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Families and Religions: An Anthropological Typology

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Abstract

This chapter outlines a typology of relationships between religious ideas and family structures, based on the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas. It illustrates that typology with descriptions of the religious and family differences between Nepalese Hindus, Nepalese Buddhists, and Coast Miwok Indians. It ends with some suggestions about how the typology might be used to analyze North American religions.

Introduction

Religious apologists frequently speak of the important relationship between religion and family life. "The family that prays together stays together" is an oft-cited—though occasionally ridiculed—cultural aphorism. The converse is often conceived to be true as well: strong family structure is supposed to provide an opening to the spiritual life. Despite the historic importance of monastic religion, most Americans believe that religion and traditional family life go together, and are mutually reinforcing.

To cite only a few examples of this cultural assumption:

My local newspaper's "Church Notes" for the week in which I am writing shows that four of the ten or so published sermon topics deal with family issues. This same newspaper quotes state politicians opposing employment protection for gays because "homosexuality goes against both God and family."[2]

Howard Ruff, the well-known investment counselor, draws an explicit connection between his Mormon convictions and the centrality of "family values" to his life (Ruff 1983). His financial advice is designed to give the middle class the means to support both family and the church of their choice.

On a more academic note, a chapter entitled something like "The Family in Religious Context" is—or at least used to be—an obligatory part of any introductory text in sociology of religion.[3]

Indeed, the very existence of a conference on "Religion and the Family" implies a connection between religion and family more significant than that between, say, "the Family and Greed" or "Religion and Cheap Sex." Something universal is suggested to us by the first juxtaposition that is lacking in the others.

These are clearly impressionistic data—but that is just the point. The supposed connection between religions and families is an ideological artifact, something that we expect because of our cultural heritage. The significant question, then, is "Does such a connection actually exist?"

This question may be posed in a more sophisticated manner. "How," we may ask, "are religions and families related in each of several cultural milieux?" If, in fact, our cultural ideology proposes that religions and families are mutually supporting (and if in certain segments of our society they *are* supporting) we ought to expect that in other cultures and societies different types of relationships will be culturally expected, and indeed will apply.

We also ought to expect that religion and family will be even more reinforcing for some groups than they are alleged to be among us. For others they will be supportive, but in a completely different mode. And for still others, religion and family will have nothing to do with one another. Such is the cultural variation that anthropology teaches us to anticipate.

An Anthropological Typology

In order to approach this issue we must make use of a typology. We must group together various societies so that their different ways of relating religion and family become apparent. But no purely ad hoc grouping will do, for we hope that the differences discovered here will correlate with cultural differences on other levels. We seek real divid-

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[1] This essay was written for the Twelfth Annual Family and Demographic Research Institute Conference on Religion and the Family, held at Brigham Young University in February, 1984. 1 am indebted to John Sorenson of the Anthropology Department at Brigham Young for comments and criticism.

[2] *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian,* February 11 and 16, 1984.

[3] For example, Benson (1960), Hoult (1958).

ing lines that separate different cultures, and which may prove to illuminate cultural differences within our society as well.

British anthropologist Mary Douglas has spent the last fifteen or so years constructing such a typology—one which relates many elements of culture, including religious belief, to social structure. (Her theory is found in various forms in Douglas, 1970,1973a, 1973b, 1978,1982; and Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982. Douglas, 1978 is the key text.)

She calls her system "Grid/Group Analysis" (the name admittedly lacks style). She presents it as a means of sorting various societies and, at the same time, ordering their belief systems. Society and cosmology, she says, vary *together*. Social forms come packaged with beliefs in such a way that "most values and beliefs can be analysed as part of society instead of as a separate cultural sphere" (Douglas, 1982: 7). Religion and social structure—for our interests, religion and the kinsystem—can be analyzed in one motion. Douglas claims to be able to predict the kind of relation between these two elements from the position a given society takes in her scheme.

