

THE CULT PHENOMENON: FAD OR FACT?

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Before we can discuss the legal strategies available to counter the new religious cults, we first must discuss *whether* the cults should be countered, and, if so, *why*. We must, in short, discuss what I call the cult phenomenon. This involves consideration of several questions. What are the new religious cults? Are they really a new phenomenon, or are they similar to religious cults that have existed in the past? How many new groups have been created? How many members have they attracted? Are they a fad that will pass or a permanent part of the worldwide religious scene? Are they dangerous, or are they a welcome addition to religious and cultural pluralism?

Sociologists define cults as deviant groups which exist in a state of tension with society.¹ Cults do not evolve or break away from other religions, as do religious sects, but offer their members something altogether different.² Although by definition cults conflict with "the establishment,"³ there are degrees of conflict. The greater the commitment the cults demand from their followers, the greater the hostility they meet from society.⁴

Religious cults have always existed, particularly in unstable and troubled times. The Roman Empire, for example, which allowed great religious freedom, was deluged with apocalyptic movements that sprang from the meeting of eastern and western cultures.⁵ Throughout history people, both young and old, have sought personal fulfillment, peace, mystical experience, and religious salvation through such fringe groups.

Today's religious cults, however, differ from those of the past in several respects. First, there has never before been such a proliferation of religious cults. Signs of this cult "boom" are everywhere. Bulletin boards on hundreds

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1. Stark & Bainbridge, *Of Churches, Sects, and Cults: Preliminary Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements*, J. FOR SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION, June 1979, at 125.

2. *Id.*

3. Sects and cults both exist in a state of tension with the prevailing society. Cults, however, are more in conflict with accepted culture and ideas than are sects because cults do not have a prior tie with another religion but form instead through the dramatic, innovative introduction of new ideas; sects, in contrast, derive from parent religious organizations by means of a gradual evolution. The cults' cultural innovation generally comes about because of disagreement with prevailing societal norms. If the group were not in conflict with society, it would not be classified as a cult. *Id.*

4. *Id.* at 128.

5. J. NOSS, *MAN'S RELIGIONS* 74 (1969).

of college campuses advertise a smorgasbord of religious options; cult members recruit new members and solicit contributions on street corners and in public parks, stores, tourist centers, and airports. One constantly hears stories of children, parents, or friends who became members of these groups. Ministers, priests, and rabbis often hear desperate pleas for help, as do the major Jewish and Christian organizations.⁶

Although the precise number of these cults is unknown, the number is large and growing ever larger. After an extensive study, Egon Mayer and Laura Kitch, sociologists at Brooklyn College, concluded that since 1965 more than 1,300 new religious groups have appeared in America.⁷ Other observers estimate that between 2,500 and 3,000 such groups exist in the United States alone.⁸ Not all are large and well-known; some last only a short time. Many of these cults are simply the personal creations of their founders and do not outlive them.⁹

It is as difficult to estimate the number of cult members as it is to know the number of cults which exist. Accurate membership records are unavailable, and the membership figures the cults release may be inflated so that they appear to be larger and growing more rapidly than they actually are.¹⁰ Cult critics who overreact in their concern may inadvertently inflate the figures or may underestimate them. Since members of cults tend to float from one group to another, in effect "shopping around" among groups, an individual may be counted in the membership figures of several different groups.¹¹ Dr. Marc Galanter, a psychiatrist at the Albert Einstein Medical School in New York City, studied the Unification Church in late 1978, and discovered that ninety percent of its members had had a previous interest in or involvement with another cult.¹² Although some experts estimate the number of cult adherents

6. The American Jewish Committee, the National Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York are just a few organizations that have documented the receipt of such pleas from desperate families.

7. Mayer & Kitch, *The Paths Seekers Follow: Ideology and Ritual in the New Religious Groups* (Oct. 1976) (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion).

8. Singer, *In Search of Self, The Cult Culture*, ISRAEL HORIZONS, June 1979, at 18.

9. For example, Oric Bovar's suicide brought an end to the cult he had started. Thomas, *Practices of Cults Receiving New Scrutiny*, N.Y. Times, Jan. 21, 1979, at 52, col. 1.

10. The Church of Scientology claims 4,000,000 members worldwide. Mitzman, *Scientology Under Seige*, THE WEEKLY, Sept. 5, 1979, at 18. The Unification Church claims 37,000 members in the United States and 2,000,000 worldwide. Warren, *Moonies: Millions of Members—and Dollars*, Chicago Sun-Times, July 8, 1979, at 11. The Hare Krishnas claim 10,000 to 12,000 full-time members in the United States and tens of thousands of "lay members" throughout the world. Ryon, *Krishna Sect Deep Into Real Estate*, L.A. Times, Nov. 26, 1978, at 1. The Divine Light Mission claims 1.2 million followers throughout the world. Forster, *Guru's Sect: Misgivings in Malibu*, L.A. Times, Jan. 12, 1979, at 1.

11. *Targets of the Cults*, HUMAN BEHAVIOR, Mar. 1979, at 58.

12. Galanter, Rabkin, Rabkin & Deutsch, *The Moonies: A Psychological Study of Conversion and Membership in a Contemporary Religious Sect*, 136 AM. J. PSYCH. 165, 166 (1979).

at 300,000,¹³ Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman, authors of *Snapping*,¹⁴ assert that there are 3,000,000 past and present cult members in America alone.¹⁵ Dr. Margaret Singer, a psychologist and cult expert who counsels former cult members, agrees that two to three million people are presently in these groups.¹⁶

Never before have religious cults been so geographically widespread. They are in every area of the United States, in major cities and on college campuses. They have spread to Canada and to Western Europe, where governments are alarmed by their rapid growth.¹⁷ Cult centers also exist in Asia, Africa, South America, Israel, Australia, and New Zealand.

Today's cult members are trained in the latest methods of group dynamics and "Madison Avenue" public relations, advertising, and media-manipulation techniques.¹⁸ They bring a great enthusiasm to their work, so that all members are highly visible and effective missionaries. This dedication heightens their efficiency. Thus, although the actual number of recruiters may be small, they are very successful in attracting new members to their groups.

