

# NEW RELIGIONS OR CONTEMPORARY CULTS

BY

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## CONTEMPORARY CULTS

### *Brief Summary*

*Definition: A «cult» is religious perversion; it is devotion to a religious view or leader centered in false doctrine. «It is organized heresy.» It is a system of worship centering in devotion or homage to a person or an object.*

*The theology of the cults is formulated by the founder—prophet or guru—on whom the members absolutely depend. The cults demand «obedience» rather than belief or understanding. They promise the followers a «secret» knowledge to enable them to attain «new consciousness».*

*The cults are non-Christian because they reject Jesus Christ as the second person of the Holy Trinity and as Savior.*

*The cults use deception and several brainwashing tactics to gain new converts. Those who follow these cults lose completely their free will—ἐλευθέρᾳ βούλησιν—and become slaves to some religious «dictator» leader who exploits the youth to gain personal material wealth, power and glory.*

*The true yardstick for measuring religious truth is Orthodox Theology as proclaimed by the Apostles, as is written in the Scriptures, as taught by the Holy Fathers, and preserved by the One, Holy, Orthodox, Catholic and Apostolic Church. In the Gospel of St. John 16:13 we read: «When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. God the Holy Spirit guides the Church into the truth.»*

*Be aware of deceivers and false self-proclaimed gurus. The Holy Bible warns us: «But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction» (2 Peter 2:1).*

*The most effective way to combat the cults is by strengthening the unity of the family, the fellowship of the Church and especially by growing in the faith of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## I

*Introduction*

One of the greatest concerns that religious people have today is the influx of new religions or, as some refer to them, «cults». First, I would like to define what a cult is in order to better understand this subject matter. The Bible Dictionary gives the following definition: «Cults, (are) systems of worship centering in devotion or homage to a person or an object.»<sup>1</sup>

In the ancient world, fertility cults were very common, especially in Western Asia, such as the sun-god cults, pillar cults, cults of the dead, bull cults in Crete, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Another definition: «A cult is a religious perversion. It is a belief and practice in the world of religion which calls for devotion to a religious view or leader centered in false doctrine. It is an organized heresy.»<sup>3</sup>

The prevailing doctrine of past and present cults is the gnostic or secret knowledge that they alone possess to attain salvation or perfection. This is evident in early Gnosticism as well as in the nineteenth century cults such as the Seventh Day Adventism, Mormonism, Christian Scientist, Jehovahs Witnesses, Spiritualism, Theosophy and many more. Several of these cults offer «special welfare» services to promote good will and enable them to further their propaganda. Such are the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, *The Christian Science Monitor*, the Battle Creek Sanitorium (Seventh Day Adventists) and many similar activities.<sup>4</sup> Through these philanthropic activities they appear to be harmless to people in order to promote their religious propaganda.

There are a great number of cults today. Someone stated that

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1. Madeleine S. Miller and J. Lane Miller, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1961, p. 120.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Dr. Charles Braden, *These Also Believe*. Quoted in Hubert F. Beck, *How to Respond to the Cults*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977, p. 6.

4. James G. Vanburen, *Cults Challenge the Church*. Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 196, p. 11.

there are about five thousand and that there are three thousand «messiahs» in America today. In the present study I will limit myself to discussing several of the new religions emerging during the last few years in this country.

## II

### *Theology of the New Cults*

The success of the present plethora of cults is due to the attention given them by the media.<sup>5</sup> The tenets are formulated by a «founder-prophet», on whom the members greatly depend.<sup>6</sup> The cults «demand obedience rather than belief or understanding.»<sup>7</sup> The strong belief of the members in the supernatural character of their leader transforms the leader into an object of worship. That is, «the reverence and worship that the disciples have invested in their leader»<sup>8</sup> changes the perception of reality. Lowell Strieker states: «To worship a human being, to treat him as a god, to find freedom from stress in the adoration of a cult leader, requires a considerable change in consciousness.»<sup>9</sup> And that is exactly what they claim for their members, «new consciousness, altered perception, intense emotional states.» Their motto is «stay high forever! Tune in! Drop out! End all downness!»<sup>10</sup>

The scientific study of religion indicates that «man is a religious creature.»<sup>11</sup> And that «religious belief has always been supposed to rest on a leap of faith—a leap from despair to promise.»<sup>12</sup> In recent years various sociological forces have emerged to question or overthrow tradi-

5. Lowell D. Strieker, *The Cults are Coming*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978, p. 13.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 13. This is also evident in the earlier cult of the «Kingdom of Father Divine.» Cantril states: «Father Divine's Kingdom serves as a prototype of those social movements we know as 'Cults'—organized actions, generally rather restricted and temporary, in which the individual zealously devotes himself to some leader or ideal.» Thousands of peoples believe «Father Divine is God.» See Hadley Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movement*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1951, p. 123.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

11. Carroll Stoner and JoAnne Parke, *All God's Children: The Cult Experience—Salvation or Slavery?* Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Book Company, 1977, p. 32.