Douglas presents several forms of her typology, about which I have written elsewhere (Spickard, 1984). In the typology's most defensible form she distinguishes between three basic kinds of social organization. These she labels "ascribed hierarchy," "individualism," and "factionalism/sectarianism." (Douglas, 1982: 4.)

Ascribed hierarchy portrays a social unit in which the group is apparently the focus of all activity, and in which hierarchical roles and prescriptive rules govern almost all behavior. The individual is enmeshed in a net of expectations that govern a great part of his or her behavior. Examples of this social type are the Hindu caste system (in its more rigid manifestations) and medieval monastic Catholicism.

Individualism portrays just the opposite[4] kind of social system: one in which individuals and individual activity are the focus of social life, and in which there are few or no specified roles and rules to which the individual must conform. Here the basis of social life is the individual-centered network rather than the group. Within this social type, indi-

viduals choose their own companions, negotiate the terms of their interactions with one another, and compete for the possession of whatever their society values.

"Factional/sectarian" societies are somewhat different, possessing both an extreme attachment to group life and a lack of the internal role differentiation that might make that life go smoothly. Individuals lack guidelines on how to regulate their behavior—a situation which Douglas claims produces conflict and competition among them. But competition is neither allowed overt expression (as among the individualists), nor is it forced into socially sanctioned channels (as among the hierarchists). The result is covert conflict, which periodically erupts into social strife. Douglas's examples include central African witchcraft movements (she did her fieldwork among the Lele of Zaire) and, interestingly, academic departments. She remarks that the latter, with their developed consciousness of the boundaries between their own and other academic disciplines, and with their putative (but not actual) internal egalitarianism, are prime social grounds for covert infighting and periodic "witchhunts." (1973a: 168–69.)

Each of these social types, Douglas argues, exhibits a distinctive cosmology—ofttimes religious—that proves functional to the conduct of its life. Different types of society typically encounter differing organizational problems, which their cosmologies may mediate or even solve. (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982.)

Hierarchical organizations, for example, suffer from the difficulty of getting many people with differing skills and interests to agree on any undertaking, even on living together for great lengths of time. To counter this, the hierarchist's cosmology will emphasize the group above the individual and will promote multiple goals, thus satisfying everyone enough to keep the group going. Nepalese Hindu polytheism, as we shall soon see, conforms to this model.

Individualism, on the other hand, suffers from an inability to see long-term projects through to completion, and from an inability to weigh the long-term or cumulative effects of individual actions. This is counteracted—though at the same time sustained—by a cosmology that sees universal, impersonal forces regulating the effects of individual decisions for the benefit of all. The "invisible hand" of free-market economists is the most famous example, though the extent to which this hand actually helps solve the individualist's organizational prob-

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[4] Declaring that "individualism" and "ascribed hierarchy" are opposites betrays a peculiarly Western cultural bias of which Douglas seems to be unaware. This is the source of one of my criticisms of her theory (Spickard, 1984: chapter 15), but it does not vitiate my use of her typology for the quite limited purposes of this essay.

lems is very much in doubt. Nepalese Buddhist conceptions of merit, which I shall examine later, do a better job.

The way beliefs arise from and affect "factional/sectarian" societies is more complicated, and is best considered in conjunction with my example of the Coast Miwok, below.

I shall first illustrate Douglas's typology by describing the relationship between religion and family in three non-Western societies.[5] Then I shall use it to examine some of the recent religious developments in North America. For both endeavors we shall have to free ourselves from any too-limited definition of religion, and indeed from any too-American definition of family. Instead, we must frame our analysis in terms of wider kin relations and the general shape of relations with the spiritual world.

Nepalese Hindus

Nepalese Hindu culture, as studied by Haimendorf (1979), Hitchcock (1966) and others, generally corresponds to Douglas's hierarchical model.

Castes are a dominant attribute of Nepalese Hindu life. Though in India castes include a multitude of people not directly related to one another, in a Nepal village caste is a more kin-like institution. A given caste (such as the Chetri or Magars) regards itself as having entered the area at a particular point in history from a given location, and is made up of a specified number of lineages, each with a corporate organization. Caste, lineage, and family form a hierarchical nesting of family or family-like ties.

