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| **Explaining the Growth of New Religious Movements** | | |
| **The Three Main Explanations For Growth in NRM** | | |
| **Marginality**  Weber (1922; 1993) stated that sects will arise when a group is marginalised. Sects offer a *theodicy of privilege.* They provide a religious explanation and justification for their suffering and disadvantage.  Many sects have recruited members from the marginalised poor people within society e.g. in the 20th century, the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims) recruited among disadvantaged blacks in the USA.  The Moonies recruited mainly affluent white middle-class members, however Wallis states this is not a contradiction because they had been marginalised in their own way, and most were hippies, dropouts and drug users. | **Relative Deprivation**  Even privileged people can be deprived. Relative deprivation means an individual is deprived in ANY way e.g. a middle-class white person could feel deprived spiritually, especially in today’s materialistic and consumerist world that lacks moral value and authenticity.  Stark and Bainbridge argue it is the deprived who break away from churches to form sects. Middle-class individuals could alter the beliefs in a church to fit with the mainstream public norms, but deprived members are then more likely to break away and form a sect that protects the original message of the organisation. | **Social Change**  Wilson (1970) argues that rapid change disrupts norms and values resulting in anomie/normlessness. People turn to sects as a solution e.g. industrial revolution saw a rise in membership of Methodism. Bruce (1995; 1996; 2011) sees the growth of cults and sects today as a response to social change of modernisation and secularisation. In a secularised society traditional churches and sects have lost their appeal because of a strict commitment being required. Cults are less demanding and require fewer sacrifices.  ***World-rejecting NRM:*** increased time in education the 60s gave them freedom from adult responsibility and world-rejecting NRMs gave young people are more idealistic way of life. Failure of the counter-culture to change the world led to disillusioned youth turning to religion instead.  ***World-affirming NRM:*** work no longer provides identity or meaning, yet we are expected to achieve, even without the opportunities to. World-affirming NRMs provide a sense of identity as well as promise of success in the world. |
| **The Dynamics of sects and NRMs** | | |
| **Denomination or Death**   * Niebuhr (1929) argues sects are world-rejecting that come into effect because of *schism* (splitting from an established church because of disagreement over religious doctrine) * He argues they are short-lived and die out within one generation because: * The second generation: born into the sect and do not share the same commitment as their parents * The ‘Protestant ethic’ effect: sects that practise asceticism (hard work and saving) tend to become prosperous and upwardly mobile e.g. Methodists in the 19th century * Death of the Leader: sects with a charismatic leader either collapse on the leader’s death, or a more formal bureaucratic leadership takes over, transforming it into a denomination   **The Sectarian Cycle**   * Stark and Bainbridge (1986) see religious organisations moving through a cycle:  1. First stage = schism; tension between needs of deprived and privileged members of a church. Deprived break away to found world-rejecting sect 2. Second stage = initial fervour; charismatic leadership, and great tension between sect’s beliefs and those of wider society 3. Third stage = denominationalism; ‘Protestant ethic’ effect and the coolness of the second generation means fervour disappears 4. Fourth stage = establishment; sect becomes more world-accepting and tension with wider society reduces 5. Fifth stage = further schism; more zealous/less privileged members break away to found a new sect true to the original message   **Established Sects**   * Wilson (1966; 2008) argues that not all sects follow this pattern. It depends on how the sect answers the question ‘what shall we do to be saved?’; * ***Conversionist*** sects e.g. evangelicals (aim is to convert lots of people) likely to grow rapidly into larger, formal denominations * ***Adventist*** sects e.g. The Seventh Day Adventists or Jehovah’s Witnesses await the Second Coming of Christ. To be saved, they believe they must be separate from the corrupt world around them. This prevents them from compromising and becoming a denomination. * Some sects have been round for a long time but have not become a denomination; instead they are ‘established sects’ e.g. Amish, Mormons, Quakers, Pentecostalists, and Adventists. * Contrary to Niebuhr’s predictions, many have socialised their children into a high level of commitment, mainly by keeping them apart from the wider world * Wilson argues though that globalisation will make this separation harder but, it will make recruitment easier in the Third World where there are large numbers of deprived people. | | |
| **The Growth of the New Age** | | |
| * The term ‘New Age’ covers beliefs and activities since at least the 1980s * Heelas (2008) estimates there to be around 2,000 such activities, with 146,000 practitioners here in the UK * Many are very loosely organised audience or client cults * They are extremely diverse and eclectic e.g. belief in UFOs and aliens, astrology, tarot, crystals, alternative medicine, yoga, meditation, magic etc. * However, according to Heelas (1996) there are 2 common themes that characterise the new age: * ***Self-spirituality:*** turning away from traditional ‘external’ religions e.g. the church to find the spirituality inside themselves * ***Detraditionalisation:*** reject the spiritual authority of external traditional sources e.g. priests or sacred texts, instead value personal experience and belief we can discover the truth for ourselves * Heelas claims most New Age beliefs and organisations offer both world-affirming aspects (e.g. helping people to succeed) AND world-rejecting (e.g. allowing them to find enlightenment in their inner world) | | |
| **Postmodernity and the New Age** | | |
| * John Drane (1999) argues that the appeal of the New Age is the shift towards postmodern society * People have lost faith in meta-narratives I.e. the search for ‘the truth’ – Science promised progress but instead gave us war, genocide, environmental destruction and global warming * People have lost faith in professionals e.g. scientists and doctors, but are also disillusioned with the churches’ failure to meet their spiritual needs   ***The New Age and Modernity***   * Bruce (1995; 2011) states the New Age is a feature of the latest phase of a *modern* society one which values individualism (which is an important value to those in ‘expressive profession’ which New Age happens to appeal to most e.g. artists or community workers) * New Age beliefs tend to be softer versions of more demanding and self-disciplined traditional Eastern religions e.g. Buddhism – ‘watered down’ * New Age activities are therefore usually audience or client cults (since they make few demands on their followers) * Heelas sees the New Age and modernity as linked in four ways: * ***A source of identity:*** individuals have many roles (at work, in the family, with friends etc.) with little overlap, resulting in a fragmented identity. New Age beliefs offer a source of ‘authentic’ identity. * ***Consumer culture:*** this creates dissatisfaction because it never delivers thee perfection it promises (e.g. in advertising). The New Age offers an alternative way to achieve perfection. * ***Rapid social change:*** this disrupts established norms and values, resulting in anomie. The New Age provides a sense of certainty and truth in the same way as sects. * ***Decline of organised religion:*** modernity leads to secularisation, thereby removing the traditional alternatives to New Age beliefs e.g. in the USA the New Age is strongest where church going is at its lowest (California) | | |