12. Stoner and Parke, *Ibid.*, p. 32.

tional values. The birth-control pill, the atomic bomb and technology have changed the course of history and the lifestyle of people.<sup>13</sup> In the turmoil of social upheaval many cults have emerged to fill the vacuum.<sup>14</sup>

In the meantime, modern science has become an object of mistrust as well. In the past the general trust in the goodness of science has been replaced by mistrust because of the pollution of the environment, that is, ecology, the constant threat of atomic war and nuclear destruction. Also, the appearance of «new religions» from the Orient, fragments of teachings from ancient religions contributed to doubt about the truth of science and religion. There is a metaphysical rebellion and a search for new world view —Weltanschauung— of modern man. The advancement of technology and our expanded knowledge of the universe leaves man to be ignorant of himself.<sup>15</sup> All these events and transformations made modern man vulnerable to the cults.

The cultic religiosity is an amalgamation of oriental and western thought and practice that aims to make converts.

### *The Unification Church*

It has been claimed that the Unification Church theology is not Christian. It is an «...alloy of Christianity, Taoism, and Buddhism...»<sup>16</sup> The teachings of the Unification Church are set forth in the *Divine Principle* by Sun Myung Moon.<sup>17</sup>

Moon describes God in explicit anthropomorphic terms. «God suffers, weeps, feels frustration, knows joy and happiness, even laughs. His will can be thwarted.»<sup>18</sup> Concerning the creation of man, Moon teaches that God's original intention was for Adam and Eve to unite and give birth to sinless children and that the human race would be perpetuated and live in perfect harmony.<sup>19</sup>

13. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

14. *Ibid.*, p. XI.

15. Jacob Needleman, *A Sense of the Cosmos: The Encounter of Modern Science and Ancient Truth*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975, pp. 1-2.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

18. Streiker, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 40. The founder of the Unification Church, Sun Myung Moon, was born in Korea. He was a Presbyterian and then a Pentecostal. Stoner and Park, p. 53.

God's will, however, was prevented from being fulfilled because of the «fall». It is reported that the Unification theology claims that Eve entered into physical sexual relations with Lucifer.

The subsequent conjugal union of Adam and Eve was without God's blessing and hence all their descendants are not children of God but children of Satan.<sup>20</sup> God made several attempts to restore humanity to perfection by sending several Massiahs, but He failed.

According to Moon, there were three stages for the resurrection or reconciliation of humanity to God. First, the family of Abraham, the Jews, were justified before God because of the observance of the Mosaic Law. God never spoke to them directly because of their low spirituality, communicating His message only through angels. The Jews never became sons of God but only servants of God.<sup>21</sup> The second stage is that God sent Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, who also failed in his mission of restoring humanity to sinlessness. I quote Professor Streiker: «Through him (Jesus of Nazareth), God sought to restore the creation to Himself, to begin the perfect family whose sinless offspring would reunite spiritual and material reality to himself. But the mission of Jesus was a failure... the crucifixion is a sign of failure.»<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, «...according to *Divine Principle*, because he was crucified, Christ was not able to marry and begin a perfect family of man and therefore failed in his mission.»<sup>23</sup> Of course, this is considered by Orthodoxy not only a heresy but a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The claim is that the Third Stage will complete the cycle of perfection. It is reported that «God again sent an advocate (Moon) to earth, the Lord (Moon) of the Second Advent.»<sup>24</sup> It is prophesied in the *Divine Principle*, that the Lord of the Second Advent will be born in Korea, he will marry and have sinless children and that «he and his followers will create a perfect family, a perfect nation, a perfect world.»<sup>25</sup> Political ideology and vogue moralism are used here to accomplish the purpose of the cult which is to bring all people under the slavery of the «Unification Church». In order to attract converts idealism is used: «the two obstacles to the rule of God, are 'Godless communism and illicit sex.'»<sup>26</sup> The price one pays to be in the cult is to become a slave to

20. Stoner and Parke, *op. cit.*, p. 34. Streiker, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

21. Stoner and Parke, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

22. Streiker, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

23. Stoner and Parke, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

25. Streiker, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

Moon, who manipulates the person for his own personal gain and power. The ultimate goal of this cult is the «unification» of all humanity under the control of Moon. To attain this purpose many means are used, including deceptive methods.