Hierarchy also dominates intercaste relations, though the prohibitions against intercaste contact are less among Nepalese than they are among Hindus of India (Hitchcock, 1966: chapter 7). Various types of Brahmans rank above other "twice-born" castes, who in turn are ritually superior to Magars, Ghartis, Metalworkers, Leatherworkers, Tailors, and so on. The specific castes vary from place to place, but in every case different castes exhibit differing—and hierarchically graded—behavior and styles of life. Deference to those of a higher caste is an enforced norm.

These kin-centered people see conformity as a moral ideal. In Nepalese caste society, Haimendorf notes, the individual is not an independent agent but belongs to a tightly organized community, and must constantly act for that community's welfare. For example, the Chetris, a high-caste group, preoccupy themselves with caste rules, striving always to avoid pollution and to maintain their ritual status. "Their ideal is the man who lives strictly according to the rules of his caste and never undertakes any action which endangers the purity of his status or arouses unfavorable comment among his caste-fellows." (Haimendorf, 1979: 169.)

This tight caste organization is paralleled in family life by a developed patriarchalism. Fathers retain authority even over their grown and married sons, and women are subject to the authority of men throughout their lives, first fathers, then husbands. To dishonor one's family is the chief sin; to honor it requires obedience in all things.

Ritual pollution incurred by the living, for example, can even affect the status of one's departed ancestors. Were a man to marry a woman who had been previously betrothed, his kinsmen who have already reached heaven might have to leave it and descend to hell. (Haimendorf, 1979: 173.) One can scarcely imagine a greater stimulus to conformity.

But this corporate concern stops at a group's boundaries. Other than intercaste deference, it simply does not matter to Nepalese Hindus what the members of other families and other groups do. Hinduism, says Haimendorf, does not present a single moral law to which obedience is required of all persons, as do Western religions.

Hindu society generally, says Haimendorf, is dominated by a notion of ethical relativity. Action appropriate to one caste or group is inappropriate to another. Aside from responsibility for the behavior of one's kin and caste-fellows, one is not concerned with the activities of others; one's responsibility is focused on one's own people.

Likewise, Hinduism allows different groups to have different gods, goddesses, and godlings to whom they pay homage in various ways. Hitchcock (1966: chapter 3) details the numerous and changing deities of the Magars, a mid-level caste, and notes that many are specific to particular locations, particular lineages, and even particular house-

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[5] Michael Thompson, in an unpublished paper written for the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis of Laxenburg, Austria, suggests the applicability of Douglas's types to Nepalese Hindus and Buddhists, though he puts her typology to very different use than do I. (He discusses their differing attitudes to risk [Thompson, 1983].) The application of Douglas's work to the Coast Miwok is my own (Spickard, 1974).

holds. Religion is family-centered, and as people respond to the demands of their own family and not others, so they respond to their own family's gods. The spiritual world is fragmented much like the social. Gods, like people, possess a hierarchy, and their behavior may be influenced differently depending on their godly social position.

Douglas's theory roughly predicts this parallel between social and cosmo-logical structure, at least for hierarchically organized societies. And because the chief problem of this kind of society is how to let many different kinds of people live in relative peace together, a mutual tolerance in the moral sphere and a fragmentation of deities in the religious realm both make good organizational sense. Peace is maintained by recognizing that different people have different goals and must meet different (supernatural) demands.

At the same time, the Nepalese agricultural situation requires a strong kin and lineage system. Nepalese cultivators exploit a limited amount of arable land, and need strict rules to prevent either the fragmentation of that land into unfarmable plots or its concentration into only a few hands. A strong family keeps land ownership stable, so that subsistence can be maintained. Pollution beliefs emphasize the group and draw tight boundaries between groups that might compete for similar resources. Though caste hierarchy divides labor, it turns much of the potential competitiveness of these groups into reciprocal interdependence.

