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GLOBALIZATION AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS: RETHINKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH, CULTURE, AND MARKET[α]

by

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the organizational complexities that occur when religions attempt to operate globally. Based on the author's research on one of the new Japanese religions – Sekai Kyusei-kyo –it focuses on two aspects of transnational religious coordination. First, it shows how culture shapes religions' reception in each locality. Second, it shows the superiority of heterarchical over hierarchical organization: like successful transnational corporations, heterarchical religions move decision-making to the periphery, leaving the center with the task of normative integration. Local culture can, however, trump even such organizational flexibility. The article explores the theoretical implications of this for market-oriented sociologies of religion.

key words:

religion, transnational organizations, Sekai Kyusei-kyo, heterarchy, local culture, market models of religion, organizational theory, globalism

* * *

Though no one doubts that we live in a global era, the term "globalization" has many different meanings. It the hands of various writers, it has been used to refer, among other things, to increased global economic integration, the increased reach of global political institutions, increased international trade, increasing standardization in the production of popular culture, and increasingly far-reaching international communications networks. All of these processes affect many aspects of life. A persistent, though still under-investigated, question among scholars of religion is just how globalization in each of these areas affects the religious sphere.

Exploration so far has proceeded down two main paths. Some scholars focus on religion in the abstract Beyer 1994; Robertson 1992). These scholars look for the ways in which globalization changes such things as people's sense of "the religious", people's attitudes toward religion and religions, and the role that religion plays in globalized social life. Other scholars investigate religious transnationalism, showing how increased communication, migration, and so on open the possibility of non-local religious particularisms (e.g.: Levitt 2001).

While valuable, neither of these approaches focuses expressly on religious organizations. How, specifically, does the current global situation,

encompassing transnational economics, politics, communications and culture, affect the organizations that are religion's carriers? To shape the question a bit more narrowly: What challenges face religious organizations as they attempt to operate in an increasingly transnational, indeed global religious milieu? How do they maintain themselves as organizations? How do they attract adherents? And how do they uphold the integrity of their religious message?

This relative lack of attention to religious organizations is somewhat surprising, given the recent strength of rational choice approaches to the sociology of religion (Finke and Stark 1992; Stark and Finke 2000). That approach notoriously targets religious "firms" as players in a religious "marketplace", competing for "customers" to "buy" their religious "goods". Most work in this vein, however, has looked at national religious markets rather than international ones. What happens to religious organizations when their operations cross national boundaries? Do the existing market metaphors work unchanged? Or do such metaphors need to be rethought?

These are some of the questions that I shall address in this article, which I have structured as follows. First, I shall discuss some sociological models of transnational religious organization, both old and new, including the institutional problems that these organizations face as they expand across national borders. Next, I shall describe the organizational experience of *Sekai Kyusei-kyo*, one of the many Japanese new religions, as it has tried to missionize North America. New religions are excellent examples of the organizational challenges posed by religious globalization, precisely because they dominate neither their home markets nor the markets that economic and social globalization opens to them. I shall then review some attempts by organizational theorists to understand transnational corporations – the closest analogue to transnational religions in the business world. Lastly, I shall explore what all this has to say to groups like *Kyusei-kyo*, to other, more established religions, and finally, to the scholars who study them. Though I lack the space to make a complete case, I think that this effort will suggest some directions for future thinking on this important topic.

Standard and Alternate Models

Just as physicists talk about a "standard model" of atomic forces, so, too, can we talk about a "standard model" of transnational religious organization – one whose archetypes are the Roman Catholic and Mormon churches. These are top-down hierarchies, centrally organized to control a worldwide network of believers. Those at the top give the orders; those at the bottom take them. Problems are passed upward to be solved, while decisions flow downward to the faithful, who are supposed to acquiesce faithfully. Though local Catholic leaders can propose organizational solutions to such things as the recent sex scandal in the American Church, the Vatican has the last word. The power of the Mormon "Wasatch Front" is similarly legend for, as many scholars have noted, White American Utah is both the power center and the ideal model for Mormonism everywhere (P. Spickard 2002).