It is reported that the *Divine Principle* considers male and female as manifestations of God's nature and that the sexual union of man and women as completion of God's nature. It appears, also, that the *Divine Principle* polarizes two gods as—good and evil—satanic and godly forces.<sup>27</sup>

The Unification Church teaches that sex by nature is evil. Only Moon selects the mates and blesses the marriages in order to restore «sinless children» to God. According to Korean religious scholars, the practice of a monthly sexual rite called *pikarume* «or blood cleansing, to purify souls of Eve's misdeed» is advocated by several religious sects in Korea including that of members of the Moon church. This rite consists of removing Eve's sin by copulating with a sect leader to be «purified».<sup>28</sup>

The Unification Church denies the basic doctrine of the Creed: «I believe in one God the Father Almighty... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God...very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial (homousios) with the Father... And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life.» The divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit has been very important to the Church throughout the centuries. Orthodoxy guards this faith with the blood of the martyrs and saints. St. Gregory the Theologian states that Christ «is called Son because he is identical with the Father in essence; and not only for this reason, but also he is of Him. And he is called only begotten, not because he is the only Son and of the Father alone, only a Son, but also because the manner of his Sonship is peculiar to himself and not shared by bodies.»<sup>29</sup>

The fall in Orthodox theology is «the sin of selfishness and disobedience.»<sup>30</sup> The Orthodox view of the fall or «original sin» is clearly stated by Bishop Maximos Aghiorgoussis. He says: «...man failed in achieving the purpose of his creation; he failed to achieve his destiny, his

26. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

27. Stoner and Parke, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

29. *Theological Oration*s. Fourth Oration, 20.

30. Athenagoras Kokkinakis, *Parents and Priests as Servants of Redemption*. New York: Morehouse-Gorham Company, 1958, p. 31. John Romanides, *Τὸ Πρωτογενὲς Ἀπόστολικὸν Ἄμάρτημα* Athens: Apostolike Diakonia, 1957, pp. 141-150.

theosis. He tried to become a 'god without God.' This is his sin; this is the cause of his fall.»<sup>31</sup> Humanity is liberated from sin and death by the Divine Logos who took up our human nature. «Through His incarnation Christ destroys all obstacles which separate man from God, which do not allow man to achieve his destiny, theosis.» And that «...through His Cross He washes up the poison of the serpent». The Cross is a victory and not defeat. «Adam's bones are made alive again on Calvary.»<sup>32</sup> Through His death and resurrection Christ restores man to the vision of the glory of God.

### *The Children of God*

It is reported that the most radical of the contemporary cults are the Children of God, also known as Family of Love. Once they were known as Jesus freaks. Now emerged as a new religion «with their own 'scriptures,' 'prophet', and practices.»<sup>33</sup> The founder of this new religion is David Brandt Berg, known as Moses David<sup>34</sup>. The claim is made that «a Child of God believes that his leader receives regular divine revelation from God. Berg puts these regulations and practices into writing for his disciples. They are called «Mo Letters». To a member of COG, a «Mo Letter» is as important as the Bible. Possibly more important.<sup>35</sup> He claims, «you could even rebuke the devil in the name of David and he will flee. No power in the world can stand against the power of David.»<sup>36</sup> The saddest thing about the COG is that they believe that they are given divine license to disregard both the moral and legislated law. The world is rotten and is compared to Pharaoh's Egypt. They consider themselves «at war with the rest of the world; they are exempt from its rules.»<sup>37</sup> The «Mo letters» are reported as using «foul or pornographic language.»<sup>38</sup> And the leader advocates «shocking sexual behavior.»<sup>39</sup> This

31. *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, «Sin in Orthodox Dogmatics», vol. 21, no. 4, 1977, p. 182. John Boojamra, «Original Sin According to St. Maximos the Confessor, *St. Vladimir's Quarterly*, vol. 20, 1 & 2, 1976, pp. 1-2.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

33. Streiker, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 50. Stoner and Parke, p. 48.

35. Stoner and Parke, p. 49. Streiker, p. 58.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

37. Stoner and Parke, p. 49.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

cult condones polygamy and disregards all sexual mores and moral conduct of the Christian religion and the American social order.<sup>40</sup>

These teachings by Berg are those which an Orthodox theologian describes as sin. Kokkinakis states about original sin as follows: «Man's functionings lost their primordial beauty and meaning... Brutal feelings sprang out of the depths of his being. Bestiality replaced morality. Virtue gave place to vice.»<sup>41</sup> It is in Christ and through Christ that we find redemption and no other prophet or «god». The Church recognizes the Scriptures that were delivered unto us by our Holy Fathers and no others.

