

Cults: pervasive influences on pliant people

by John Watson

The cult phenomenon is not a new one. Religions develop and disintegrate regularly. Often they organize for a specific cause or a specific group. When they are no longer necessary they disappear; others continue to grow and become integrated into liberal main-line religion.

A religion is "an organized system of faith and worship," according to the Merriam Webster dictionary. Viewed in terms of attempting to teach morality, beliefs and behaviour, 'cults' are more aptly described as new religions.

Even organizations which are working actively against the new religions — in Edmonton that is the Society Against Mind Abuse (SAMA) generally are not opposed to the new religions' right to practise unorthodox rituals. That is not to say these rituals are looked upon lightly. A group of dancing, chanting Hari Krishnas certainly appear bizarre, almost threatening, to anyone involved only in mainstream religion. These practices are by no means common place in Canada. The average Canadian limits his religious output to Sunday morning: he is not inclined to sing hymns on the street corner.

SAMA and organizations like it, have developed in response to what they describe as "psychological coercion." The term used to be brainwashing. The anti-cultists believe recruits are taken into the group by deceit; that the recruits are essentially trapped by the 'cult'. They do not decide to join. They simply do not make decisions at all.

'Cults', though, arise for some purpose. There is a need they attempt to fill. The new religions have poor reputations, but are a response to difficult problems of society to which they offer simplistic answers.

According to the national Film



Board production *Captive Minds*, isolation usually in the form of a retreat totally removed from the outside world, is the necessary initial step to conversion of the recruit. In this setting the group can now attempt to "soften them (the recruits) up for the eventual conversion."

The Council On Mind Abuse, (COMA) in Toronto lists a number of ways in which this is done: peer group pressure; love bombing or constant zealous affection from members in the group; sleep deprivation; conformity to the group dress code. All these are intended to remove individuality and promote acceptance of the group: step two.

The beliefs of the group are now being stressed more and more. This is the third step in the *Captive Minds* scenario — conflict over beliefs leaves the recruit in a state of total confusion. According to COMA this is done in numerous

ways: emphasizing words or phrases in long lectures; preaching incomprehensible dogma and not allowing questions; rejection of old values and life style. The group is now in a position to "exploit your suggestible state."

Alan North is an Edmontonian who has had a great deal of involvement with the new religions. He was a member of the Hari Krishnas in Ottawa for approximately two weeks. He was deprogrammed (severing the cult's influence) at that time and subsequently has worked as a deprogrammer.

North describes the indoctrination techniques used by the new religions in terms of a boat tied to a dock. The recruit is symbolized by a boat: Ropes representing family, friends, beliefs anchor the boat and provide security. The aim of the new religion is to cut the ropes, to distort the individuals perceptions so that the boat drifts away under the guidance of the new religion.

these problems — that is, not dealing with them. Involvement in the group removes the pressures the recruit could not deal with and gives a simple world in which to live.

It is "essentially a benign, even therapeutic experience."

Both Levine and North agree that about one in 500 people approached eventually join a new religion, but disagree on the duration of their stay. Levine states 90 per cent will leave within two years and eventually virtually all will leave. North does not contest the 90 per cent figure but suggests of these people, many will simply move on to another group.

A number of the new religions are involved in illegal and unethical activities. Nine officials of the Church of Scientology were convicted in 1979 of theft and conspiracy against the U.S. government. Numerous other allegations have been made against the new religions and estimates of their wealth abound: the Unification Church spends between 40 to 50 million a year on its numerous media publications. In terms of the individuals involved, the time spent in the groups can be a time of growing and awakening. After leaving a group the person is often better able to manage his own affairs.

More Second Wind

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months in restraints in a study of cholesterol and its links to heart attacks and strokes. Many people point to the Animal Liberation Front as an example of unnecessary Fanaticism exhibited by animal activists. The ALF has never caused physical harm to anyone during any of their operations. This fact can be and has been verified. That's more than I can say for some of the Dealers in Death on this and most other North American campuses. I, for one, am not going to get too excited about a few broken bars and spray-painted walls.

The fallout from that break-in has been heartening and significant. Two faculty members from the University of Western Ontario have been charged with causing unnecessary suffering to an animal, following charges laid by Peter Hamilton, director of the Vancouver-based animal rights group, Lifeforce. Although the complaint was dismissed on a technicality (it was worded wrongly) it will be reworded and resubmitted.

In addition, the University of Western Ontario has been formally notified that its controversial experiment on baboons doesn't meet the standards established by the Canadian Council on Animal Care. If the university doesn't change or stop its animal experiments, financing will eventually be cut off by the Federal government's Medical Research Council, which also contributes money to the Animal Care Council. The university would then be issued with a "non-compliance" status, which would trigger the procedure leading to a cut-off of government financing.

As well, spokesmen for the Research Council and the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council say that they agree in principle that if a university doesn't respond to the Animal Care Council's complaints, grants may be cut off from every university department, not just those involved with animal experiments. I personally have no qualms against laying a legal complaint in a court of law against any professor or researcher on this campus who causes undue suffering to an animal in his or her care, AND THIS IS NO JOKE.

I think that it is past time that we stopped enslaving the animal kingdom. There are strong connections

between the exploitation of humans — blacks and women, for instance — and non-humans. Our whole society is built on the back of the exploited — within our species and beyond our species. Anyway, the human race is not "the end all and the be all" of existence on this planet. In fact, we're one of the most destructive forces that ever walked on God's green earth. If you think that I'm somehow mistaken misguided, then please go back and reread the first paragraph of this article.

If you don't wish to participate in the abuse or destruction of an animal as part of a course which you are taking, then don't. If your professor threatens to fail you because you won't be a party to this type of activity then complain to you VP Internal, the Ombudsman, the University Board of Governors, Student Legal Aid, an animal right's group, or Peter Hamilton of Lifeforce (who can be reached through myself). You have every right to be a conscientious objector. Recently North Carolina State University became the first American university to recognize the rights of students to be conscientious objectors to such experiments. So above all, don't take it lying down.

And finally, dammit all, most researchers on this campus have about as much respect for us "insignificant," little students as they have for the animals they experiment on. Recently a prominent researcher here on campus was approached by a member of the Students' Union Executive about having members of his department publicly debate the topic of animal abuse with a group of concerned students. The researcher's response: "For God's sake, keep those people the hell out of here!" Now, does that sound like the response of an individual with a clean conscience?

As long as this kind of misuse and abuse of animals exists there will be activists willing to defend those who cannot speak for themselves. Each of us has our own ways of doing this, and each method is equally valid (including break-ins). I, along with compatriots like Peter Hamilton of Lifeforce and the members of the Animal Liberation Front, will not rest, nor will we cease and desist, until the bloody crime of animal abuse and slavery is a thing of the past.

put it in words

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