This interdependence becomes symbolized in the religious sphere. As Hitchcock (1966: 34) remarks, "the gustatory godlings are emblems of two ideas: the idea of reciprocity and the idea of scarcity. . . . [and] express the inevitable ambiguities of [the Magar] situation." Supporting this analysis is the fact that taboos on intercaste contact are less developed in areas where there is less pressure on the land. There the necessity of group solidarity vis-à-vis outsiders is not so great (pp. 41–42).

In sum, for Nepalese Hindus religion and family go together, but not as our culture expects: within each caste and lineage we find great conformity, but great toleration of other groups' gods and other ways of living. In this hierarchical society, religious notions parallel kin relations. Social unity is maintained through diversity.

Buddhist Sherpas

The situation is quite different among Nepalese Buddhists, especially the Sherpas studied by Haimendorf and by Michael Thompson.[6] The sense of corporate kinship so central to Hindu society is generally lacking. A kin-system clearly exists, but individual families are relatively independent of wider kin obligations. Haimendorf (1964: 39) argues that this is a consequence of the Sherpa economy: migratory herding rewards self-reliance and discourages stringent kinship obligations.

Though Sherpas have loose clan affiliations, and there are some rudimentary caste-like distinctions, these by no means approach the hierarchism of the settled Hindu populations. Instead, they approximate the American discrimination against those "from the wrong side of the tracks." Sherpas possess what Haimendorf calls an "open society" in which individual initiative is more important than family position. Group boundaries are generally low, and generations of immigrants have been able to make themselves a place.

While every society must find itself a means of social control, Sherpa society has made that control less onerous than many: it is basically egalitarian, and whatever authority exists is vested in the totality of its inhabitants. This authority is delegated to elected officials whose privileges are strictly defined. Much activity falls outside of their scope and is unregulated. (Haimendorf, 1979: 182.)

Unlike Hindu villages, Sherpa villages lack corporate councils for dispute resolution. Instead, every village has one or two men who are skilled in mediation. These men neither hold office nor possess any authority over others, but attempt to defuse conflict by meeting with the quarrelers—usually over beer—and seeking agreement. "The peace-maker gains social esteem and religious merit, but does not get any material reward for his efforts and the expenditure he has incurred" (Haimendorf, 1964: 182).

Families, too are independent. As soon as a couple marries, it establishes its own household (to which, as is well known, a second husband may later be added). The family's economy is independent of others', though there is some unorganized sharing for the benefit of the poor. Because of the altitude, the growing season is short, and a family must engage in other activities to make ends meet. Usually this involves trading—either bringing goods up from the lowlands or bring-

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[6] Haimendorf (1964,1975,1979); Thompson (1982). Cf. Peissal (1979).

ing goods across the Himalayas from Tibet (though this latter opportunity is now closed). Lately it has involved work for mountaineers—an occupation that requires the same self-reliance and ability to be gone from home for long periods that trading previously demanded. (Thompson, 1982.) Families must often make do with absent men—a factor which has probably contributed to the acceptability of polyandrous marriage among these people.

Compared to Hindus, kin-group control over the individual is extremely low. While Hindu marriages are arranged and relations between the sexes are severely regulated, Sherpas decide their own marital fates and casual sex prior to marriage is the norm. And considering the fact that a girl's amorous liaisons take place in the same room where her parents are sleeping, a blind eye and a deaf ear to others' behavior must be culturally valued. Parents are not authoritarian; in fact Haimendorf lists one of their chief sins as being "to threaten children or make them cry . . . whatever the reason" (1979: 187).

But there are areas of life where collective activity is necessary, though extremely difficult for an individualist society to carry off. Mountain travel depends on a network of trails and bridges, which demand constant upkeep; yet there are no public organizations which make it their business to perform this work. Nuclear families are certainly not up to the task, and communal work cannot be compelled by any wider group.