It is worth remembering, however, that this centralization is an accomplishment, not a given. Rome was hardly the center of Catholicism at the end of the ancient world. Power was divided in the East, and, in the West, Irish monks did more than Rome to sustain a Christian Europe. Had Viking raids not ravaged their monasteries, Western Christianity might have remained a relatively egalitarian network of centers of learning rather than the near-monarchy it later became. True, Charlemagne and Pope Gregory VII had something to say about this, but this merely underscores the adventitiousness of history (Cahill 1996). Similarly, contemporary Mormonism is the result of a political fight, in which those Latter-Day Saints who resisted Brigham Young were cast beyond the pale. There are still Mormon colonies in Mexico – until recently polygamous – which long resisted Utah's rule. There is also the Reorganized Church of the Latter-Day Saints, among other offshoots. Hierarchical organization is not as inevitable as it often seems to be.

Moreover, such central hierarchies fray at the edges. The tensions between American Catholics and the Roman Church are well known, and have not been erased by the appointment of more conservative bishops, despite John Paul II's hopes. European and North American Catholics have one set of conflicts with the Vatican, African Catholics have another, and Latin American Catholics have yet a third. The center has to adapt to the fringes as well as vice versa. The same happens in the Mormon Church; there, too, non-White Mormons find practical ways to get along with Utah while maintaining their independence (P. Spickard 2002).

Yet, undemocratic centralism is not the only model. I have already mentioned early-medieval Ireland, but early Anglo-American Puritanism also did not operate in a hierarchical mode. Transnational immigrants, Puritans came to American to found a "city on a hill" and "a light to the nations." They saw themselves as a "new Israel," founding a Christian society in untamed wilderness. Of course, New England was no unpopulated country, at least not before the White Man's diseases killed off the native population (Mann 2002; Crosby 1972), and the Puritans followed the Old Testament model by slaughtering or deporting the new Canaanites who remained. But they did not set themselves up to rule other Christians by becoming a new Rome: Protestant

America became a land of independent congregations – a pattern that continues today (Warner 1994).

Christianity later developed another transnational pattern: the overseas mission. Designed to bring religion to the heathen, American and European missions spread across the globe.[1] Sent not just to Africa, South Asia, and the other formal colonies, nor just to non-Christian quasi-colonies, such as China, they also sought converts in other Christian regions, especially Latin America. They still do,[2] following the centuries-old commandment to take Christ to all nations. Unlike the ancient Nestorians, who were Christianity's earliest messengers to the East, they did not go native. Instead, they came as civilizers as well as redeemers, peddling Western knowledge along with the Gospel. And they saved bodies as well as souls, for the medical missionary was a part of this quasi-Imperial enterprise (Spickard and Cragg 1994).

As Robin Horton (1971) has noted, Africans flocked to these Christian missions – and then flocked right back out of them, to found their own small churches, which are now legion.[3] Much African Protestant Christianity avoided the hierarchical model by going it alone, a tactic that African Catholics have not embraced so openly. The independents saw no need for international coordination, however. Thus, they do not help us answer the organizational question of how such coordination is possible. For that, the so-called "new religions" are better specimens.

There are several ways of looking at the rise of new religions in Europe and America during the last half of the 20th century. Demand-side theorists focus on changes social and cultural norms that weakened the traditional churches, without weakening the need for spiritual transcendence (Luckmann 1990). Supply-siders focus on freer religious markets and the increasing supply of third-world spiritual leaders in the West, especially after the loosening of U.S. immigration quotas in 1965. Whatever the explanation, many new religions amount to a reverse spiritual missionization, in which centers in India, Japan, and the Near East now sponsor emissaries to the heathen Euro-Americans. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Nichiren Buddhism, and various Sufi orders have created new religious forms to appeal to Westerners, while remaining theologically orthodox – much as Protestant missionaries created "new" religious clothes for their Christian message. So, too, have arisen independent imitators, appropriating Eastern religions in an even more Western mode.[4]

(I am deliberately ignoring those "new religions" that attempt to revitalize Western Christianity and Judaism in the U.S. and Europe. They do not engage in transnational trade – the topic of this discussion.)