### *Hare Krishna*

The cult of Krishna was founded in New York in 1965, by A. B. Bhaktivedanta, who is known as Swami Prabhupada. It originated in the Hindu religious tradition.<sup>42</sup>

According to Hindu theology, Brahman is God the creator. He is the central Godhead in all Hinduism. Shiva the Destroyer stands for life itself, and pure energy of force. Shiva destroys «in order to make room for new creation.» Vishnu is the Preserver. He is always benevolent and conservator of values.<sup>43</sup> Krishna is the incarnation of Vishnu and is a very popular hero-god among the Hindus.<sup>44</sup>

It is no doubt that «The International Society for Krishna conscious is a religion» that seeks to make converts.<sup>45</sup> The Krishnas advocate that Lord Krishna is the ultimate manifestation of Brahman.<sup>46</sup> In the U.S. the Krishnas believe that they were freed from moral law, and they scorn the law of the nation because they feel they are above the law.<sup>47</sup>

The Krishna devotees believe the following eight points which seem to be helpful to their followers. They are:

40. *Ibid.*, p. 50. Streiker, p. 60.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 31. For teaching young people about sex, I highly recommend *The Truth About Sex* by S. G. Macris, M.D. published by St. Tikhon's Orthodox Seminary in South Canaan, Pa. Dr. Macris is associate professor at the Thessaloniki Medical School.

42. Stoner and Parke, p. 42.

43. John B. Ross, *Man's Religions*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967, pp. 279-287.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

45. Stoner and Parke, p. 42.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 44.



1. «By cultivating a bona fide spiritual science, we can be free from anxiety and come to a state of pure, unending, blissful consciousness.»

However, without the fulfilment of Christ and God's grace, the person remains empty.

2. «We are not bodies but eternal spirit souls, parts and parcels of God (Krishna). As such we are all brothers, and Krishna is ultimately our common father.»

The entire human race must be included into the brotherhood of the Church. All human beings are created «in the image of God» and deserve His love. Man is body and soul.

3. «Krishna is the eternal, all-knowing, omnipresent, all-powerful and all-attractive personality of the God-head.»

Krishna in an idol, possessing human (evil) passions and the desire to possess things.

4. «The absolute truth is contained in all the great scriptures of the world... however, the Bhagavadgita is the literal record of God's actual words.»

The truth of God is revealed in the Holy Bible, in Christ and His Church.

5. «We should learn Vedic knowledge from a genuine spiritual master (Prabhupada).»

The ultimate truth is the Logos, Christ, who teaches all people the will of God.

6. «Before we eat, we should offer to the Lord the food that sustains us. Then the food becomes Krishna and purifies us.»

The sacrifices to idols do not help anyone to arrive to the communion with God. True Communion with God is found in Christ Jesus.

7. «We should perform all our actions as offerings to Krishna and nothing for our own sense of gratification.»

The actions of the faithful Christian are in accordance to God's will as Christ taught us.

8. «The easiest method for most people to achieve the mature stage of love of God is to chant the holy name of the Lord in the mantra, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama Rama, Hare Hare.»<sup>48</sup>

This chant may be helpful for brainwashing but it does not bring you to God. Only Christ is «the Way, the Life and Truth» (Gospel of St. John).

«Hare Krishna» means the holy name of the godhead; «Rama» refers to «Prince Rama», a hero who struggles to regain his throne. Some of these doctrines seem to be attractive. The goal of the Krishna, however, is to enslave people and to use them to attain their goal, which is power and wealth.

Hare Krishna also teaches the myth of reincarnation. This doctrine was condemned by the Church in the name of Origen. The first anathema against Origen in the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553 A.D.) clearly condemns reincarnation as an evil doctrine and warns the Orthodox Christians against falling prey to false prophets.

Though there are many similarities between Krishna and Christianity, the fundamental difference remains very deep, that is, Christ Jesus is the only Lord and Savior of the world. Christ destroyed the idols of polytheism including those of Krishna.

### *Scientology*

The founder of Scientology is the philosopher and science fiction writer, Lafayette Ronald Hubbard. It claims to be a religion that promises its members clear-thinking and happiness in this life. In his book, *Dianetics: the Modern Science of Mental Health*, he describes a system called «processing» — the effort to erase bad memories or scars which he calls *engrams*.<sup>49</sup> The book also advocates reincarnation. But it «mentions

48. *Ibid.*, p. 45-46. Also Streiker, p. 68. A Hindu scholar states that «the four cardinal principles of Hinduism may be described as follows: the non-duality of the Godhead, the divinity of the soul, the unity of existence, and the harmony of religions.» Swami Nikhilananda, *Hinduism: Its Meaning for the Liberation of the Spirit*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959, p. 25. In the Orthodox tradition, with the invocation of the Name of Jesus Christ one avoids sin. The Jesus prayer is «Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me a sinner.» The constant repetition cleanses the heart. *The Way of the Pilgrim*. Trans. R. M. French. New York: The Seabury Press, 1965, p. 191. The entire book is useful on the prayer of the heart from the Orthodox Christian perspective.