Here the Sherpas' Buddhism has its effect. The Sherpas' moral system is based on the belief that every act of virtue adds to an individual's store of merit, whereas every morally negative action or sin diminishes this valuable commodity. They place special emphasis on meritorious activities which benefit the general public and even complete strangers. This demonstrates one's total selflessness, for one's efforts will not benefit one's kin and friends more than others. Providing for the construction of bridges, the maintenance of trails and so on, as well as the sponsorship of religious and secular festivals, provide scores of good marks for anyone interested in improving their chances in the afterlife. Economic surplus is expended not only in the support of religious institutions (and the manufacturers of the famous prayer-wheels), but also in the provision of secular good works. (Haimendorf, 1979: 182ff.) After death a person's good and bad deeds are counted up, and the balance of good or bad marks determine a man's fate.

Sherpas do not believe their deities punish them or demand sacrifices of them. They see serving the deities as a possible source of merit, but not the only source available. Their concept of sin centers on infringements upon the dignity of persons or animals rather than on offenses to gods. Sins against persons will weigh most against them at the end of their lives—though to the extent that spirits are persons, they deserve good treatment too. The model of ideal action vis-à-vis others is extended to the gods rather than the other way around. Ethics lie at the center of religious life.

Unlike Hindus, who spend a great deal of time trying to placate spirits, Sherpas' notions of the highest powers in life are almost mechanical. Merit is a calculable substance, attainable through specified and commonly known channels. Sin—or demerit—is calculable as well, and is something that is almost unavoidable in the course of day-to-day existence. So the goal of life is to accumulate enough merit (while avoiding enough demerit) to help one later on.

Clearly, on Douglas's terms, this cosmology is functional to the Sherpa social organization. The society is individualistic, probably as a response to a difficult ecological situation, and as a result is unable to carry out certain civic activities necessary for its survival. So, the religious orientation of the people—likewise individualistic—provides the means by which these activities can be carried out. Through religion the weaknesses of the social sphere are overcome.

But this religion is not family-centered, and individuals are on their own vis-à-vis the supernatural world. Douglas's schema predicts this individualism, because, in her view, cosmology reflects social life. Contrary to our own cultural stereotype, a weak family structure does not mean a weak religion—just a different one.

Coast Miwok Sorcery

Our third case, as promised, is more complex. The Coast Miwok Indians of central California were a settled village people exploiting a relatively rich environment.[7] Their location just to the north of San Francisco Bay (prior to the Spanish conquest) gave them access to acorns, shellfish, waterfowl, roots, deer, rabbits, buckeyes, and other foodstuffs in relative abundance. They were organized into tightly

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[7] See Spickard, 1987, for sources for and an extended discussion of the following.

bounded exogamous lineages which "owned" these resources, each family group (*lineage* and *family* being synonyms for these people) holding gathering rights to certain tracts for each of the major resources. There were no interlineage work groups and no village-wide institutions for the redistribution of surplus. Most of the time they did not need any. Each extended family was self-sufficient, and, in general, lived well in a relatively stable environment.

Residents of rural California, however, know something about this purported "stability." The mountains in which the Miwok lived are dominated by a series of micro-climates. Weather in this area varies considerably from year to year, and the variation from valley to valley and hillside to hillside is even greater.

This variation had a particularly important impact on the acorn crop—the staple of the California Indian diet. While in a given year the oaks owned by one lineage might bear prolifically, those owned by another might prove barren. The same was true of buckeyes and seeds—the replacement staples. Hunting with the small bows available at the time was notoriously difficult, and this left shellfish as the sole more-or-less dependable resource. And if the members of a given lineage became sick and unable to gather, their ability to feed themselves was in jeopardy.

Of course, common sense suggests that if one family's resources failed, that family should be able to get help from others. In south-central California, for example, the village headman functioned as a center for redistribution—in other words, taxing the rich to give to the poor. But this was not the Miwok headman's role. Though some redistribution did occur, it was not so regularly institutionalized as elsewhere. Instead, because the boundaries between lineages and those between villages were so great, cooperation across them was next to impossible. So, for those whose resources had failed, all that kept them going was their savings from the past and the fact that the next year the resources would succeed—while some other lineage would get the short end of the stick.