For many of these groups, there arises a problem of global organizational coordination. How can religions that are based in countries with relatively little socio-political power control their offshoots in the metropolis? Not only are Westerners used to dominating the rest of the world, but their cultural individualism makes them even more prone to resist others' domination. Some groups find non-hierarchical ways to share resources – there is, for example, a lively Pentecostal trade between Nigeria, Brazil, and the United States, which no partner dominates (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001). Reverse-missionaries, on the other hand, have to satisfy both their converts and the home church. Unlike Western missionaries of former eras, they do not have a colonial administration to support them. What models have they created to solve this problem? What pressures do they suffer? How can they maintain their connection with their mother churches, while still responding to the needs of their Euro-American parishioners? A closer look at one of the new Japanese religions shows us some of the dynamics of such situations.

Sekai Kyusei-kyo

Sekai Kyusei-kyo, once known in the U.S. as the Church of World Messianity, is one of the 700 or so new religions founded in Japan in the 20th century (McFarland 1967; Earhart 1970; Ellwood 1974). Set up in the 1930s by Mokichi Okada, and led by him until his death in 1955, Kyusei-kyo has drawn both scholarly and popular attention (Blacker 1971; Derrett 1983; Hambrick 1979; Hardacre 1982; Offner 1982). Its most intriguing attribute is its chief religious practice, *johrei* – a form of spiritual healing (J. Spickard 1991; J. Spickard 1995). The group's participants channel "divine light" from their hands to heal each other's bodies and souls. All describe the process as powerful, and all see it as the main reason for their adherence.

For our purposes, however, the group's most important theological attribute is its insistence that the coming transition to the Age of Fire requires

[1] On the changing notions of "heathen", see Douglas (1970).

[2] See the documentary film Onward Christian Soldiers (Icarus, 1989).

[3] See also the BBC documentary African Religion: Zulu Zion (BBC, 1977) and the special issue of the journal Social Compass on African religion (Volume 48, issue 3, 2001).

[4] Bhagwan Shree Rajnesh and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi are Indian examples of the latter. Prabhupada A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami is an Indian example of the former.

that the spiritual strengths of both Japan and the United States be united. Japan, the founder taught, is hierarchical and organized – crucial capacities in the coming world transformation. America, on the other hand, is inclusive and broad-thinking – also crucial for worldwide success. Okada symbolized this unity of *shojo* and *daijo*, order and expansiveness, in the church's *izunome* cross. This symbol graces both stationery and web sites, serving as a reminder of the church's distinctive approach. Actualizing *izunome* in the real world remains one of the group's primary aims.

In effect, this teaching requires Sekai Kyusei-kyo to work transnationally. It is the basis of the group's missionary efforts – which have, by the way, not been limited to the United States. The church has significant presences in both Thailand and in Brazil, and now considers itself to be a Japan-based global organization.

Okada organized World Messianity loosely, giving his assistant ministers great latitude in how they undertook their projects. As one current leader put it, Okada said "Stay with me – and do what you need." This fostered considerable creativity in each of the three arenas that Okada found most important for world-salvation: *johrei*, nature-farming, and the cultivation of beauty. The first of these concentrates on physical/spiritual healing, and the second on farming without the use of pest- or insecticides. As for beauty: the church owns an important art museum in Japan and operates a prominent school of flower-arranging.

Okada's death proved an almost classic case of the problem of institutionalizing charisma. With first his widow, then his daughter, as spiritual leaders, the church repeatedly split and reorganized itself, oscillating between centralization and relative autonomy for its sub-units. Several of the original assistant ministers founded their own churches, though some later returned to the fold.[5] *Izunome* became hard to develop within the Japanese church itself, even leaving aside the East-West unity that Okada sought. This process has apparently continued until the present. In recent interviews, leaders of World Messianity's American successor organizations (the "Johrei Fellowship" and the "Izunome Association") identified three factions in the Japanese church, each of which has its own leadership group and each of which emphasizes a different constellation of Okada's teachings. Today, they cooperate, but they have not always done so.

