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# A Typology of Cults

Bruce Campbell

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## Abstract

The development of a concept of “cult” useful for empirical research has lagged behind the refinement of terms used to analyze other forms of religious organization. Utilizing Troeltsch's “technical mysticism” concept, the article defines cults as non-traditional religious groups that are based

on a belief in a divine element within the individual. Three ideal types of cults are posited: a mystically-oriented *illumination* type; an *instrumental* type, in which inner experience is sought for its effects; and a *service-oriented* type, which is focused on aiding others. The usefulness of the typology is tested in its application to the analysis of six groups: Theosophy, Wisdom of the Soul, Spiritualism, New Thought, Scientology, and Transcendental Meditation.

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