

INTRODUCTION: OUTREACH

Volume I of this work dealt primarily with the right of religious bodies to manage their own internal affairs. This volume deals with the efforts of religious bodies to reach out to the world.

Almost every Western religious body asserts some kind of intentionality toward the world outside its walls. Cloistered contemplative religious orders, such as the Trappists, devote prayers to the redemption of the world. They believe intercession to be at least as effective as the more activist interventions of their more worldly counterparts. Jehovah's Witnesses, though believing that their activities can accomplish neither the redemption of the world nor their own salvation, still feel obliged to witness to the forthcoming judgment of Jehovah—from which mission they derive their name. There are exceptions: the Old Order Amish do not engage in active evangelism or other efforts to affect the outside world. Because of the wide gap between their chosen way of life and the rest of society, they seek mainly to be left alone to pursue their agrarian, nontechnological path. In this quiescence they are more like the adherents of many mainline and Eastern Orthodox Christian groups than they are like their Anabaptist forebears, who were active evangelists.¹ This exposition will focus on several types of outreach: evangelism; conversion; solicitation and fund-raising; social service; political action and reform.

In these outreach activities, most religious bodies seek to benefit the society in which they are situated. But their good intentions are not always appreciated. In fact, these outreach activities often encounter opposition, hostility and resentment, almost in direct proportion to the effort and zeal the religious group puts into them. The younger and more vigorous (and naive) the religious movement, the more effort and zeal it may invest in outreach, and the more turbulence it may stir up. This proportionality is due in large part to the energy gradient between the religious movement and the rest of society. New religious movements have a very high energy level, such that their members are caught up in collective activities of intense commitment to which they devote more time and effort and fervor than most other people do to the achievement of their fondest ambitions. This obsession-compulsion

¹ The Anabaptists were a movement on the “left wing” of the Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth century, whose surviving successors include the Swiss Brethren, Hutterites, South German Brethren, Dutch Mennonites and the followers of Jacob Ammon, the Amish. They insisted that all Christians were called to be evangelists, in contrast to the magisterial Reformers like Luther and Calvin, who contended that the command, “Go ye into all the world and make disciples...” had been accomplished and was no longer incumbent upon living Christians. See Littell, F., *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 45.

with religion is a very unsettling and upsetting phenomenon to bystanders, especially when it is focused on *them*. The resulting animosity seems proportionate to the differential between the level of energy of the religious adherent(s) and that of the bystander(s).

One of the forms this animosity takes is a feeling of defensiveness, as though the zeal of the intense advocate of religion were a reflection upon or reproach to the bystander's own religion. Some truly devout believers take understandable umbrage at the implication—or announcement—that their faith has no merit, especially if expressed in offensive terms.²

The energy gradient was represented in an earlier work by relative velocity.

By its very ardor, [the religious movement] creates a boundary turbulence between itself and the calmer regions of the world. Its abrasiveness supplies part of the friction that slows it down. On every side, hands reach out to grasp it, buffet it, or cling to it, and each imparts its perturbation.³

The “faster” the religious movement “moves,” the greater the shock waves created between it and the more inert mass of the population and the greater the “drag” on the movement. It is for such reasons that the religious movement generates opposition in direct proportion to its difference from the mean, not only in level of commitment and activity, but in idiom and lifestyle. Aversion to differences of speech, attitude, tempo and appearance is common to all people and is known as *xenophobia*, fear of the strange(r), but when to it is added a sharp difference in *energy* and when that energy is devoted to *religion*, then xenophobia is amplified by several powers and can become quite dangerous, producing a phenomenon that might be called *pistaphobia* (fear of faith). *Pistaphobia* probably fuels the impulse to persecution that lies not far beneath the surface in many people and leads to many kinds of unlovely behavior, some of which eventually winds up in court and makes an all-too-human impact on the law of church and state.

². See *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296 (1940), in which the defendant had played a phonograph record denouncing the Roman Catholic Church for pedestrians who happened to be Catholic. That case is discussed at § 2c below.

³. Kelley, D., *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972, 1977, Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univ. Press, 1986), p. 102.