The dynamics of the Japanese church are not our central concern, however. Instead, Okada's notion of the necessary unity of East and West is more important to the question before us – of organizational transformations in global new religions. This teaching has put World Messianity in something of an awkward position, because the church's long-standing mission work in the U.S. has never been very successful. Begun in the early 1950s, only 10,000 members had been enrolled on the U.S. mainland by 1975, and only about a quarter of these were active. The missions to Brazil and Thailand, on the other hand, had attracted several hundred thousand followers. How was the promised *izunome* unity to come about, without U.S. participation?

At the time of my first fieldwork with this organization, in the mid-1970s, active members of Kyusei-kyo's San Francisco branch were split between three communities. Second-generation Japanese Americans rubbed shoulders with older White spiritualists and with younger ex-hippies. Each of these groups valued the connection between the U.S. and Japan, but for different reasons. The Japanese Americans saw themselves embodying the *izunome* unity with their bicultural competence. The older Whites honored Japanese spiritual traditions, but saw Kyusei-kyo as bringing these into the modern age. Ex-hippies appreciated the church's save-the-world mentality, particularly its notion that the coming new age required the healing of what they saw as a sick society. All members especially valued *johrei*, but for different reasons: as a source of physical healing (for the Japanese), as a source of spiritual cleansing (for the older Whites), or (for the younger Whites) as a concrete tool for world renewal. They practiced what they saw as one faith, though they viewed that faith through different cultural lenses.

In 1974-5, the Japanese Mother Church decreed a "Reunification" program to bring the church under tighter control. This program grew out of the Japanese church's own efforts to create a more centrally organized church after the founder's death. As in Japan, members were required to attend "Rededication" classes, pay regular dues, and turn in their old *ohikaris* for new ones. (These are the medals that members wear around their necks that make channeling *johrei* possible.) They were also required to renounce "heretical" beliefs – such as the importance of physical healing, the worth of previous spiritual traditions, and the possibility of saving society. As these were the three justifications that San Francisco members gave for participating in church life, the new policy created considerable dissent. I was told at the time that some 80% of church members left the organization. The current church President, however, told me that the number of active members who left was much lower, as the 80% included lots of inactives. In either case, the impact was severe. The Reunification program was quickly seen by American ministers as moving the church in the wrong direction.

[5] One of these is Mahikari (see Davis 1980).

Although theological differences between Japan and the American membership were important, the primary conflict was cultural. Japanese are notoriously attuned to hierarchy, while Americans notoriously do not like being told what to do. My recent interviews with current leaders of the American church make it abundantly clear that American members – including Japanese-Americans – resented what they saw as a Japanese power grab. Some of these leaders criticized specific individuals in the Japanese hierarchy who, they felt, betrayed Okada's image of a loosely coordinated church. The Americans especially objected to perceived theological changes that created a more Japan-centered religion. These changes, they said, elevated the Japanese headquarters and its sacred grounds above Okada's own teachings. They took away each national church's ability to discover the best way to reach its own population. The post-Reunification membership drop – and its failure to recover in the following years – only cemented Americans' notion that the top-down Japanese model could not be transferred to American soil.[6]

By the mid-1980s, conflict between the Japanese hierarchy and the American church broke into the open. Following factional divisions in the church in Japan, American leaders found themselves in a lawsuit for control over the church's U.S. property. The Americans won, declared their organizational independence from the Japanese church, and changed its name to the Johrei Fellowship. Some dissidents left to join the Mokichi Okada Association (MOA), a semi-secular organization run by a long-time Japanese church leader. Ten years later, a significant minority of the remaining membership left to found the Izunome Association – again over the question of how best to relate the American and Japanese churches. Both groups are headquartered in the Los Angeles area and have branch churches nationwide. Neither has attracted many new followers. Both seek ways to make their movement more widely attractive.