I, and many other observers of the cult scene, believe that one of the major factors which sets the new religious cults apart from those of the past is the use by some of new and highly sophisticated techniques that successfully manipulate thought and behavior to attract and keep new members in the group.¹⁹ Hundreds of former cult members have testified to this in court proceedings, public information hearings, magazine and newspaper interviews, and counseling sessions. Psychiatrists and other professionals who counsel former cult members confirm the use of these techniques.

These coercive persuasion techniques include constant repetition of doctrine, application of intense peer pressure, manipulation of diet so that critical faculties are adversely affected, deprivation of sleep, lack of privacy and time for reflection, cutting ties with the recruit's past life, reduction of outside stimulation and influences, skillful use of ritual to heighten mystical experi-

13. Thomas, *Practices of Cults Receiving New Scrutiny*, N.Y. Times, Jan. 21, 1979, at 52, col. 1.

14. F. CONWAY & J. SIEGELMAN, *SNAPPING: AMERICA'S EPIDEMIC OF SUDDEN PERSONALITY CHANGE* (1978).

15. *Id.* at 12.

16. Mitzman, *Scientology Under Seige*, THE WEEKLY, Sept. 5, 1979, at 18.

17. Minthorn, *Guru Sects Worry Western Europe Leaders*, Minneapolis Star, Oct. 11, 1978, at 22A.

18. The Unification Church sends mass mailings of colorful brochures accompanied by a sophisticated sales letter. (The author has received such pamphlets in the mail.) Church leaders are trained with elaborate manuals. (The author has these manuals on file, supplied by an ex-member of the Unification Church, who had a high position in the Church and who wishes to remain anonymous.)

19. Testimony of Flo Conway at Information Meeting on the Cult Phenomenon in the United States, Washington, D.C., Feb. 5, 1979, at 49 [hereinafter cited as *Information Meeting*].

ence, and invention of new vocabulary²⁰ which narrows the range of experience and constructs a new reality for cult members.

Psychiatrists and counselors who treat former cult members say that their emotional and intellectual responses have been severely curtailed. Dr. John G. Clark, Jr., Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital-Harvard Medical School, who has worked with former cult members for the past six and one-half years, explains:

They appear to have become rather dull and their style and range of expression limited and stereotyped. They are animated only when discussing their group and its beliefs. They rapidly lose a knowledge of current events. When stressed even a little, they become defensive and inflexible and retreat into numbing cliches. Their written or spoken expression loses metaphor, irony, and the broad use of vocabulary. Their humor is without mirth.²¹

In short, a complete personality transformation seems to occur. The cult leader can mold the recruit's new beliefs and personality according to the leader's desires so the new adherent will have a total commitment to the group. This can happen very quickly, sometimes within a period of days or weeks.²²

Authors Conway and Siegelman believe that in most cults there is "a single moment of conversion and transformation" which they term "snapping."²³ This moment is induced "in the course of a cult ritual or therapeutic technique that is deftly orchestrated to create the experience of a momentous psychic breakthrough."²⁴ After this experience the person is highly vulnerable to suggestion. The cults follow up the process by chanting, meditation, speaking in tongues, or other mental exercises that reinforce the effects of the sudden psychic experience and also act as mechanisms to stifle future doubts.²⁵ The results of this expert thought manipulation can be neutralized only with great difficulty. In some cases the changes are permanent.²⁶

20. The Church of Armageddon renames the days of the week according to the seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation and the months of the year after the twelve tribes of Israel, and renumbers the hours of the day according to a pattern found in the New Testament. The Church modifies the manner of reckoning chronological age in accordance with its leaders' interpretation of the Bible so that the age of a group member is spoken of as sixty-six years older than his or her actual chronological age. Everyone in the group takes on a "Virtue Name" such as Meekness, Integrity, and Happiness; they all take on the surname "Israel," and no longer use their given name. R. ENROTH, *YOUTH, BRAINWASHING, AND THE EXTREMIST CULTS* 83, 85 (1977).

The Church of Scientology has devised a virtually new language because they have thousands of new words and phrases to describe their methods and ideas. Interview by the author with a former member of the Church of Scientology (Oct. 24, 1979).

21. Testimony of Dr. John G. Clark, Jr., *Information Meeting*, *supra* note 19, at 41-42.

22. *Id.* at 39.

23. Testimony of Jim Siegelman, *id.* at 47.

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.*

26. F. CONWAY & J. SIEGELMAN, *supra* note 14, at 154-55.

Today's religious cults are unique also because of their great wealth. They charge high fees for classes or lectures and sometimes actually take control of members' financial assets.²⁷ They own extensive property,²⁸ operate lucrative

27. Costs of auditing Scientology courses average about \$150 per hour; the average Scientologist spends about \$5,000 to complete the process. Telephone conversation with Mary Weeks, mother of former Scientologist (Oct. 1979). Some former Scientologists report spending between \$10,000 and \$15,000. C. STONER & J. PARKE, *ALL GODS CHILDREN, THE CULT EXPERIENCE: SALVATION OR SLAVERY?* 42 (1979). Several have reported spending as much as \$100,000 on auditing. F. CONWAY & J. SIEGELMAN, *supra* note 14, at 162.

Members of the Church of Armageddon, C. STONER & J. PARKE, *supra*, at 175, Divine Light Mission, *id.* at 37, and Children of God, *Charity Frauds Bureau, Final Report on the Activities of the Children of God to Honorable Louis J. Lefkowitz, Attorney General of the State of New York* 11-12, 28 (Sept. 30, 1974) [hereinafter cited as *Final Report*], must turn over all their money and possessions to the group when they join.

