

Religion more than theological grab bag

Cults offer prepackaged approach

by Lucinda Chodan

"I refuse to buy those neatly tied packages called grab bags in stores . . . people should do the same with religion," said Reverend Kenneth Larson at the U of A Chaplain's Association *Symposium on Cults* Thursday afternoon.

Larson, from Portland, and Reverend Colin Clay of the University of Saskatchewan addressed the history of cults and the differences between cults and conventional religions at the Thursday session.

"Let me begin by saying something about freedom of religion," said Clay. "In Canada, all those religious freedoms have a place . . . we're not concerned about sects."

Clay also admitted that Christianity has several of the characteristics used to define cults, including peer pressure and "something some might refer to as brainwashing."

"But there are some very clear distinctions between the Christian church and the so-called religious cults," Clay said.

He said cults have Messianic leaders and often

practise "heavenly deception" in recruiting followers.

On the other hand, Christianity does not have an earthly Messiah and it uses the Bible, not the earthly Scriptures of these leaders, he said.

Some people say these Messianic leaders represent a new Reformation of Christianity, Clay said. However, this is unlikely, he said.

For instance, Unification Church leader Sun Myung Moon says he is God's third attempt to redeem the world. Moon claims he was walking down a street in Singapore and God appeared to him in a vision, Clay said.

"God was looking for the Lord of the Second Advent and Moon sort of volunteered for the job," he said.

Clay said cults also used deceptive methods to raise money for their organizations. He cited a Hare Krishna group selling records in Saskatoon, which said, in turn, that the proceeds were for UNICEF, an alcoholic rehabilitation center and CKOM radio.

The Children of God also encourage female followers to

exchange sexual favors for money for the church or to recruit others, he said.

He also said the speed with which cults recruit followers is suspicious and liked it to "a Jewish boy showing up at a monastery Friday and leaving Monday as a fully ordained Dominican priest."

Clay said that recruits cannot be blamed for joining cults, though.

"Let's put the blame where it lies — with society," Clay said. "Business is too big, government is too big . . . idealists are particularly vulnerable to this kind of appeal."

"What is the problem?" Clay asked. "For the Christian community, . . . the cults I've mentioned are not compatible."



Reverend Colin Clay

For society, though, the pressure on cultists, the speed of recruitment, their paranoia and loss of doubt all present problems, Clay said.

"What should our response

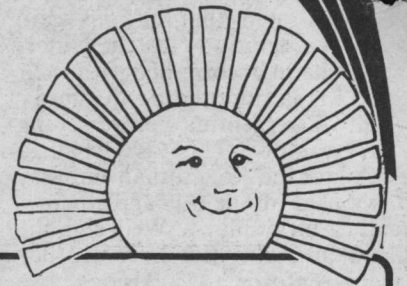
be?" he said. "Because cult members are told that the outside world is Satanic, the most effective tactic may be love, he suggested. "That person is somebody's son or daughter."

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