Finding a Market

Religious market theorists rightly point out that the problem of how to gain adherents is common in competitive religious markets. Like other "firms", churches compete for "customers" by producing a popular "product" at an attractive "price". Roger Finke and Rodney Stark claim that only traditionally supernaturalist churches can gain market share, a case for which they have some evidence in the United States (Finke and Stark 1992; cf. Bruce 1999); by their reckoning, religious denominations historically decline when they fail to emphasize supernatural rewards. The recent success of several American mega-churches indicates a somewhat more complex picture in that market, however, as these churches seem more typified by a one-stop-shopping approach to religion than by mere traditionalism. A whole industry of church growth consultants advises pastors about how to "bring more Americans to Christ". The dominant strategies emphasize good entertainment values, a highly organized message, activities for all parts of life, and serving people "where they are". The Crystal Cathedral's drive-in religious service exemplifies the latter, as does the American trend of allowing short pants and tank tops in church. And that is not just in southern California, but nation-wide.[7]

Religions like Sekai Kyusei-kyo are in something of a bind, here. They cannot market themselves to Americans as "that old-time religion", because they are not Christian. They thus fail to resonate with the specifically Christian supernaturalism that Finke and Stark claim attracts American religious customers. On the other hand, they are too small to provide a full-service religion, even for the Japanese American population, which once found in them an attractive support for an immigrant/ethnic identity. The high intermarriage rate among that population – reportedly now more than 60% – might become a source of growth, were the church able to leverage its *izunome* theology into a serious organizational identity. It makes some sense that joint Japanese/Anglo families would be attracted to a joint Japanese/Anglo religion. But such attraction has not occurred.

The church has had some past success at playing on the American image of Japan as a superior civilization. Americans have long been attracted to "Oriental Wisdom", though that attributed "wisdom" has usually amounted to a cultural Rorschach test (see Tamney 1992). Japan's recent economic slide, however, has made that part of the "Orient" seem less wise. Lately, Chinese Taoism and Tai Chi have become "the exotic East" to Americans, replacing things Japanese.

[6] The leaders of both the Johrei Fellowship and the Izunome Association made this argument to me as they outlined recent church history. Though still bitter over their recent split, leaders of both organizations favor American organizational independence from Japan. See below.

[7] Such examples undercut the argument that only strict churches are strong. This may be true for some strict churches, if strength is defined only by individual commitment to the organization (Iannaccone 1994). It is not likely true if strength is defined in terms of market share, as Finke and Stark claim. (See also Stark and Finke 2000).

The most serious proposal I heard in my recent interviews with American church leaders was to emphasize their religion's most unique "product", *johrei*. This spiritual practice, which involves projecting invisible "light" from the palms of one's hands, is supposed to clear the "clouds" from one's spiritual body. These clouds are the believed to be the source of disease, physical, mental, and spiritual. Receiving *johrei* thus lets God's light reach one more fully. Church members say that this brings practical blessings, both spiritual and material. Nearly every member has a healing story, some of which are well attested.

Representatives of both the Johrei Fellowship and the Izunome Association wondered aloud about how to publicize *johrei's* benefits for physical as well as spiritual healing. This is already being done, of course, but the underlying question was about how to get *johrei* accepted by an American medical establishment that increasingly accepts alternative healing systems. Could the organization grow by, in effect, ceasing to be a religion and becoming a network of quasi-medical practitioners?

This question is deeper than I have space to pursue here, though I should note that America's alternative healing market is as competitive as is its religious market (McGuire 1988). Despite – or perhaps because of – Christian Science, the market opening for "healing religions" does not seem promising in the U.S. Non-medical healing is very popular there, but it is also suspect. Even were this not so, the structural disparity between the American medical system, which is based on individual consultation with private practitioners (Freund, McGuire and Podhurst 2003), and the American religious system, which is based in congregational communities, does not bode well for congregational growth through medicalizing religious practices.

