MCDONALDIZATION/THE
SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF
RELIGIOUS CONVERSIONS

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IRRATIONALITIES OF
RATIONALITY

Ritzer claims that although McDonaldization is supposed to be rational, it can lead to results that are irrational. These include:

- Inefficiency and higher costs: McDonaldization isn’t efficient for everyone, especially customers, and may cost extra.
- The illusion of fun: Fun has become a guiding principle of many McDonaldized institutions.
- False Friendliness: Genuine fraternization is restricted or eliminated and replaced with either no human relationships or “false fraternization.”
- Health and environmental hazards: Includes health risks of fast food, food poisoning, litter, environmental hazards of factory farms.
- Homogenization: Similar products are offered through the U.S. and world.
- Dehumanization: McDonaldization offers low-skill jobs, treats customers impersonally, minimizes contact between human beings, and has negative effects on families.

DEALING WITH MCDONALDIZATION

- Three perspectives on a McDonaldized Society
  - Velvet cage: McDonaldization is comfortable; it represents a standard of good taste and high quality
  - Rubber cage: the bars of McDonaldization can be stretched to allow adequate means of escape; some aspects are disliked, others are appealing
  - Iron cage: McDonaldization is deeply offensive and there are few ways out
- Strategies for carving out less McDonaldized lives
  - Create non-McDonaldized institutions
  - Fight back collectively
  - Cope individually

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN U.S. HISTORY

- The Great Awakening (1730s & 1740s): Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield called for a “new birth”
- Second Awakening (early 1800s): Charles Finney borrowed techniques from advertising and showmanship
- Post-Civil War: Dwight Moody was a master organizer and church builder in Chicago
- Post-WW I: Ames native Billy Sunday promoted “muscular Christianity”
- Post-WW II: Billy Graham held first revival meeting in 1949; within 25 years, over 1.5 million people “stepped forward” for Christ at his rallies
TWO VIEWS OF CONVERSION

- Turnabout view of conversion
  - Radical break with past and immersion in a new life
  - Institutionalized view of conversion
  - Organized by families, churches and revivalists
  - Often an age-stage ritual to affirm existing values
  - Like other rituals, can still be meaningful experience
- Today’s sources: two studies & one documentary on Billy Graham
  - Wimberly et al.’s survey of Knoxville, TN, rally
  - Altheide & Johnson’s covert participant observation of Phoenix, AZ, rally
  - Video: Billy Graham (Biography series, Randall Balmer narrated)

THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND CHURCHES

- Conversions organized by families and churches as life-stage ritual to re-affirm existing values (Wimberly et al. 1975)
  - Method: survey at Knoxville Billy Graham rally
  - 91% of attendees were church members
  - Bloc mobilization: 31% came with church group
  - Not break with family: 66% came with families/friends
  - Life-stage ritual: 73% of conversions < 20 years old
  - Research on conversions to a different religion, shows that conversions result from ties to people in that religious community

THE ROLE OF THE REVIVALISTS

- Publicity begins 18 months before event
  - Organize churches to supply attendees
  - Train counselors and other workers
  - Provide message promoting conversion
  - Provide “altar call” period for conversion
  - Counselors go forward during altar call
  - Counselors help converts through conversion
  - Counselors record conversions
  - Local churches notified to “follow up” conversion

BUREAUCRATIZING CONVERSIONS

- Altheide & Johnson: covert observation of 1974 Phoenix rally
  - Research question: how are decisions made as to type of conversion in face-to-face encounters?
  - Acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord
  - Assurance of Salvation
  - Rededication
  - Results: all converts categorized as “acceptance”
  - Interpretation: organization environment engulfed spiritual priorities