49. Stoner and Parke, p. 46.

neither eternal salvation nor God.»<sup>50</sup> This cult has been described as the «largest mental health organization in the world, the science of knowing how to know.»<sup>51</sup>

As was stated earlier, the doctrine of reincarnation was condemned by the Christian Church at the Fifth Ecumenical Council (A.D. 553) in the name of Origen. «If anyone asserts the fabulous pre-existence of souls, and shall assert the monstrous restoration which follows from it, let him be anathema (First Anathema). This holds true for both Scientology and Hare Krishna who erroneously teach reincarnation.

### *The Divine Light Mission*

This cult is a conglomerate of the well-known religions and their scriptures. That is, the Torah, and all the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Koran and the Bhagavadgita, and because it was founded in India, Bagavagita, the Hindu scripture, is emphasized more. Guru Maharaja Ji is the founder and claims to be God.<sup>52</sup>

The group claims that the Guru Maharaja Ji is «Lord of the Universe» and is worthy of honor and worship by his devotees.<sup>53</sup> It is said that «while the philosophy of the young Guru Maharaja Ji... has no elaborate theology, what theology it has reflects Hinduism, not Christianity and Judaism, from whose ranks come the masses of its membership.»<sup>54</sup> The God of the Mission is closer to the concept of «infinite power and energy» of the Hindu religion than to the God of reason and will, who is the creator of the universe and has a plan for it.<sup>55</sup>

The Divine Light Mission is clearly condemned by Scripture. «Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist» (1 Cor. 8:6). Only Jesus Christ is the Logos of God who was incarnated for the salvation of the human race (see John 1:4).

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50. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 46. «Dianetics was an evolutionary step, a tool which had use in arriving at a higher level of knowledge.» Omar V. Garrison, *The Hidden Story of Scientology*. Secaneus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1975, p. 33.

52. Stoner and Parke, p. 39.

53. *Time Magazine*, April 28, 1975, p. 76.

54. Stoner and Parke, p. 39.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

### *Drugs and Religions*

Several mystical religions make use of drugs to attain mystical experiences. It is said that G.K. Chesterton remarked that religious syncretism is «religion gone to pot.»<sup>56</sup> This can be literally said of contemporary cults.

From ancient times the Oriental Religions used potent drink in sacrifice as a hidden energy of the gods. The ancient Indian deity «*Soma*» was one of the most important deities. *Soma* as a drug was secretly prepared from an unknown plant «and traditionally it was pressed, mingled with milk, and drunk on the same day.» The Persians drank «*Hao-ma*». *Soma* is more like Hashish. In *Rig Veda* we read: «I have drunk *Soma*, I have become immortal.»<sup>57</sup> The purpose of «*soma*» is to intoxicate the mystic who sees visions and lights. Finally, the mystic attains the ultimate goal of nihilism or *nirvana*. Orthodoxy denies these visions as evil and self deceptions. In the Christian tradition, the vision of the divine uncreated light is attained through prayer, fasting and spiritual vigilance, that is, by waging war against the devil.

### III

#### *Cult Practices and Life*

It is evident that the cults are syncretistic in character and doctrine. They are an admixture of oriental religions with some Judaeo-Christian flavor.

This is called an «age of messiahs» and it is said that «each campus has its share of gurus, and young people are flocking to join religious movements that are often cults.»<sup>58</sup>

It was stated that in 1975 there were communal living centers in 120 cities and recruiting teams in 150 colleges throughout the country.<sup>59</sup>

The crucial question is, what attracts young people to enter the strange and fanatical life of the cults? Why are young people joining these far out, extreme religions? There are several reasons. The most obvious—loneliness and boredom. People join the cults, «to escape self-

56. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World's Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 175.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 175. LSD is considered a sacrament by some cults to get closer to each other and to God. See Stoner and Parke, p. 111.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

dissatisfaction, loneliness, and boredom.»<sup>60</sup> When people run out of strength and personal endurance to accept life's hardships, they climb the band wagon of the cults to carry them through. When people experience uncertainty and hopelessness, they are the most susceptible to religious cults or occults. Dr. Streiker aptly states that «when there is great want and frustration, men and women will turn to powers greater than themselves for aid and comfort.»<sup>61</sup>

One must realize that those who worship a cult leader have been exposed to some «personal trauma» that has set them back and out of balance emotionally. «They have sublimated their instinctual feelings.»<sup>62</sup>

The frightening thing about the cults is that the victims would not question the actions and life of their leader. «It makes no difference what the facts are. The need to believe is so great for the cultist that he will ignore what tends to discredit the founder-prophet.»<sup>63</sup>

How are these young people attracted to the cults and how are they recruited? The recruiters are told to watch for those who are lonely. Those who carry a backpack and a guitar are «symbols of rootlessness», and are special targets for recruitments.<sup>64</sup>