28. The Unificaton Church owns the New Yorker Hotel, *The Darker Side of Sun Moon*, TIME, June 14, 1976, at 48, the Old Tiffany Building, Lyons, *Moonies Utilize New Tactics*, Nashville Banner, Feb. 16, 1978, at 15, and the Columbia Club, Manhattan Center, and East Sun Building (former Lofts Candy factory), *Moonies' Street Take in 1978 Was \$20 Million*, Church Says, RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE, May 18, 1979, at 19. These four New York City properties alone were assessed in May, 1979 at a value of \$12,225,000. *Id.* The Church also owns 480 acres in Westchester County, New York, *Moon Church Biggest Landowner in Large Westchester Township*, RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE, Dec. 8, 1978, at 16, including Reverend Moon's 22-acre Tarrytown residence, Lyons, *supra*, a 255-acre estate in Barrytown, New York, Warren, *Moonies: Millions of Members—and Dollars*, Chicago Sun-Times, July 8, 1979, at 11, two recruitment camps in California, Dickey, *Moon Church 'Love Bomb' Fall-Out*, Wash. Post, Feb. 20, 1978, at B1, houses in San Francisco, *id.* at B3, Cincinnati, Brookshire, *'Moonies' Looking for Brighter Image*, Cincinnati Post, Feb. 16, 1978, at 10, and the former Chislehurst convent in England. *Nuns Regret Sale of Convent to One of Moon's Agencies*, RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE, Oct. 17, 1978, at 23.

The Hare Krishna movement owns two dozen large urban properties, including a 14-story temple and residence in Manhattan, Borders, *Hare Krishna Sect Displays Vitality at Its New \$2 Million Temple in India*, N.Y. Times, Jan. 16, 1978, at B4, col. 1, a solar energy pyramid-style house and nine other buildings in Los Angeles, a large estate in West Germany, a 23-acre estate near London, a warehouse in California, and a large temple complex in India. Ryon, *Krishna Sect Deep Into Real Estate*, L.A. Times, Nov. 26, 1978, at 1. The Movement also owns farms in India, Italy, France, England, Canada, Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand, and six farms in the United States. 14 BACK TO GODHEAD, THE MAGAZINE OF THE HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT 5:35 (1979). In addition, the Movement owns a new \$500,000 temple on a West Virginia farm, Darling, *Almost Heaven, West Virginia: Theme Park on Hare Krishna Ridge*, Wash. Post, Sept. 3, 1979, at D1, and the former Fisher mansion in Detroit, Michigan. Taylor, *A Reuther Wedding, Krishna Style, in a Palace by Fisher*, N.Y. Times, Aug. 9, 1977, at 26, col. 1.

The Way International owns a 155-acre center in New Knoxville, Ohio, Barmann, *Ohio-Based 'Way' Termed 'Source of Grave Concern'*, Catholic Telegraph, Mar. 16, 1979, at 1, and the entire campus of the former Emporia College in Kansas. MacCollam, *The Way—Who Are They and What Do They Believe*, CHRISTIAN HERALD, Nov. 1977, at 53.

The Tony and Susan Alamo Christian Foundation owns a 160-acre farm in California and property in Alma, Arkansas. *Foundation's Finances Stir Criticism*, N.Y. Times, Jan. 21, 1979, at 52, col. 1. The Foundation also owns property in Nashville, Tennessee. Sirica, *Religion is their Chief Business*, The Tennessean, Dec. 19, 1976, at 14.

The Church of Armageddon owns a \$250,000 mansion in Hawaii, property in Alaska, an airplane and a cargo ship. Telephone conversation with Robert and Joyce Paris, parents of former Church of Armageddon member, Tom Paris (Dec. 1979). The Church also owns nine houses in Seattle, Washington, telephone conversation with former Church of Armageddon member who wishes to remain anonymous (Dec. 1979), and a 160-acre ranch in Washington. R. ENROTH, *supra* note 20, at 83.

diversified businesses,²⁹ and skillfully extract money from the public by solicitations.³⁰ Their incomes are largely tax-exempt because they call themselves religions. The People's Temple had over ten million dollars in various bank accounts at the time of the mass suicides and murders in Guyana.³¹ Ex-Unification Church official Allen Tate Wood estimates that the movement's income is between 109.5 million and 219 million dollars per year.³² The Divine Light Mission is worth about five million dollars.³³

Money buys power. Some cults can afford to hire the best legal minds to help them fight their opponents.³⁴ They sue journalists who write about

The Body of Christ owns a fleet of small airplanes, Sheppard, *Many Find Coercion in Cults' Holds on Members*, N.Y. Times, Jan. 23, 1979, at A16, col. 1, two dozen farms in Ohio, Florida, Mississippi, Alaska, British Columbia, and Guatemala, *'The Body' Loses its Earthly Head*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, June 29, 1979, at 43, Texas, Georgia, and Peru. Moore & Harris, *Uneasiness is Growing About New Sects in U.S.*, Houston Chronicle, Mar. 20, 1977, at 14.

The Church of Scientology owns a 57-acre estate in England, P. COOPER, *THE SCANDAL OF SCIENTOLOGY* 57 (1971), a large ship called "Sea Org," *id.* at 51, six buildings in California, including the former Cedars of Lebanon Hospital complex, Lev, *Strange Shidduch: Scientology and the Yordim*, ISRAEL TODAY, June 21, 1979, at 2, and the old Fort Harrison Hotel in Clearwater, Florida. Buursma, *A Religion or Flim-Flam?*, Louisville Courier-Journal, July 10, 1977, at 1.

29. The Unification Church, for example, has businesses in many countries. *The Darker Side of Sun Moon*, TIME, June 14, 1976, at 48. The Church has five companies in Korea, Lyons, *Moonies Utilize New Tactics*, Nashville Banner, Feb. 16, 1978, at 15, including an armaments manufacturing factory and a pharmaceutical company, *The Darker Side of Sun Moon*, *supra*, a printing company in San Francisco, Warren, *Moonies: Millions of Members— and Dollars*, Chicago Sun-Times, July 8, 1979, at 11, restaurants, and gasoline stations. Welles, *The Eclipse of Sun Myung Moon*, NEW YORK MAGAZINE, Sept. 27, 1976, at 36. The Church publishes *Newsworld*, a daily New York newspaper. Kurlansky, *Rev. Moon's Daily Counts 10,000 Paid Circulation*, EDITOR & PUBLISHER, Feb. 12, 1977, at 14. Critics allege the Church controls the Diplomat National Bank in Washington, D.C.. Miller, *Moon Church Charged by SEC in Bank Case*, N.Y. Times, May 2, 1979, at D18, col. 1. The Church invested \$18 million to produce the film, *Inchon!*, du Plessix Gray, *The Heavenly Deception*, N.Y. REV. BOOKS, Oct. 25, 1979, at 15.

