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[Book Review of] *New Religions and Mental Health: Understanding the Issues*, edited by Herbert Richardson

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being. As such, they are prudential judgments of conscience, and for them to be attributable to the agent, the conditions required to satisfy an ordinary judgment of conscience are applicable here. As it is not ethically permissible to impose the harms of war on a conscientious objector, so also is it not permissible to impose harms involved in research on patients who object to them. As a society cannot demand of children that they agree to risk harms for the good of society, so also medical research cannot demand of children that they risk harms for the purpose of advancing medical knowledge. This is so because children lack the conceptual wherewithal to formulate responsible prudential judgments of conscience. And what applies to children applies even more forcefully to the unborn. The duty to receive informed consent is grounded only generically on the principle of respect of persons, for its specific foundation is the principle that decisions concerning one's health and physical well-being must be made by someone — either the person himself or one charged with the care of the person — who is capable of making this type of judgment.

The author makes the very fine point that all arrangements between the researcher and client should include the stipulation that compensation will be provided to the client for any harms whatsoever incurred on account of the research, irrespective of the liabilities of the researcher.

This work was written with the express purpose of modifying and streamlining regulations and procedures employed by Institutional Review Boards. It is unlikely that the modifications suggested by the author would be as cost-effective as he suggests, and in all probability the modified procedures would be less ethically acceptable than the ones presently in use.

This book is of value for the summary and review of current DHEW and DHHS regulations, but it is seriously deficient as an ethical critique of these policies and regulations.

— Robert L. Barry, O.P.

New Religions and Mental Health: Understanding the Issues

Herbert Richardson, Editor

Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, N.Y. 14092, LII + 172 pp.

In the book *New Religions and Mental Health*, Herbert Richardson has brought together in a single volume a series of articles which delineate the salient issues of what, for some, seems to be a modern, perplexing problem — the conversion of many of our intelligent young people to forms of religious belief and practice which are perceived as new and inimical to established religious beliefs and practice and even to the good of society itself. The editor selects articles by authors who present a wide variety of viewpoints on this controversial issue and integrates them into a manageable whole, through an introduction which summarizes the issues raised in the articles.

The first set of articles is used to define the problem by presenting a case against the cults and then showing what is involved in the process of “deprogramming.” A discussion of “mental health” as a social weapon and various proposals

for legislation in the area of conversions to cults completes the first part. Part two contains articles which consider the stake that special interest groups have in the promotion of cults and the opposition to them. These include orthodox Jewish groups, psychiatric groups seeking control of modern religious movements, and the influence of the media in the manner in which it reports the nature and practices of new religious groups. Part three relates recent judicial decisions and the results of governmental studies covering religious "cults." Part four contains a theological discussion of the phenomena of conversion in general and how these are illustrated in the lives of historical figures as well as applied to current cases of conversion to some of the new religions.

Many of the issues raised in these articles are not really new, but are old questions set in a new context with new descriptive terminology. Such issues as the freedom of religion, liberty of conscience, the role of the state in determining religious orthodoxy, and the right of the majority to pressure conformity on a deviant minority are but a few facets of a perplexing question. Is it possible that we are witnessing a recycling of history, the rise of another Inquisition? Only this time, instead of finding a Dominican friar at the rack and thumbscrew, are we to look for a psychiatrist at the consulting couch, administering truth serum and neuroleptic drugs until the reluctant deviant succumbs into a muddle-minded egalitarianism of the secularistic status quo? All this could be accomplished with the blessings of a governmental legislature whose "mental health" goals are defined by the context of a society which is more self-centered, consumer-oriented, and irreligious.

The spectacle of intelligent young people turning away from traditional religious beliefs and commonly accepted moral standards of a secularistic society in favor of an often ill-understood and idealistic cult is seen as an affront and challenge to those who hold these religious views and convictions. Is it not easier to condemn these aspirations of the young than to view critically basic commitments and how these are carried out in day-to-day living? Is it the idealism and capacity to satisfy the inner needs of the human heart which are lacking in traditional religions, or are we witnessing the failure of present religious communicants to exemplify this idealism in their lives — a failure which causes so many of the young either to abandon religion altogether or to seek a new idealism and inspiration in life from the religious sentiments contained in the new religions?