The young recruits usually of the opposite sex, invite the prospect to coffee or dinner and to have a joyful time. The young people do not decide to become members of the particular cult; they become involved in them. They are showered with love and affection; they share dinner, followed with music—lecture—and painting a beautiful world in an atmosphere of peace. At the end of the evening they are invited to a weekend workshop and to spend time with the new friends. In fact religion or the name of the leader is not even mentioned.<sup>65</sup>

The new recruit at the weekend retreat receives so much attention that there is no time to think about what is happening to him or her. They are kept busy—lectures, calisthenics, sharing and confessional sessions and a lot of singing. By then, one might get some idea of what he or she is getting into and the direction this is taking, but he is not allowed to talk to anyone or openly discuss the situation. If he or she has strong commitment in the outside world, he or she may say no to the next

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60. Streiker, p. 101.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

64. Stoner and Parke, p. 6.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

step, that is, to the workshop.<sup>66</sup> These recruits are young—in their early twenties and for the most part are college educated. «They are lonely, college-aged men and women, some living away from home for the first time in their lives. Many are recovering from a recent personal crisis, such as a breakup with a boy friend or girl friend, an academic or job-related setback... overcome by adulthood and its responsibilities.»<sup>67</sup> The cult-recruiters would deceive and even «use sexual charms to recruit.»<sup>68</sup>

Once the recruits come to the center, the proper atmosphere is created by providing a separate room where one receives constant reinforcement in the new life. For instance, the Hare Krishnas would tell them: «Don't worry about school or your job. It doesn't matter. Krishna will take care of everything.»<sup>69</sup>

You see, «...it is not so much religiosity that the young cultists are seeking, as it is a better and more fulfilling way to live their lives. Cult leaders know this well»<sup>70</sup> and take advantage of the young people. Dr. Saul Levin says they are not religious but seeking the fruits of religious experience—«Peace, happiness and self-fulfilled in the highest purpose anyone can choose for his life, the creation of a better world.»<sup>71</sup>

One must realize that «a cult holds out nirvana (absolute happiness) as an attainable goal. It promises the revelation of truth and the fruits of experience, in increasing degrees, as a novice grows toward maturity in his faith.»<sup>72</sup>

The recruiters and those soliciting money to further the cause of the cult use every means including deception to attain their goal. They call it «heavenly deception». It is said that if they can only look one in the eye for five or ten minutes while they talk or sing, they are able to hypnotize the person and then he or she will believe everything they say.<sup>73</sup>

It is evident from what we are told by those who have fallen prey to the cults that «religious cults do exploit youth and ought to be held accountable for the techniques they use to convert and control

66. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

67. Streiker, p. 43.

68. Stoner and Parke, p. 22.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

their members.»<sup>74</sup> Characteristically, «cult recruiters are trained to flatter, to give false confidence to those without confidence.»<sup>75</sup> They also use sexual charms to recruit young people to their camp.<sup>76</sup>

The potential recruit is administered a heavy dose of love, peer approval and «contact high» atmosphere. Members of the opposite sex are instructed to make new recruits by showering the person with «attention» and «flattery». Visitors to the cult centers will observe that people receive no more than five hours of sleep—that is much less than they were used to.<sup>77</sup> The diet is «high-carbohydrate, low-protein» and frequently vegetarian.» This unfamiliar habit of sleep and diet «contributes to a sense of distance or removal from ordinary life.»<sup>78</sup> The familiar musical tunes are used and the lyrics are changed to hypnotize the victim. The constant condemnation of the world as satanic and the guilt of the sinfulness of the world makes it easier to convince young people of the safe surroundings. The dancing, chanting, incense, etc., alter the state of consciousness, and suggestibility of the mind is increased.<sup>79</sup>

Dr. Virginia Jolly, a psychiatrist, states that «dancing, chanting, prayer, singing and meditation can alter the state of consciousness just as surely as hypnosis or drugs. When the cults get a recruit to chant or meditate, or do any other thing that changes his state of mind, they can then easily implant new ideas, new realities and begin to control the thought process.»<sup>80</sup>

There are several brainwashing tactics that were used by the Chinese prison camps in Korea, by the military in training, and by the religious cults.

1. Removal of the shoes is used as a prop to relax the individual. In Hare Krishna incense is used—the scent and dancing relaxes the body and mind.
2. Mystical manipulation is especially used by Guru Maharaja Ji. The emphasis here is to give all you have—your troubles, your mind, etc., and try to be holy and pure.
3. The need for purity is constantly pounded into the minds of

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74. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

the new recruits. Push for good and pure that brings out the guilt and shame of the impure—the outsiders.