The Hare Krishna sect runs a catering service in Los Angeles, restaurants in London, Iran, Honolulu, Amsterdam, and New York, Ryon, *Krishna Sect Deep Into Real Estate*, L.A. Times, Nov. 26, 1978, at 1, 12, and publishing enterprises. *Id.* at 14. They produce and sell Spiritual Sky incense, D. COHEN, *THE NEW BELIEVERS; YOUNG RELIGION IN AMERICA* 87 (1975) and cookbooks. C. STONER & J. PARKE, *supra* note 27, at 217.

The Tony and Susan Alamo Christian Foundation owns a western clothing store in Nashville, Tennessee, Sirica, *Religion is their Chief Business*, The Tennessean, Dec. 19, 1976, at 14, and a large restaurant, gasoline station, western clothing shop, cement company, and construction company in Alma, Arkansas. *Foundation's Finances Stir Criticism*, N.Y. Times, Jan. 21, 1979, at 52, col. 1.

30. E.g., Juffe, *Moonies Admit that the 'Young Deceivers' are Raking in Millions on the Streets of New York*, N.Y. Post, May 17, 1979, at 5 (the Unification Church).

31. Doder, *Swiss Reveal Shift of Cult Fund*, Wash. Post, Aug. 3, 1979, at A20, col. 1.

32. Juffe, *Moonies Admit that the 'Young Deceivers' are Raking in Millions on the Streets of New York*, N.Y. Post, May 17, 1979, at 5.

33. *Two Ex-Aides Warn Guru Might Lead Sect to Violence*, Wash. Post, Nov. 26, 1978.

34. Bodine, *The Church that Sues Like Hell*, Nat'l L. J., July 9, 1979, at 1, 11. Some of the attorneys retained by the Church of Scientology include Phillip J. Hirschkop, Leonard Boudin, Michael Nussbaum, Roger Zuckerman, Roger Spaeder, John Zwerling, Leonard

them,³⁵ and campaign against legislation that aims to curb their activities.³⁶ The Unification Church hires top journalists and columnists to write for its newspaper, *Newsworld*,³⁷ which offers a platform for its political viewpoint. Critics even accuse the Unification Church of using its great wealth to buy influence with the United States government.³⁸

Money also can purchase respectability. Some cults take their adherents from their street jobs and put them into "white-collar" jobs.³⁹ Cult members who are visible to the public dress more conservatively than they did in the past so that outsiders will think the group is less eccentric and therefore less dangerous. Many Hare Krishna members, for example, now wear wigs and conventional clothing, rather than their exotic Indian garb, when they solicit on the streets. The Unification Church employs renowned theologians⁴⁰ to teach at its seminary and to lecture on the group's behalf. It "dialogues" with Evangelical Christians and would like to do the same with other religious groups.⁴¹ It seeks the academic world's stamp of approval by inviting prominent academicians to annual conferences sponsored by a Unification Church organization, the International Conference on the Unity of Science (ICUS).⁴² Some academics are flattered by these invitations, but others refuse to attend the controversial meetings because of their ties to the Unification Church.

Because of their sophisticated coercive persuasion techniques, their vast wealth, and the power and respectability their money can buy, the contemporary cults are not merely a passing fad. They are not simply temporary way-stations for those who may be "into" something else next year. They are a permanent and rapidly growing part of the worldwide religious and cultural scene.

This does not mean, however, that we must be complacent about the new cults. They want people to grow accustomed to them, to become resigned to

Koenick, and Earle C. Dudley. *Id.* Jeremiah Gutman has represented members of the Peoples' Temple, Unification Church, Church of Bible Understanding, and Hare Krishna. *Information Meeting*, *supra* note 19, at 18.

35. *Id.* *Information Meeting*, *supra* note 19, at 18.

36. *E.g.*, Lyons, *Moonies Utilize New Tactics*, Nashville Banner, Feb. 16, 1978, at 15 (Unification Church); *County Fair Hare Krishna Ban Disallowed by Federal Judge*, RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE, Aug. 22, 1979, at 3 (the Hare Krishnas); Bodine, *supra* note 34 (the Church of Scientology).

37. Some of those appearing in *Newsworld* include Charles Burden, Josette Sheeran, Jeremy Gaylard, Ted Agres, Evans Johnson, Edgar Boshart, Howard Reeser, Harry J. Stathos, Michael Novak, James J. Kilpatrick, and Tony Brown.

38. Halloran, *73 Record Tells of Plan by Sun Myung Moon Aides for Drive Against Nixon Impeachment*, N.Y. Times, Sept. 19, 1977, at 22, col. 1.

39. *E.g.*, Ruppert, *Moon May Shift Efforts to Europe*, Seattle Times, Oct. 15, 1978, at B4 (Unification Church).

40. They include Herbert Richardson, Warren Lewis, and Josef Hausner. News release of Unification Theological Seminary, Sept. 24, 1976.

41. *The Moonies Cross Wits with Cult-Watching Critics*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, July 20, 1979, at 38.

