

# Letter to the Editor

25 October 1992

Dear Revd. Dr. Bray:

Dr. Riggans's article in *Churchman*, Vol. 106, No. 2, 'New Religious Movements: Response', provides a good introduction for clergymen and parishioners who may not be familiar with the ecclesiastical part of the background of this subject.

In the opinion of many longtime students of N.R.M.s, or cults, as they are generally termed in the U.S., however, there is also a strong secular factor to *predisposing* toward the general mind-set *leading* to general vulnerability, *i.e.*, the constant, deliberate destruction of the civilizing influence of earlier, perhaps 'bourgeois' value systems, which is carried on in the media, print and television, the entertainment industry, and even schools, *via* 'personal value-based' curricula, offering ever more lurid scenarios and types of 'no subjects barred' 'music lyrics', extreme fashions, extensive lack of morals in government, business, and 'social policies', etc. . . .

The out-of-balance daily moral confusion leads many discouraged/idealistic people to be easy targets for *cultic ploys*. Cults are *big business*, out for *money and power*, and are able to design ploys to reach many market 'creneaux', which they do, with great tenacity and sophistication—and cynicism.

Indeed, though Dr. Riggans's premises relegate 'brainwashing' to a rather minor position, it is the *primary precipitating factor* in cultic indoctrination. It is better termed 'coercive persuasion', or 'mind control', 'mental conditioning', etc., because **all** cults use deception and *subtle* processes to engage their prospects, rather than *exclusively* the *combined* physical tactics presumed by some apologists to be necessary for 'brainwashing'.

Dr. Riggans's Bibliography does not include Dr. Robert Lifton's classic book on mental conditioning, *Thought Reform and The Psychology of Totalism*, which very clearly lists in Chapter 22, the eight steps of *mind control*. In actual practice, there are many apparent variations of these steps, but the differences are only superficial: the techniques are within the categories which Dr. Lifton describes. Dr. Riggans's paper lists some of them.

It is important to become familiar with the *modus operandi* from sect to sect, in order better to help individual victims, because these 'programs' and built-in cues are very effective in *perpetuating* cultic mind sets, and in conditioning cultists to fiercely resist counselling.

There are an amazing number of tightly controlled cultic groups in the U.S., and a large number of the major ones operate worldwide many

Churchman

claiming followings 'in 80 countries' etc. While individual cults may be self-styled 'spiritual journeys' *qua* Christian, neo-Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, druid, philosophy, health/science, back to nature, U.F.O., executive training, etc. . . , **they all break down individual ego and thought processing** and are *totalitarian in fact*, betraying their promises/claims of peace and salvation.

As pointed out, cult members are by and large, by no means uneducated. As a matter of fact, most effective cults start out early on trying to influence clergy, academia, government people, prominent media, entertainment, and sports figures, even going after highranking military personnel (as well as 'lower echelons'). Alarmingly, cults seem to have easily attracted followers in very sensitive defense and research areas, including in Great Britain.

Hence, the suggestions for people affected to go to their clergy and/or Government officials, may often be a blind road, resulting in little or no support. Sadly, in Canada, the most active cult education group there recently had to disband for want of adequate financial support, even though several Ministers tried to get Government subsidies in recognition of their sorely needed services.

Here in the U.S., just this month, the F.B.I. allegedly foiled the attempt of the father of a world-known family to rescue his scion from an allegedly Fascist political group, whose leader is in prison at this time. Frivolous and totally meritless court suits harassing any perceived opponents are routinely carried on for years. These groups get away with amazingly audacious ploys because of their unlimited finances. For this reason, I ask that you keep my name *confidential*, using 'Name withheld'.

Dr. Riggins's Bibliography lists a number of sources that are not impeccable. A few suggested additions might be Dr. Lifton's book, *supra*; *Snapping*, and *Holy Terror*, by Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman; *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, by Steve Hassan; *Psychobabble*, by R.D. Rosen; *Battle for the Mind*, Dr. Wm. Sargant. There are many other books and papers in scientific and other journals which will lead to a fuller understanding of this *many-faceted* subject. Keep in mind that many authors are cult-sponsored.

With today's uneasy economic conditions, there will be an increasing number of cult recruits. Ongoing, widespread education at many levels is essential. It is hoped that you will continue your good work in this field to help as many as possible avoid the devastating cult experience, the effects of which can carry on into several generations, as well as wantonly shattering birth families.

Sincerely  
(Name withheld).

**We welcome letters for publication. Ed.**