To see what happened in this situation, we need only enter into the mental framework of the Miwok and see the universe from their point of view. The Miwoks knew nothing of science, had no conception of natural causality, and in particular could not explain why one oak grove would bear in a given year and another would not. It would have been one thing if all families' resources had failed, but they did not.

Only a few did so, and only a few were struck by disease, while others had plenty to eat and were healthy. Their reasoning was sensible: mystical effects must come from mystical causes. Obviously, they thought, if one family is fat while another is starving, then a sorcerer must be at work.

Sorcery fears were rife among the Miwok and their neighbors. Sorcerers never came from one's own lineage (in pre-contact times), but from the lineages of one's enemies. One had always to be on guard against them—much as today we are on guard against reckless drivers when we cross a busy street. If one were to let a bit of one's hair, one's nail parings, one's feces, or the like fall into the hands of a sorcerer, then one would be in grave danger. These very substances—boundaries of the body, symbolically speaking—could be used to penetrate a person's own bodily boundaries, and cause one to sicken and die.

I do not want to detail Miwok sorcery beliefs, for they are not at issue here.[8] My point is that Miwok cosmology, as best I have been able to reconstruct it, involved a perception of mystical danger to members of families—both at the hands of other families and from usually neutral (though sometimes maleficent) spirits. It is not quite correct to say that the Miwoks had a religious pantheon, for the only beings equivalent to gods were active at the beginning of and the renewal of the world, and, furthermore, these gods did not take an interest in people's day-to-day affairs. The entry of the supernatural into the human realm took place at the time of misfortune, and usually wore human robes.

This cosmology was a product and a reflection of a particular kind of family structure—one in which kin groups did not cooperate with one another. On the one hand, the relatively rich environment made this lack of cooperation possible (had the environment been less rich the innate selfishness of the system could never have prevailed); on the other hand, that same environment's occasional failures presented a practical problem that demanded solution. The cosmology that resulted both explained environmental failures and expressed the underlying social hostilities in a particularly direct way.

Given all this tension, one might ask how such a society survived with any stability for over a thousand years. How were lineages—

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[8] The symbolism of these beliefs first interested me in Douglas's theories (Spickard, 1974).

being exoga-mous—able to reproduce, given a generalized uncooperativeness periodically erupting into hostility? One answer is that the level of inter-lineage tension was not always high; though the environment was not stable enough for sorcery fears ever to dissipate entirely, resource-failure was not a yearly recurrence. In addition, by trading women (and men) repeatedly, specific lineages became informal marriage providers. Until a child was born to a couple, the in-marrying partner was looked upon with some suspicion, but after the birth of one or two children, the spouse as well as his or her lineage was regarded as relatively safe. This tended to focus sorcery fears away from certain lineages and toward others, and provided a path for material assistance to flow in time of need.

Just as important, however, was a third option: expulsion. Because certain lineages developed such bad reputations for sorcery over a long period of time, and were so cut off from their neighbors, the neighbors would expel them from the village. Although the records I consulted revealed that this was a rare occurrence, it was, nevertheless, possible, and therefore could defuse a particularly volatile situation.

Like Nepalese Hindus and Sherpas, the Miwoks' cosmology reflects their family structure. Trapped in tightly bounded lineages that lacked interfamily ties, they saw anything outside themselves as threatening. The typical response to such threat was to draw closer to those one could trust, exacerbating the family's isolation. Society and cosmology reinforced one another, and were themselves reinforced by an environment that failed at random—lending credence to the perceived supernatural menace.

Unlike the Hindus and Sherpas, however, Miwok cosmology did not solve their social problems. Though one would expect social isolation to be overcome by sharing, sorcery fears stood in the way. Family-centeredness in this faction-ridden society did not promote tolerance, but aggression. Had their environment failed more frequently, it is doubtful that their society could have survived.

North American Parallels

I have summarized the foregoing in Table 1 which lists the primary attributes of each of the three social types in Douglas's model, along with the religious cosmologies that accompany them and some suggested examples. Her basic principles—that cosmology reflects

social structure, and often proves functional to its continuance—should be clear.