42. ICUS pays their travel expenses and very large honoraria to attend the conferences. Cooke, *Rev. Moon's Parley Meets Some Rebuff*, Boston Globe, Nov. 22, 1978, at 3.

their existence, to tire of worrying about them, and to stop fighting them. They want to be perceived as "new religious movements" rather than as "cults," which they view as a negative label implying that they are at odds with society. They liken themselves to other religious movements which were once considered radical but which, after the passage of time, have become old, established, and accepted groups. Unification Church officials, for example, often compare their legal difficulties and negative public image to the past harassment of the Mormon Church, implying that just as the Mormons once were considered outsiders and eventually were accepted, so too the Unification Church eventually will be accepted. They cite cases of extremism in the Catholic Church, claiming that their treatment of members is no worse, and that some Catholic parents are unhappy at their children's decision to join the cloistered nun's or monk's orders just as parents of Unification Church members are unhappy that their children have renounced the world to dedicate themselves to a new life.⁴³

One can agree that all religions have at some point in their histories been guilty of excesses. Extremism, fanaticism, and irrationality are found in all religions and, one can argue, are perhaps an essential component of all religious or mystical experiences. These new religious cults, however, are *not* like the Roman Catholic Church, the Mormon Church, or other past "new religious movements." The contemporary cults exhibit characteristics that set them apart from past religious cults and from established religions.

These fundamental differences make them different in kind as well as degree, and make them a unique phenomenon. What are these characteristics?⁴⁴

(1) Members swear total allegiance to an all-powerful leader whom they may believe to be a Messiah. The leader sets the rules for daily life and proclaims doctrines or "Truth," but the leader and his "inner circle" generally are exempt from these rules and prohibitions. These rules, doctrines, or "Truths" cannot be questioned. The leader's word is the absolute and final authority.⁴⁵

(2) Rational thought is discouraged or forbidden. The groups are anti-intellectual, emphasizing intuition or emotional experience. "Knowledge" is redefined as those ideas or experiences dispensed by the group or its leader. One can only attain knowledge by joining the group and submitting to its doctrines.⁴⁶ If the follower shows signs of doubting the cult, he is made to

43. Presentation by Dr. H. Richardson, commenting on the new religious movements (Nov. 1977) (paper presented to the Religious Educ. Ass'n).

44. Remember that these are generalizations and do not apply equally to all of the groups. The groups to which these characteristics refer include the following cults which I consider "hard core": The Unification Church, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, The Church of Armageddon, Children of God, Body of Christ, The Way International, Divine Light Mission, The Tony and Susan Alamo Christian Foundation, and the Church of Scientology.

45. Warsaw, *Anybody's Kid, Cults and the Jewish Connection*, EXPO MAGAZINE, Spring, 1979, at 39.

46. *Id.*

feel that the fault lies within himself, not with the cult's ideas, and to feel intensely guilty about these doubts. Says Rabbi Zalman Schacter, Professor of Religion and Jewish Mysticism at Temple University, "[A]ny group which equates doubt with guilt is a cult."⁴⁷ Because of some cults' use of sophisticated coercive mind-control techniques, followers may indeed lose their ability to doubt and to think freely.

(3) Cults' recruitment techniques are often deceptive.⁴⁸ The potential follower may not be told what he can expect and what will be required of him. He may not even know the name of the group. The Unification Church, for example, which operates under seventy "front" groups, often does not mention its name or that of Reverend Moon for several weeks;⁴⁹ by that time the person is well indoctrinated. I am convinced that most cult members probably would not join if they knew beforehand what lay ahead. Since some cults begin intensive coercive persuasion techniques immediately, by the time the recruit realizes what the group is all about he may have lost the ability to think freely and hence cannot rationally decide whether or not he wants to join. As law professor Richard Delgado explains, "A convert never has full capacity and knowledge simultaneously."⁵⁰

(4) The cult psychologically weakens the follower and makes him believe his problems can be solved only by the group. The cult undermines all of the follower's past psychological support systems: all help from other therapy methods, psychologists or psychiatrists, religious beliefs, parents or friends is discredited and often may be forbidden. Psychological problems as well as intellectual doubts are soothed away by denying the reality of the conflicting feelings, by keeping the adherent so constantly occupied that he has no time to think about them, and by assuring the convert that faithful following of the cult's teachings will in time assuage the conflicts. The cult follower may reach a plateau of inner calm and appear to be free from anxiety. This placidity, however, may be a mask for the unresolved psychological turmoil which continues to plague the adherent.⁵¹

The cult may make the follower feel helpless and dependent on the group by forcing him into childlike submission. Former Unification Church member Chris Edwards relates how childlike he felt during a confusing game played while he was being recruited: "During the entire game our team chanted loudly, 'Bomb with Love,' 'Blast with Love,' as the soft, round balls volleyed back and forth. Again I felt lost and confused, angry, remote and helpless, for the game had started without an explanation of the rules."⁵²

47. *Id.*

48. Testimony of Rabbi Laurence Gevirtz at The Assembly of the State of New York Public Hearing on Treatment of Children by Cults, Aug. 9, 1979, Vol. II, at 110 [hereinafter cited as *Public Hearing*].

49. *Id.*

50. Testimony of Richard Delgado, *Information Meeting*, *supra* note 19, at 60.

51. F. CONWAY & J. SIEGELMAN, *supra* note 14, at 170.

52. C. EDWARDS, *CRAZY FOR GOD* 31 (1979).

He describes how he surrendered himself to the comfortable feeling of being a small child again: "'Give in, Chris,' urged a voice within me. 'Just be a child and obey. It's fun. It's trusting. Isn't this the innocence, the purity of love, you've been searching for?'"⁵³ The cults offer total, unconditional love but extract the higher price of total submission to the group in exchange for this love. As Edwards explains:

Suddenly I understood what they wanted from me. Their role was to tease me with their love, dishing it out and withdrawing it as they saw fit. My role was not to question but to be their child, dependent on them for affection. The kiddie games, the raucous singing, the silly laughter, were all part of a scenario geared to help me assume my new identity.⁵⁴

(5) The new cults expertly manipulate guilt. The devotee believes that the group has the power to "disperse existence,"⁵⁵ and to determine, according to psychologist Moshe Halevi Spero, "who has the right to live or die, physically or metaphorically."⁵⁶ Members may be forced to "confess" their inadequacies and past "sins" before the group or certain individual members.⁵⁷ Journalists Carroll Stoner and Jo Anne Parke report that "[c]ountercult activists claim that some religious cults keep dossiers on members and their families—the more secrets the better—in order to use the material as emotional blackmail if the members should decide to leave, and tell of cases where this has happened."⁵⁸

(6) Cult members are isolated from the outside world, cut off from their pasts, from school, job, family, and friends as well as from information from newspapers, radio, and television.⁵⁹ They may be prohibited from coming and going freely into the outside world, or are so psychologically weakened that they cannot cope with it. They are told that the outside world is evil, satanic, and doomed, and that salvation can come only by remaining in the group and giving up all else.

