AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF

REVIVALIST RELIGION IN ADELAIDE

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SUMMARY

Evidence suggests that the concept of the 'secularization' of modern societies must be re-examined. Not only has there occurred the spread of 'invisible religion' in Thomas Luckmann's phrase, but revitalizing movements emphasising personal commitment, healing and charisma, have sprung up in the main Christian churches. The Pentecostalist movement has been highly influential in this.

The Pentecostal organization studied in this thesis, has been highly successful over three decades in achieving conversions, stable and growing membership, and avoiding disruption.

In this study explanation and understanding of the recent history and current beliefs and practices of the organization, which I call God's Army, are attempted by the combined use of historical sociology and ethnographic field work.

Two problems are considered and used for wider analysis:-

(a) The role of the founder and prophet and his relations with both an inner circle of leaders and the wider laity. Connections are proposed between the frequency and type of ideological changes, and his relations with both types of followers. The analysis employs a modified version of Weber's concept of charismatic authority.

(b) The social processes of recruitment and commitment with particular reference to the redefinition of their social situations by members. The significance of healing, 'deliverance' (exorcism), and codes of conduct in everyday life are examined in detail. From this propositions are made concerning the communication and meaning of faith and doubt in God's Army.

While the wider social and religious context of the growth of God's Army is not a major problem considered, the importance of such

contexts for a fuller understanding is considered at appropriate points. This is done by reference to the few other studies of Australian religion, documentary sources from the Pentecostalist movement and sociological interpretations of social change.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Josephine M. Dey.

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PREFACE

In this study I have applied ethnographic and historical sociological perspectives to the study of one unfinished episode in the growth of 'ecstatic religion' in Australia.   This began with the arrival in Adelaide of a man I shall call James.   From his own account, his arrival was in response to a prophecy made about him by a shadowy legitimating figure, a pastor in New Zealand.   More certainly he was invited by a small group of sponsors to initiate a revival and extension of their theological position which consisted mainly of a racial doctrine of the divine responsibility of Anglo-Saxon peoples called British-Israelism.

James was raised in the recently established tradition of Australian Pentecostalism, itself an outshoot of British, Commonwealth and American missionary efforts.   After his arrival in Adelaide in 1945, he succeeded in instilling Pentecostal beliefs and practices among many of his British-Israelite sponsors.   With this nucleus of followers he went on to attract a few new followers from the various Pentecostal groups already established, and also disenchanted members of mainline Protestant churches.   Over the following three decades his influence grew, both in Adelaide, and more widely in Australian Pentecostalism.   The congregation of what I have called God's Army grew and became quite diverse in its social composition.   A definite form of church govern-ment or "Oversight" emerged to administer local and foreign missionary efforts, finances and various enterprises ranging from a modern assembly complex to a school and Bible college.   A career structure of elders and pastors and minor officials developed.

In his early years in Adelaide James encountered several challenges to his leadership, which took the form of largely implicit denials, or

extensions of his teaching. By the early 1960s, however, these declined and until his death in 1977, he exercised leadership which was publicly based on acknowledgement of his personal revelations and ministry.

Both of these phases however were marked by changes in the ideology of God's Army, as announced from time to time by James. Doctrines relating to healing, mental health, the preservation of family life, 'deliverance' (exorcism), and Christian conduct in every-day life, followed each other. These were reflected in situational selection and emphasis of certain portions of ideology by various sections of the congregation. The result has been that a good deal of actual diversity of experience and pluralism of doctrine underlies the insistence that all think alike and that very little change has occurred in God's Army or in James since 1945.

My thesis describes and analyses these aspects of change. However, I have not tried to do this by adopting a chronological approach which traced the major steps through the thesis. Nor have I adopted a 'community' frame of reference to account for social relations. The first part of the study is based on a critical view of Weber's concept of charismatic authority and attempts to analyse relations between a leader who claims to embody 'higher' directives, his lieutenants and the wider followership. The second part takes advantage of the conclusions of the first part and analyses the social process of recruitment and commitment employing as a framework the idea of the social construction of reality and related concepts from symbolic interactionism.