4. Confession—public or semi-public confessional period that discusses their innermost fears and anxieties.
5. Aura of sacred science—a knowledge that is beyond questioning—the secret knowledge that brings one to salvation.
6. They place far greater value on feeling than on intellect.
7. Each cult has its own lingo.
8. The cults dispense with experience.<sup>81</sup>

### *Some Suggestions to Parents*

I do not doubt that «religious cults do exploit youth and ought to be held accountable for the techniques they use to convert and control their members.»<sup>82</sup> Both parents and youth ought to be aware that once somebody enters into one of these religions they lose their free choice *ἐλευθέρα βούλησις*, which is a fundamental doctrine in Orthodoxy. Reason and free will constitute man's image of God according to our Orthodox Christian Faith.

The experts in the area of cults advise us to keep alert. Dr. John G. Clark, Jr., a psychiatrist, warns us how to recognize a cult. He lists the following:

1. All the groups have a living leader who is demonstrably wealthy.
2. Their systems of government are totalitarian.
3. The beliefs of all these cults are absolutist and intolerant of other systems.
4. A cult's interest is very low or nonexistent in encouraging individual development toward some kind of satisfactory individual adult personality.

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81. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-76. Brainwashing was used by other cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses. See W. J. Schnell, *Thirty Years a Watch Tower Slave*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958, p. 20.

82. Stoner and Parke, p. 68. Why one joins? A professor of psychiatry gives the following view. «One has to describe the subtleties and power of recruitment procedures and how one persuaded and indoctrinated». It is difficult to explain to one unfamiliar with the cults why a person is unable to walk away from a cult. This «entails being able to give a long and sophisticated explanation of social and psychological coercion, influence, and control procedures.» Dr. Margarer Tholer Singer, «Coming out of the Cults,» in *Psychology Today*, January, 1979, p. 80.



5. Almost all of the cults emphasize money-making in one form or another, but few concentrate very much on demeaning, or selfdenigrating activities or rituals.<sup>83</sup>

Dr. Clark tells us that there are two types of groups in the religious cults. One group is the «chronic schizophrenics, border-line personalities whose problems get them involved,» and the other is a group of normal, developing young people on the way to becoming adults who have fallen into traps.<sup>84</sup>

The deprogramming technique is 1) to discredit the authority figure of the cult leader; 2) to present contradictions (ideology vs. reality): for example «how can he preach love when he exploits people.» The breaking point of the person from the cult is when one begins to listen to reality and begins to express opinions, including those about the cult. The final step in the transference begins when the former cultist identifies with the deprogrammers and talks against the cults.<sup>85</sup>

The problem today is that there are no strong role models and our society is not clear on the issues, especially the difference between good and evil. The human need to belong to a special group, to have friends, to have security and to feel important should be understood by parents and church people. These should be within the confines of the Church and the family. We must understand the youth in that «their energy and enthusiasm need constructive channeling. They need direction and discipline and a clearly defined purpose in life. They need to be taught how to think for themselves and to develop their own systems of self-discipline.»<sup>86</sup> The contemporary religious movements reach to the heart of man's search for spiritual transcendental experience—his need for ritual and structure.<sup>87</sup> These are provided by our Holy Orthodox Christian Church to the individual if only one takes advantage of the opportunity. The great variety of rituals and the rich symbolism of Orthodoxy fulfills all the human needs and offers personal redemption.

A Baptist minister, Dr. George Swope, who is a professor of Sociology and a College Student Counsellor, suggests that young people

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83. *Ibid.*, p.p. 221-222.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 77

should be encouraged «to take part in outings, bowling, swimming, games, and other activities.»<sup>88</sup>

Dr. Martin Orne, a psychiatrist, finds the reason for joining the cults is our «whole culture» that «created a society of instant everything, where happiness is a primary goal instead of a by-product as it should be.»<sup>89</sup>

The question must be boldly asked: is the family a healthy enough institution to encounter the cult threat? We honestly state that «it is in society's primary institution—the family—where most social problems begin and end and where cultural myths and realities must ultimately be confronted.»<sup>90</sup> The Orthodox family is the haven for the individual where all his needs are fulfilled. The family is the strong fortress that gives one love, happiness and security. The strong family ties and clear personal identity with the Christian commitment will help one to arrive at his goal unharmed. Our vision is to attain salvation in Christ, Who is the sole Messiah and Logos of God.