(7) The cult or its leader makes every career or life decision for the follower. The Hare Krishna group, for example, regulates every hour of activity for those members who dwell in the temples.⁶⁰ The cults determine every aspect of the adherent's personal life, including sexual activities, diet, use of liquor, drugs and tobacco, perhaps even the choice of marriage partners and whether, when, and how to bear children.⁶¹ Even if one does not live within

53. *Id.*

54. *Id.* at 38.

55. Spero, *Cults: Some Theoretical and Practical Perspectives*, J. JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE, Summer 1977, at 333.

56. *Id.*

57. *Id.*

58. C. STONER & J. PARKE, *supra* note 27, at 266.

59. *Id.* at 28.

60. D. COHEN, *THE NEW BELIEVERS: YOUNG RELIGION IN AMERICA* 39 (1975).

61. *Id.*

the group, the cult comes to overpower all other aspects of life. Career and schooling may be abandoned and all other interests discouraged so that the cult can become the follower's total world.

(8) To attract idealistic members, some cults promise to raise money to improve society and help the poor.⁶² In practice, however, energies are channeled into promoting the well-being of the group rather than into improving society.⁶³ Cults often exist solely for the purposes of self-survival and financial growth.⁶⁴ All energy and financial resources are devoted to the cult, in some cases to the benefit of only the leaders. While all religious organizations must be concerned with such practical affairs, these considerations are not their sole reasons for existence.

(9) Cult followers often work full-time for the group. They work very long hours, sometimes eighteen to twenty hours a day, seven days a week, for little or no pay, in circumstances which are often demeaning.⁶⁵ In many cases their situation could be described as involuntary servitude. They are made to feel guilty or unworthy if they protest. If they do work outside of the group, salaries are turned over to the cult. The lower echelon members often live a life of self-denial or live in extreme poverty, often in conditions which violate health and sanitary codes. In contrast, however, cult leaders live comfortably and in some cases very luxuriously.⁶⁶

(10) The cults are anti-woman, anti-child, and anti-family. Women perform the most menial tasks of cooking, cleaning, and soliciting contributions

62. Singer, *supra* note 8, at 18.

63. *Id.*

64. *Id.*

65. The workers often are not given enough to eat, and what they do eat may not provide adequate nourishment. C. STONER & J. PARKE, *supra* note 27, at 171, 209-13, 215; R. ENROTH, *supra* note 20, at 85-86; F. CONWAY & J. SIEGELMAN, *supra* note 14, at 94-95. They may be inadequately clothed, C. STONER & J. PARKE, *supra* note 27, at 171, and may be housed in crowded and dirty quarters. Testimony of Christopher Edwards, *Public Hearing*, *supra* note 48, vol. I, at 11-12; testimony of Rabbi Laurence Gevirtz, *Information Meeting*, *supra* note 19, vol. II, at 117-18. When they solicit funds, they often meet with hostility and contempt, F. CONWAY & J. SIEGELMAN, *supra* note 14, at 158. They often do degrading menial work for the cult, e.g., Flynn, *The Subordinate Role of Krishna Women*, Rocky Mountain News, April 10, 1979, at 42, for very long hours and little or no pay. Allen, *Family Hopes Fade in Fight with Cult*, N.Y. Post, July 2, 1977, at 17; Wiesen, *The Stolen Child*, Jewish Press, Aug. 26, 1977, at 28; conversation with Mary Weeks, mother of former Scientologist Lynn Weeks (Oct. 1979).

66. Children of God leader David Berg lives in isolation on a large estate near Florence, Italy, C. STONER & J. PARKE, *supra* note 27, at 117. Church of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard lives in isolation, either on a large ship off the coast of Clearwater, Florida, P. COOPER, *supra* note 28, at 51, or in an elegant penthouse at the top of the Clearwater, Florida Scientology headquarters. Interview with former Scientologist who wishes to remain anonymous (Oct. 1979). Sun Myung Moon lives in an \$850,000 mansion on a 22-acre estate in Tarrytown, New York. Warren, *Moonies: Millions of Members—and Dollars*, Chicago Sun-Times, July 8, 1979, at 11. Tony and Susan Alamo live in a \$125,000 house in Nashville, Tennessee. McNulty, *Town Feels No Brotherly Love for Jesus Cult*, Chicago Tribune, Nov. 6, 1977, at 22. Divine Light Mission Guru Maharaj-Ji lives in a Malibu, California mansion that cost half a million dollars. Forster, *Guru's Sect: Misgivings in Malibu*, L.A. Times, Jan. 12, 1979, at 1.

on the street and rarely hold high decision-making positions. Birth control, abortion, and the physical circumstances of childbirth are regulated by the group's leaders, who are usually men. There are reports of sexual abuse of women in the Church of Armageddon,⁶⁷ and a fourteen-year-old in the Children of God claims that she was raped when she disobeyed a leader.⁶⁸ Women in the Children of God are encouraged to use sex to recruit new members from different strata of society who then can provide the group with worldly skills and talents.⁶⁹

There have been tragic reports of child neglect.⁷⁰ Children are often improperly cared for and inadequately educated. They may be taken away from their parents and raised by others in the group or even geographically separated from their parents. Children and teenagers in Jonestown were beaten and given electric shocks,⁷¹ and two children who tried to run away had "chains and balls welded to their ankles as punishment."⁷² In the Church of Armageddon children are beaten and locked in closets if they are unhappy or disobedient,⁷³ and members and their children often are denied food.⁷⁴ Because some members now have belonged to a cult for many years, the consequences of the cult experience are affecting a second generation, the innocent children of these members. This is perhaps the most tragic aspect of the cult phenomenon.