Yet, this proposal does bring us face to face with one of the chief barriers to the translation of religion from one society to another – which is increasingly the case in a globalized world. Mixing religion and medicine clearly works in Japan, for traditional Japanese culture does not sharply divide the two institutional spheres. It also clearly works in Brazil, where even the middle class finds scientific medicine beyond its financial reach.[8] But it does not easily work in the United States, where the spheres are seen as distinct. Even though suburban, middle-class Americans are increasingly open to alternative medicinal practices, they tend to absorb such practices into their existing definition of "seeing a doctor": one goes when one is ill, and stays as far away as possible the rest of the time. Similarly, "going to church" involves weekly services, prayer, a supportive community, and being reminded of the deeper meanings of life. There are cross-overs (McGuire 1988), but such definitional differentiation is not easily bridged.

Contributions from Transnational Corporation Theory

The experience of *Sekai Kyusei-kyo* leaves us with two main issues to explore. The first is the problem of how to unite the Japanese sense of hierarchy with the American sense of equality into an organization that operates effectively across national borders. The second is how to translate an interpretation of "what is this religious stuff we are doing" from one cultural sphere to another. Such questions have also arisen in American business schools, in the study of transnational corporations. It is to some of the results of their study that I now turn.

I should say at the beginning that the study of transnational corporations is in a rather peculiar state (Ghoshal and Westney 1993). Though such corporations are clearly powerful international players, there is considerable mystery about how they best work, organizationally speaking. Multidimensional and heterogeneous, such organizations do not always realize the promised comparative advantage of cross-national coordination and internalized transactions (Doz and Prahalad 1993). Put simply, there is a reason that International Telephone and Telegraph – better known as ITT – no longer exists as a powerful international conglomerate. It failed to make money. Current transnationals are also not the fountains of wealth that their enthusiasts envisioned. Though they often have enough power to ruin local economies (Barnet and Müller 1974), they do not seem to be any more profitable than smaller firms are.

Part of this has to do with organizational structure. Despite its size, ITT followed the headquarters-subsidiary model, which posits a central organization commanding tentacles that reach to all parts of the globe. Imaged by its critics as a giant octopus, plucking resources from around the world and returning them to a central maw, this company basically starved to death. It lacked the ability both to coordinate its constituent parts for common tasks, and to sell its goods in its various markets. Central authority was exhausted by handling local crises, and local managers were hamstrung by centralized decision-making. In time, the company collapsed.

[8] The Izunome Association has used this fact to attract Brazilian immigrants to the Los Angeles church – a task made easier by the fact that the head minister in that Association is himself Brazilian.

(There are some interesting parallels between this collapse and the economic collapse of the centrally planned Soviet Union. Central planning apparently does not do very well in an information-based world.[9])

Informed observers argue that successful transnational corporations do not operate on this model. Rather than octopuses, they can be best thought of as anthills, whose workers organize themselves to carry out self-identified tasks on behalf of the corporation, without waiting for orders from the central office. Laying aside the animal metaphors, these corporations amount to interorganizational networks (Ghoshal and Bartlett 1993). They are not so much organizations as overlapping constituencies that coordinate along, but not precisely within, corporation boundaries. Successful transnational corporations are not internally homogenous, nor do they have clear organizational charts. Instead, they allow their units considerable independence to respond to market conditions, political exigencies, and so on. And they encourage cross-unit cooperation to respond to new opportunities. What they are <u>not</u> is what analysts have heretofore thought that all good transnational businesses – and by extension, transnational churches – ought to be: they are not hierarchical.