Parents often make the mistake of not giving the proper instruction to their children and not strongly imparting to them the experience of our Christian Orthodox faith. A statement by Professor Streiker aptly expresses the danger of being wishy-washy about our religious convictions. He states: «How can anyone find a fixed point of reference in a stressfilled world by reacting to such an attitude as that reflected in the often-heard parental cop-out: 'I don't believe in forcing my children to do anything they don't want to. I think they should have the right to think for themselves, to decide on their own values and beliefs. I think that when they are adults they can choose their own religion.' If parents who feel this way would only realize that they are telling their children: 'I really don't care what you believe or how you choose to behave as long as you don't hurt yourself or embarrass me. I just make out the best I can from day to day. I don't know what I believe; so how can I encourage you to follow in my steps?' How much better it would be if we admitted our own lack of faith to our children instead of patting ourselves on the back for our superiority to those who compel their children to conform to parental standards of faith and practice.»<sup>91</sup>

This very well states the responsibility that we have as parents

88. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 301.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 300.

91. Streiker, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

to teach our faith to our children with conviction and commitment. Your child may resist your suggestions to abide by your values, but a child seldom does anything as an alternative to a parental example and wish. «Love your child enough to cut the cord.»<sup>92</sup> That is, allow your child to make decisions, and in the process, make mistakes. Your love and concern will be expressed in your wise parental guidance as he or she develops into adulthood.

Our pastoral concern should be to share with our people—especially with the youth—the dangers that are out there awaiting them. Young people should know that a visit to a strange place for a cup of coffee or for some excitement may cost them their personal freedom. They should always remember—that they do not say they are recruiting for some far out cult—they just invite you to a lecture, an evening with young people or to a retreat. It will be days before they find out that they are slaves to some religious leader who manipulates young people for his own wealth and power.

Exhort young people to always have Christ and the Church as their guide. If they are lonely encourage them to talk to their parents, to their priest, to a Church School teacher, to anyone they know from the Church.

St. Paul says keep the tradition—paradosis, Christ is the same-yesterday, today and forever. He gives us salvation and life everlasting.

To gain control of the young people the cults use 1) Debility, that is, physical and psychological exhaustion, to the point that one is not able to resist; 2) Dependence, that is, the young people are barred from TV or reading the newspapers in order to be completely dependent on the cult leaders for every kind of information; 3) Dread, that is, the fear of satan is so strongly implanted—the devil's around you—even if one thinks of his parents they attribute it to the devil. It is a «guilt trip» in order to completely control and manipulate their young minds. Young people are sent to the world to collect money by dubious methods, such as these referred to as «heavenly deception» to bring in millions of dollars.<sup>93</sup>

The danger of these cults is that young people are trained to be

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92. *Ibid.*, p. 122. One must make adjustments in life. «Jung holds that personality maturity includes a satisfactory adjustment to a cosmic setting which is conceived of in spiritual terms.» Richard D. Knudsten, *The Sociology of Religion: An Anthology*, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967, p. 207.

93. Stoner and Parke, p. 125.

completely obedient, even if the action is destructive to society. They possess an «armory of knives, bows and arrows, and sling shots which male cult members had learned to use with great accuracy.»<sup>94</sup> The danger is to themselves but also to society.

*Be Aware!*

The contemporary religious cults, demanding fanatical loyalty to their leaders, pose a threat to young people. In their recruitment, «heavenly deception» is used because cults often work through fronts which appear to be youth clubs, youth discussion groups, and the young people may not realize that they are being trapped. Be on your guard!

To young people we recommend to always be skeptical of strangers who invite them to coffee-fellowships, to lectures, retreats, entertainment or workshops. Ask bold questions about what they believe concerning religion and philosophy of life. Always be on your guard and do not accept evasive answers. Ask how they spend their day and why they are not in school. Keep away from groups that place heavy emphasis on fund raising, give utter devotion to a single leader and demand complete control of its members. Do not ever join a group which asks you to fill out a financial statement or donate your material possessions, or warns you not to reveal to your parents that you are involved. Be suspicious of communal living and of all «religious» groups which do not meet in established religious buildings of the kind you are familiar.»<sup>95</sup>

Keep away from all strangers at all times. If you are lonely or in trouble, always talk to your family or to your priest. Learn to pray in our Orthodox way, be strong in your faith, and place all your trust in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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94. *Ibid.*, p. 112. Also a cult leader of the Church of Armageddon allegedly said «that it might one day be necessary to kill someone for disciplinary reasons.» p. 112.

95. You may distinguish the Church from cult as follows: «The Church is that type of organization which is overwhelmingly conservative, which to a certain extent accepts the secular order, and dominates the masses; in principle, therefore, it is universal, i.e., it desires to cover the whole of humanity.» And that «the sects, on the other hand, are comparatively small groups; they aspire after personal inward perfection, and they aim at a direct personal fellowship between the members of each group.» Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. vol. 1 Chicago: The University Press, Midway Reprint, 1976, p. 331.

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For informative articles and publications, write C.A.R.I.S., P.O. Box 1783. Santa Ana, California 92702. Tel. (714) 533-1800. They publish an excellent magazine on the cults. Also several tapes are available on the Jehovah's Witnesses.