Family bonds are subordinated to cult loyalties, and the cult may even speak of itself as a higher family. Children and parents are not allowed to form close relationships because this would threaten loyalty to the cult. Families often are deliberately split up and members forced to renounce spouses who disapprove of or leave the group. Cult leaders may order a cult member to "marry" a new partner even though the follower is already legally married to another either inside or outside the cult.⁷⁵

Followers' ties with families who do not belong to the group are strained if the family disapproves of the cult; adherents often are forced to sever these familial ties altogether.⁷⁶ Families often are prevented from locating or communicating privately with their loved ones. The cult may tell the adherent that

67. Fraiman, *I Lost My Brother to a Cult*, REFORM JUDAISM, March 1979, at 5.

68. *Final Report*, *supra* note 27, at 48.

69. Wallis, *Recruiting Christian Manpower*, SOC'Y, May/June 1978, at 72.

70. See C. EDWARDS, *supra* note 52, at 177-79, 195-98; R. ENROTH, *supra* note 20, at 89; C. STONER & J. PARKE, *supra* note 27, at 175, 177, 179; testimony given at *Public Hearing*, *supra* note 48, vol. I, at 10-14; vol. II, at 72-74, 77, 146-48, 185-86; vol. III, at 100-02, 105-06, 108-09, 293, 298-304; testimony given at *Final Report*, *supra* note 27, at 35-36, 48, 52.

71. Testimony of Dr. Hardat Sukhdeo, *Public Hearing*, *supra* note 48, vol. III, at 10.

72. *Id.* at 11.

73. R. ENROTH, *supra* note 20, at 89.

74. *Id.* at 85-87, 90.

75. Hopkins, *The Children of God: Disciples of Deception*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Feb. 18, 1977, at 21.

76. Warsaw, *supra* note 45, at 39.

his family is satanic and warn him that the family will try either to kidnap him or to trick him into leaving the group.

(11) Some cult members believe that they are elite members of an "elect" survival group in a world that is coming to an end.⁷⁷ They believe that the universe is embroiled in a Manichean conflict between Absolute Good and Absolute Evil and that the final battle between these two opposite forces will soon be fought. By joining the cult, the members believe that they have become affiliated with Absolute Good which will triumph over the forces of Evil at the End of Time. They shed their old identities and take on new ones in preparation for this "new age." The cult members experience a feeling of rebirth, and often adopt new names, new vocabulary, and new clothing in order to purify themselves for their new lives.⁷⁸

(12) Many of these groups share a philosophy which allows the ends to justify the means.⁷⁹ Because the ends, such as the salvation of souls, the salvation of the world, and the triumph of Good over Evil, are so important, any means necessary to achieve them are permitted and even encouraged by the cult. Moreover, there may be a double set of values, one for cult members and another for the outside world.⁸⁰ Thus, while the cult members must be truthful to each other and to the cult leaders, they may be encouraged to lie to outsiders. The Unification Church, for example, practices what it calls "Heavenly Deception"⁸¹ and the Hare Krishnas "Transcendental Trickery."⁸² The Children of God believe that the world is so corrupt that they are not subject to its laws and teach their members to subvert the legal system.⁸³

(13) The cults often are shrouded in an aura of secrecy and mystery. They refuse to provide new members with information about the group, promising more knowledge only as the members become more involved. Some leaders are rarely if ever seen by the average member. In addition, some cults keep financial information from the public.⁸⁴

(14) An atmosphere of violence or potential violence frequently surrounds the cults. Two recruitment centers of the Unification Church are guarded.⁸⁵ The Divine Light mission has a security force and the Hare Krishnas' farm in

77. *Cultists Trying to Readjust Not Getting Help They Need*, RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE, June 1, at 4.

78. Shanker, *New Cults—Why Now?*, ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE OF B'NAI BRITH BULLETIN, June 21, 1979, at 3.

79. Singer, *supra* note 8, at 18.

80. *Id.*

81. Davis, *Defector's Inside Story: How the Nickel and Dime Moonies Rake in \$219 Million*, N.Y. Post, May 16, 1979, at 13.

82. Report by C. Wallace, Prime Time Sunday, (July 1, 1979) (NBC News television program).

83. *Final Report*, *supra* note 27, at 16.

84. Juffe, *Moonies Admit that the 'Young Deceivers' are Raking in Millions on the Streets of New York*, N.Y. Post, May 17, 1979, at 5.

85. Telephone interview with Phillip Cushman, eyewitness (Oct. 1979).

West Virginia houses weapons which the cult members insist are necessary to protect themselves and their leaders from "hostile outsiders."⁸⁶ Members of the Way International participate in marksmanship and weapons "safety" courses.⁸⁷ A large arsenal of automatic rifles, shotguns, and handguns was accumulated at Jonestown,⁸⁸ where Congressman Leo Ryan and members of his party were slain and the People's Temple followers committed mass suicide by poison.⁸⁹

Some cult members have been involved in beating or shooting incidents. In May, 1979, for example, a Swiss court sentenced the head of a Divine Light Mission to fourteen years in prison on charges ranging from breach of the peace to attempted murder.⁹⁰ In August, 1979, two Unification Church area directors were arrested and charged with shooting at the unoccupied car of two former members.⁹¹ Because of harassment, the parents of Christopher Edwards, a former Unification Church member, had to hire private detectives to guard their home for several months after their son was deprogrammed. Edwards has received many death threats since the publication of his book about his experiences with the Unification Church.⁹² Other former members have reported that their lives, too, have been threatened,⁹³ and that, after leaving their cults, they have been harassed psychologically, economically, and legally.⁹⁴

Observers are divided as to the meaning of these new groups. Some scholars see the new cults as the cutting edge of a healthy and growing spiritual awakening in the Western world, which will promote religious pluralism by insuring freedom of choice and a variety of religious alternatives.⁹⁵ Cult critics, however, believe that the new cults actually are anti-pluralistic because they claim to possess the sole "truth." Because the cults discourage or forbid their members from discussing other ideas and alternatives, critics maintain, religious pluralism is hindered rather than promoted.⁹⁶

86. Herskowitz, *When Country Meets Krishnas*, Wash. Post, Jan. 5, 1979, at A1, col. 4.

87. Thomas, *Some in Congress Seek Inquiries on Cult Activities*, N.Y. Times, Jan. 22, 1979, at A1, col. 2, A14, col. 3.

88. Testimony of Jackie Speier, *Information Meeting*, *supra* note 19, at 27.

89. *Witness Tells How Cult Members Went to Deaths*, N.Y. Times, Nov. 25, 1978, at A8, col. 3.