Table 1. Cosmology and Family Structure

	Family Type		
	Hierarchical	**Individual**	**Factional/Sectarian**
Social attributes	Group-centered Internal ranks/many linked groups Fixed roles Inequality	Person-centered networks Flexible roles Equality	Group-centered High group boundaries (Role rigidity varies) Internal equality
Chief social problem	How to stay together	How to do common tasks	keeping group unity
Religious attributes	Polytheism In-group conformity/out-group tolerance Group defines doctrine Rituals central	Pluralism Tolerance Individual defines doctrine Ethics central	In-group monotheism Bigotry Group defines doctrine Group membership central
Cosmology's structure	Parallels society (hierarchical)	Parallels society (individualist)	Parallels society (emphasizes boundaries)
Cosmology's function	Helps accept group differences Aids division of labor	Frees individual Aids tolerance Aids public works Encourages charity	Defines the group against others
Examples	Nepalese Hindus Establishment	Nepalese Buddhists (Sherpas) "New-Age" religions	Coast Miwok Fundamentalists/Sectarians

Unfortunately, I cannot take up these examples here in any greater detail. Instead, without pushing things too far, I would like to point out some possible North American parallels—religious groups on which Douglas's typology might just shed some light.

Douglas asks us to look for a set of social relations that may be correlated with a religious cosmology. Since ours is a complex society, we would expect to find all three of her social types present in it.

Although we do not find hierarchies on the Hindu scale among us, some parts of our society are clearly more hierarchical than others. For example, the so-called "Eastern Establishment"—the wealthier, old-line, New England-centered denominations—is perhaps the closest thing to hierarchism left in this nation. It is in this Establishment, I expect, that we can find the tolerant, family-centered religions that best approximate the Hindu model. (The term *Boston Brahmin* becomes culturally interesting here.)

In this subculture there is considerable church-going as a family activity. But with this habit is an attitude that considers the actual content of religious devotion (within a certain range) less important than its mere existence. Religion is seen as a private, family matter, and excessive preoccupation with things spiritual is not well regarded. That is, some religiousness is expected from all, but it should not take over all of one's life and certainly should not create barriers between people.

Though I did grow up with people like this, and have certainly met many of them in my adult life, I am not sure to what extent such a subculture still exists in America. The shifts in political and social power in the last few decades (see Bensman and Vidich, 1971) lead me to believe that this group is certainly much less influential than it once was, and is not the wave of the future for American religion. But as a theorist rather than a church sociologist, I will leave it to others to check out my suppositions.

I suspect the other two types will be of greater future importance.

While the factionalism of the Miwok does not have a complete American parallel, on the so-called "Religious Right" there is both a clear concern for family issues, along with an intolerance for alternative points of view that clearly does not fit with either the Hindu or the Buddhist models. While I would not be as willing as Douglas to identify all religious sectarians with the factional social type,[9] there is some truth to this association. Certainly if one looks at the proliferation of fundamentalist groups over the last century or so of American history, the combination of religious and social conservatism with a desire for factional purity stands out (Marsden, 1980).

The standard sociological description of the supporters of this religious right portrays them as being left out of the dominant cultural and economic developments of recent years.[10] Urban sophistication, lax upper-middle-class morality, the lack of patriotism and traditional values perceived among the educated and the jet-set—all these are focal points for political resentment that wears a religious mask. Like the Miwok, the members of these classes, so the explanation goes, act out their social frustrations in a religious idiom, and a particularly intolerant one.

The key here is the moral distinction made between "them" and "us"—a division that is also found among certain of the "new religions" such as the Unification Church or the People's Temple. On Douglas's theory the high external barriers erected by these groups go hand in hand with a dualistic cosmology which serves to reinforce group identity—that is, to maintain the very barriers which make the group unique. Of course these barriers also isolate the group, encouraging social conflict—as in the Miwok case.