In a fascinating article, Gunnar Hedlund traces the word "hierarchy" to two 5th century treatises by Dionysius the Aeropagite, who applied the word to the celestial and the ecclesiastical hierarchies, respectively. These hierarchies "worked" because the Boss (God) was all-knowing, angels maintained a strict chain of command, and – most importantly – because the competitive environment never changed. You always knew who "the other side" was. "Knowledge and perfection increase as you move up the hierarchy, thus justifying the one-way flow of communication from the top down." As Hedlund puts it, in pure hierarchies:

> To generalize wildly: there are CEOs with brains, global and summarized information, and formulation of strategies at the top, and workers with legs or more limited brains, specific information, and implementation of tactics at the bottom. (Hedlund 1993:222, 223)

Does this sound like any churches you know? More exactly, does it not sound like the fondest wishes of central church leaders, yet who lack God's omniscience, who lack angelic followers, and who lack a stable religious marketplace? No wonder that Sekai Kyusei-kyo's efforts to control its American colonies failed. Its "successes" at attracting converts in Thailand and Brazil were no more the result of central office policies in Japan than were its repeated failures to attract converts in the United States. Success as well as failure resulted from a willingness to let each national church find its own way. If the knowledge of how to respond to local religious markets does not exist on the local shop floor, it is unlikely to exist anywhere. If freeing local, regional, and national churches to respond to local conditions does not produce success, then success is not likely.

There are, of course, alternatives to hierarchy as corporate organizing principles. Hedlund favors what he calls "heterarchy": the cooperation of autonomous corporate sub-units across organizational lines, for the benefit of both the sub-units and the corporate whole. Rather than being made up of stable Chiefs and Indians, various players will be Chief on one project and Indian on another. Relationships will be more complex than simple "command and control", engendering cooperation that extends beyond specific goals. Matrix management will be the rule rather than the exception. What saves this situation from anarchy, says Hedlund, is normative integration.

> Shared objectives and knowledge, and a common organizational culture and symbolism are important mechanisms. Investments in communications systems, rotation of personnel, a bias for internal 'promotion' and other human resource management strategies become increasingly important. (Hedlund 1993:231)

Without this normative integration, a transnational corporation's sub-units cease working together. The primary job of the "center" in heterarchies is to sustain this integration, not to control the periphery.

<u>The Issue of Culture</u>

I think we can all imagine ways to apply this model to transnational religions. And we can imagine the potential normative integration that such religions can muster. Indeed, transnational religions may have an easier time of integrating on the normative level than they do on an organizational one. My interviews with the leaders of the Johrei Fellowship and the Izunome Association certainly showed that they shared both values and loyalties, even though they are currently unable to work together.

[9] As has frequently been noted, Marx himself predicted this. He said that when the relations of production contradict the means of production, the relations of production change. This was true of the shift from handicraft to factory production, but it is as true of the shift from centralized factory production to the distributed production made possible by rapid information processing. Centralized economies – or companies – are not light enough on their feet to survive when information is an independent factor of production, as it is today. And centralized political systems follow.

But the issue of culture still looms large, both in the case of these organizations' effort to translate a Japanese religious reality to the United States, and in the case of transnational religious organizations generally. It is worth exploring an instance of successful cultural translation from the business world, one which actually required granting independence to a former subsidiary. This example provides a cautionary tale to those religions that think that they can maintain organizational unity across national borders. It turns out that normative integration is a difficult achievement, in the face of "distinct national (and other) cultures who may have quite different ideas as to what the organization and their roles in relation to it are all about" (Van Maanen and Laurent 1993:275).

Most Americans (and many others) have visited either Disneyland in southern California or Disney World in Florida. These famous theme parks have long captured something central to the American imagination. One can learn things about American attitudes by analyzing the cultural messages embedded in such popular attractions. Countless culture critics have noted its safety, order, and cleanliness – all marked contrasts to American urban life.

> The park's claim to be 'the happiest place on earth' … requires the banishment of all signs of decay, crime, confusion, discontent, pain, or struggle in the park's design and the reduction wherever possible of social and stylistic diversity on the part of customers and employees alike. (Van Maanen and Laurent 1993:287)

The result is an idealized "small world" of universal sympathy and harmony – one in which a nostalgic Main Street dominates both jungle and wild West. As one pair of anthropologists put it, at Disneyland, "America shines and spreads its light on the world, and the exotic is reduced to familiar terms. .. closely scrutinized, controlled, and licensed by broad middle-class values of harmony and order" (Van Maanen and Laurent 1993:291)

In the late 1980s, the Disney Corporation transplanted this magic kingdom to Tokyo, where it has been a rousing success. It has not, however, done so by replicating the cultural messages of its American prototype. Instead, the park turned a profit only after the Oriental Land Company – a Japanese development firm – took control from the Walt Disney Enterprises, subtly altering the park's themes to match Japanese cultural realities.