The editor's introduction gives an excellent summary of the main issues involved in the question of religious "cults," and the stake that people of all religious persuasions have in the attitudes and legislation adopted by our present society toward religious freedom, conversions to alternate beliefs and lifestyles, and the definition of orthodoxy in religious beliefs and practice.

Traditional religious bodies are threatened by the departures from their ranks of those to whom they would like to look for leadership in future generations: the young, the intelligent, and the idealistic. They are threatened when their present ideals and practices are examined by the young and found wanting. Parents whose lives have been dominated by a work ethic and the accumulation and multiplication of material possessions and comforts are deflated when their children express the idea that "there must be more to life than this." Whether turning to cults is any more of a solution to their inner feeling of emptiness in the midst of abundance than turning to drugs, alcohol, or sex can only be determined on a personal and individualistic basis. Each person, especially the young, needs the inner freedom to explore the possibilities which may provide such a sense of inner peace and fulfillment. No one is comfortable with having his or her basic life commitments questioned, especially by his own flesh and blood whom he loves and for whom he wishes and strives to provide the very best.

The psychiatric profession has a large stake in the present controversy. A secularist society cannot look to established religions as the arbiters of its mem-

bers' orthodoxy or deviance. The members' "mental health" is medicalized and made the sole prerogative of the psychiatric profession. The psychiatrist rather than the priest, rabbi, or minister determines acceptable behavior, exorcises the deviant, and counsels the legislator on the formulation of laws aimed at maintaining the status quo.

The media, with its own stake in selling papers and promoting its TV ratings, is tempted to manipulate the news to its own purposes. Cults make good copy and create interest, so they are exploited by the media beyond their own importance and influence. What is of importance is the effect that this kind of reporting has on popular sentiments and the pension of legislators to respond to these popular hysterics. The real question is whether the current cult phenomenon in our present society is of such a magnitude or danger that it warrants the inauguration of legislation which could seriously threaten the religious freedom which is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution. The numbers involved and the results of recent government investigations seem to indicate that we do not need to institute another Inquisition to insure the maintenance of our current secularistic status quo.

Understanding conversion as a normal part of the process of human development is an important insight gleaned from present theological reflection. When viewed in the context of the conversion of certain historical figures, the conversions of many of our present-day idealistic youths do not appear as spectacular and unusual as we are led to believe. The fact that some young people today have turned from commonly accepted standards in search of a fuller meaning in their lives through new forms of religious expression may cause many to feel uncomfortable at their own unexamined life, but this discomfort should not stampede our society into legislating away the very religious freedom which our people enjoy. This book has done well in raising and clarifying the issues surrounding religious cults. With its insights, perhaps the efforts to "save" the few will not result in the destruction of the religious freedoms of the many. The latter loss would be far greater than the first.

— Joseph H. Determan, O.P.
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Toward a Reformulation of Natural Law

by Anthony Battaglia

Seabury, New York, 1981, 150 pages, \$14.95.

Battaglia presents here a modified version of the natural law theory, by which he tries to steer a middle course between absolutism (immutable precepts) and complete relativism (no grounding of precepts in reality). His version is supposed to be faithful to the central insights of St. Thomas Aquinas — whom he calls the greatest of the natural law theorists (p. 4) — while developing his thought with an eye to modern problems, especially that of "historicity."

Battaglia argues that, for Aquinas, our knowledge not only of God, but also of creatures, can be only analogical, not univocal. He then interprets "analogical knowledge" to mean partially false, "reformulable," and uncertain. According to Battaglia, Aquinas held that we know things not as they *really* are but only in terms of *our* knowing power (p. 41); we know not the essences of things but only their appearances (p. 141).