Most important is a religious dualism paralleling the social. Unlike the Establishment, sectarians emphasize the cosmic struggle between Good and Evil. The key question, both religious and political, is "Whose side are you on?" Only one answer is allowed. "Family," "traditional values," and so on have become code words for in-group membership. The modern religious right seeks to recast all of society in its image.

What is the future of this intolerant sectarianism? Secularization theory sees it as a response to modernity, and believes that as we become used to our new way of life, fundamentalism will fade away. On Douglas's model we would disagree. Her theory predicts that any time a society becomes factionalized such aggressive, dualist cosmologies will emerge.

But not all of the new religious sectarians are rightist, or even Christians. Much of America's new spirituality has affinities with the eastern religions, and "new-age" sects seemingly spring up every-

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[9] Comments to this effect may be found in Douglas (1970,1973a, 1982) and in unpublished remarks made before the 1983 convention of the American Academy of Religion in Dallas.

[10] See Bensman and Vidich (1971: l48ff). For other views see Marsden (1983) and Anthony and Robbins (1983).

where. Even the mainline denominations have altered much of their ministry from traditional families to youth work, urban outreach, and so on. Ministry by women, "marriages" of homosexuals, Zen in the chancel—many of the trends that the religious right-wing abhors are an ever-expanding part of the American scene.

Rather than moralize, Douglas's theory would have us look to the social relations that support this change. I think we can find a parallel to the Sherpa case here.

Economically speaking, the family is much less important to survival in America than it once was. With the decline of family-centered enterprises, including farming, the rise of salaried employment, and particularly the growth of national firms at the expense of local businesses (and the resulting necessity of job mobility), the maintenance of a family has become a luxury that some cannot afford. At the same time, cheap and effective means of birth control free those who want sex but not children from the necessity of having a spouse as well. Like the Sherpas, economic mobility and easy sexuality go hand in hand with both a restriction on the importance of kin ties, and with an individualization of religion. The relationship between a person and the spiritual world can now be a matter of the individual heart.

Theologically, these individuals see God, life, or some other all-encompassing end as something to be actively sought, not passively awaited. Thus the growth of various kinds of meditation, the popularity of the ecstatic experience of the divine among both Catholics and Protestants, the resurgence of liberal Quakerism as a religion of experiencing—all are indications of a cultural move toward individualism in religious life.

But as in the Sherpa case, with the decline of the family, all is not sin and degradation. As Buddhism is for the Sherpas a religion of ethics, and one which is functional to the wider social situation, so ethics are at the center of this new religious development. "Do your own thing" goes hand in hand with "do unto others . . ." Social philanthropy is alive and well, and the church's outreach to those traditionally excluded from its life does much to alleviate the condition of the casualties of modern living.

Individualism in religion, and the centrality of both ethics and an active spiritual striving both seem to me to be correlated with a society in which, at least for major sectors of the population, extended and even nuclear families have become economically irrelevant, and even

difficult to maintain. The decline of the group and the increasing autonomy of the individual, while causing great psychological strains, place both the burden of the pursuit of social justice and the pursuit of God—key elements of our Judeo-Christian heritage—squarely on the individual's shoulders. Thus, it is up to the individual—not the family or the church—to carry this burden. And if individual experience becomes the touchstone of spirituality, the proliferation of paths that these individuals take in their spiritual pursuits will probably continue.

If the foregoing is valid and if current socioeconomic trends continue, Douglas's theory predicts that American religion will become more individualized, more tolerant of disparate religious paths, and even more concerned with ethical action toward others.[11]

I must admit, however, that I find it disturbing to be able to explain by sociological means the kind of spirituality toward which I am most drawn, and which I see as being the most appropriate path toward an appreciation of Deity.

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[11] Anthony and Robbins (1983) argue that only one trend among the "new religions" moves in this direction. The other trend, typified by such groups as the Unification Church and the People's Temple, moves in their eyes toward a reestablishment of a "civil religion," but in sectarian terms (see Bellah, 1967, 1975). On Douglas's model, the manichaean worldview of these groups seems more akin to right-wing fundamentalism than to the old-style civil religion of which Bellah speaks.

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