These alterations are several. Where the American park is a small, crowded place in a hugely spread-out metropolis, the Japanese park is larger than its southern California counterpart. Thus the sense of intimacy that Americans find in this miniature kingdom becomes a sense of elbow-room to the crowded Japanese. The greater orderliness of Japanese visitors than Americans allows more personal interaction with ride operators, who are uniformly Japanese and wear nametags. Visitors see them as individual persons – as "us", as opposed to the American actors playing Snow White, Peter Pan, and so on, who lack both nametags and individuality. These actors are instructed to speak only English, emphasizing their foreignness. Whether playing Disney characters or shop craftsmen, *gaijin* employees are put on display, much like animals at the zoo. Indeed, Tokyo Disneyland is marketed as a "foreign vacation" – an excursion to an America that reinforces Japanese cultural superiority. To quote the same anthropological observers:

> If Disneyland [USA] sucks the difference out of differences by presenting an altogether tames and colonized version of people of other lands (who are, when all is said and done, just like the good folks at home in Los Angeles or Des Moines), Tokyo Disneyland celebrates differences by treating the foreigner as exotic, its people to be understood only in terms of the fact that they are not Japanese and not, most assuredly, like the good people of Osaka and Kyoto. (Van Maanen and Laurent 1993:298)

Tokyo Disneyland is successful precisely because it does <u>not</u> mean the same thing to its Japanese audience that the American theme parks mean to Americans. Rather than a sign of vanishing cultural distinctions, it is a sign of their permanence.

<u>Implications for Globalized Religions</u>

From the business world, we have learned about the economic failure of hierarchy, plus the impossibility of exact cross-cultural translation. What implications do these matters have for the problems facing Sekai Kyusei-kyo and its successor organizations? What implications do they have for religious organizations generally, and new religions in particular? And what implications do they have for those of us who study such religions?

The message to World Messianity is dual. On the one hand, the American church was right to suppose that its key to success lies locally, not with following Japan. The church's successes in Thailand and Brazil are the result of local conditions, not Japanese genius. Likewise the failure to attract North American members stems from the American religious marketplace – plus twenty-five years of organizational chaos as the American and Japanese churches have tried to work out their relationship. That's the good news. The bad news is that a spiritual message lying halfway between religion and medicine is not as promising in the American marketplace as it appears to be elsewhere. Despite its *izunome* aspirations, the church seems destined to remain small in the West – or to become just another item on the menu of New Age practices, sampled by a few without commitment. Unless, of course, the

Japanese church finds a way to work with the Americans rather than against them; creative cross-national cooperation will never produce a religious juggernaut, but it might produce new opportunities.

The message to other religious organizations is dual as well. On the one hand, there is much to be gained by adapting a heterarchical organizational style. This style works well across national and cultural borders, and religious centers should be adept at the normative integration that heterarchy needs.. Even the Roman Church shows glimpses of this, as clergy, religious, and lay people from various nations work together on common tasks. On the other hand, the hierarchical impulse dies hard. The cultural differences between the Vatican and the United States are not going away – much less the cultural differences between the Vatican and Christian Africa. I suspect that it will be a long time before Rome wakes up to the fact that it cannot impose its will on "its" Church anymore (McGuire and Spickard 2003). New religions never could, though some have tried.

The message for scholars of such religions is a bit more straightforward. Simply put: economic metaphors help us understand religious life, but not transparently. As an economic "product", religions are a lot more like Disneyland than they are like rolled steel. Sociologists of religion who theorize about religious markets and rational actors would do well to actually read the work of those trying to understand the business world. They would see there what one does not find in their current work: that markets are complex, that there is no one right way to produce goods for them, and that culture matters.

This would be no small lesson, indeed.

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