90. *Divine Light Leader Gets Fourteen-Year Term*, RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE, May 23, 1979, at 6.

91. Freundel, *Sect Leaders Arrested for Shooting at 2*, Wash. Post, Aug. 22, 1979, at C5, col. 1.

92. du Plessix Gray, *The Heavenly Deception*, N.Y. REV. BOOKS, Oct. 25, 1979, at 8, 15.

93. Stivers, *Ex-Moonie: Brainwashing Turned Me Into a Robot*, N.Y. Post, Aug. 10, 1979, at 13.

94. See F. CONWAY & J. SIEGELMAN, *supra* note 14, at 161. See also du Plessix Gray, *supra* note 92; Stivers, *Ex-Moonie: Brainwashing Turned Me Into a Robot*, N.Y. Post, Aug. 10, 1979, at 13.

95. Ahlstrom, *From Sinai to the Golden Gate: The Liberation of Religion in the Occident*, in UNDERSTANDING THE NEW RELIGIONS 19 (J. Needleman & G. Baker eds. 1978).

96. Shanker, *supra* note 78, at 4.

I believe that these new religious cults are dangerous to society because they are authoritarian and anti-democratic. They often encourage their members to disobey or disregard society's laws in favor of the group's mores. They demand that the individual submit to the group's authority, surrender his intellect to the group's unquestionable doctrine, and subject his life to the group's greater good. Reverend Moon has carried to an extreme this notion that the role of religion must be supreme. According to Robert Boetcher, staff director of the congressional subcommittee which investigated the Unification Church, Reverend Sun Myung Moon's "stated goal is to rule the world by setting up a global theocracy in which separation of church and state will be abolished."⁹⁷

The cults are also dangerous to their followers. Although some people have found happiness, peace of mind, purpose, and meaning in their lives through cult membership, others have suffered physically. Cult members have been subjected to bad diet, lack of sleep, improper clothing, unsanitary living conditions, and overwork. Many groups deny proper medical care to their adherents, endangering especially those who have pre-existing physical problems such as diabetes. Illness is seen as a sign of sin or a lack of faith. Reports exist of members going blind or losing limbs because they did not get timely medical attention.⁹⁸

Cults are psychologically dangerous as well. Many cult members and former members have experienced severe mental breakdowns. Others have experienced a gradual erosion of their intellectual powers, a diminution of their self-confidence, and a loss of faith in their reasoning and decision-making abilities.⁹⁹ Even if members do leave the group, it may take months or even years for them to regain lost intellectual powers and their sense of well-being. Some former cult members will never regain their full potential. As Dr. John G. Clark, Jr. has stated, some cult members

cannot remember the past or the subtle values which would become conscience. They are often deluded, hallucinating, and confused in a new highly manipulative environment, in their altered states of consciousness. Their minds are split. They are, in effect, living in a second personality modelled on the needs of the surrounding group.¹⁰⁰

Dr. Clark continues:

To me the latest casualties of these extended manipulations are nearly unbearable to contemplate. More tortured rejects are beginning to straggle home because they are useless to the cults now. Some are

97. Testimony of Robert Boetcher, *Information Meeting*, *supra* note 19, at 31.

98. Testimony of Rabbi Laurence Gevirtz, *supra* note 48, vol. II, at 117.

99. Singer, *supra* note 8, at 19.

100. Testimony of Dr. John G. Clark, Jr., *Information Meeting*, *supra* note 19, at 40.

simply chronically psychotic, while others painfully can recognize that they cannot control the content of their minds enough to work out their life problems. Others have no flow of consciousness.¹⁰¹

Evidence exists that cults may be threatening to life itself. Many adherents have disappeared within the cults, and families and friends do not know whether they are dead or alive. Some people believe many die or take their own lives in these groups. Members of the Unification Church, for example, have died violently in recent years: William Daley placed his head on a railroad track in Westchester County, New York and awaited an oncoming train;¹⁰² another member was the victim of a street crime while trying to sell the group's newspaper, *Newsworld*, in a deserted neighborhood.¹⁰³ Two Love Israel cult members died after sniffing the chemical solvent toluene, during a Church of Armageddon religious ceremony.¹⁰⁴ Some infants and mothers have died in childbirth because of poor medical care.¹⁰⁵ We will never know how many other cult followers have died because of inadequate medical attention.

Is another Jonestown possible? Are there other Jim Joneses? Do these cult leaders hold such power that they can persuade their followers to kill themselves and perhaps others at the leaders' command? Many observers of the cult movement fear that the answer to these questions is "yes." Dr. John Clark warns that "these cults or groups are armies of willing, superbly controlled soldiers who would not only kill their parents or themselves, but are ready to act against anyone."¹⁰⁶ Rabbi Maurice Davis, a long-time cult opponent, echoes Dr. Clark's fear: "The path of segregation leads to lynching every time. The path of anti-Semitism leads to Auschwitz every time. The path of the cults leads to Jonestowns and we watch it at our peril."¹⁰⁷

101. *Id.* at 43.

102. Testimony of Bernard Livingston, *Public Hearing*, *supra* note 48, vol. II, at 67.

103. *Probe of Moonie's Death Requested in New York*, RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE, May 25, 1977, at 11.

104. C. STONER & J. PARKE, *supra* note 27, at 178.

105. Thomas, *Practices of Cults Receiving New Scrutiny*, N.Y. Times, Jan. 21, 1979, at 52, col. 1.

106. Testimony of Dr. John G. Clark, Jr., *Information Meeting*, *supra* note 19, at 43.

107. Testimony of Rabbi Maurice Davis, *id.* at 78.