

ocCULTism?

- Greg Wotton

Recently I was shocked to hear a friend refer to his daily routine of meditation and ritual as his daily 'brainwashing'. I found this particularly upsetting because of the public's common mistake of using the words Cult and Occult interchangeably. Not only did I feel that the term was dangerous to use in connection to the Western Mysteries, but it was also totally inaccurate.

So what is brainwashing if not the cleansing of the mind and clearing of thought as taught by the Buddhist, Zen and Yoga traditions? From looking at the evidence I must say that the main difference is who is in control. Is it the practitioner or the heads and leaders of the organization?

The word "cult" has been in use by sociologists for many years and has generally been applied to any new religion or religious movement which has exceeded a certain membership. Many of these are not even new religions, per say, but rather new ways of looking at an old religion. Christianity was a cult to the Jews. It was a new movement, a new sect. By the same token the Hare Krishna are really a Hindu splinter group which focuses almost completely on mantra. None of these are "new" but rather just new ways of looking at things.

Now that isn't to say that there aren't new religions cropping up. Dianetics, the Branch Dividians, Heaven's Gate, and even the Church of the Subgenius are all new, and by the definition of Sociology, cults. Unfortunately the media has had a profound effect on this term and there has been so much vilification of these new movements that the word "cult" is no longer usable in the field of Sociology. Now all new sects, cults and movements are referred to as NRMs or New Religious Movements.

This is due to a new movement known as the "Anti-Cult Movement" (ACM) and their allegations against these new religions, new movements and even new ideals and philosophies. Their primary charge is the frightening and terrible Brainwashing or Coersive Mind Control, which strips you of your will and make you the slave of the new "Cult".

Brainwashing is a term which was coined during the Korean War in which, it is said, American POWs were subjected to mind control techniques by the Communist Chinese in order to make them defect to North Korea and freely give up all of their secrets concerning the U.S. Military campaign. When Anti-cult writers and activists began attacking Cults in general, they found that comparing the apparent quick and drastic conversion of young people into a new religion with Communist Brainwashing was a powerful way of gaining sympathy for their causes.

According to Dr. Lorne Dawson (*Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*) there are three major steps involved in Brainwashing as proposed by the Anti-Cult movement. These are commonly referred to as Unfreezing, Changing, and Refreezing as they apply to the thoughts and behaviour of the new member.

Unfreezing is the most highly publicized stage of the process. The other two stages represent the adoption of the daily routine of Cult life. As it is the unfreezing stage which most of us are familiar with as Brainwashing, it is the area that I wish to focus on in this article.

The purpose of the unfreezing process is to eliminate the new recruit's capacity for rational thought. Specific practices include long term sensory deprivation or overload, sleep deprivation and malnutrition. In cases of sensory deprivation, lights, sounds, even human contact are eliminated until such a time as the new member is ready to be reborn into the new society.

Dr. Dawson explains that "Physically weakened and psychologically disoriented by such practices, the sense of reality of these people is fractured, as is their sense of self -- the stable personality characteristics used to anchor behaviour." (Pg 160 of MS) By then introducing the individual to a daily routine within the Cult the individual can then embrace a stable structure after having all stable structures stripped away.

Many people argue that Brainwashing is, in fact, impossible; that any conformity is merely the psychological result of abuse, not unlike the abused wife who can't leave her husband and conforms to his decisions and ideas.

According to Steve Hassan in his book *Releasing the Bonds: Empowering People to Think for Themselves* an organization which is engaged in this type of coercive mind control abuse must conform to, what he calls, the BITE model of control. BITE stands for **B**ehaviour Control, **I**nformation Control, **T**hought Control, and **E**motional Control. Each of these has a series of qualifiers which identifies the Cult as coercive and dangerous.

Essentially these controls are meant to totally control the environment in which the Cult members exist. What clothes to wear, what haircuts to have, what books, papers, and news are and are not allowable. Often propaganda and lies are used to create a very ridged "Us vs. Them" attitude within a very closed and controlled environment. By so doing they can continue to control the thoughts of the members by controlling what information they have available to them for making decisions.

Historical and current sins and emotional events are often used in an abusive way to force conformity. Attempts to leave or question the cult can induce blackmail type retaliation. There is also an attempt to create a great fear of ever leaving the group and the total severance of family, friends and others who are not part of the group or organization. Many people are lead to believe that they could not survive outside the safety of the organization

Now that we have something to work from, we can look at how this applies to the various schools and orders of the Western Mystery Tradition.

There do not seem to be any major occult organizations in the West which can successfully have this model applied to them. There are certain controls in place during the training, but this psychological training does not conform to the BITE model as outside study, reading and research are always

encouraged. Also who has the facilities to accomplish such atrocities, who has the money in the occult community to create such an isolated environment? But most importantly there is not the inclination to try and take control from others. “Man Know Thyself” is a cornerstone of our tradition.

From a totally practical point of view, Occultists just don't have time for this sort of thing. Between their research, studies, daily jobs, meditation and ritual work as well as any Lodge or Order paperwork etc. there are simply not enough hours in a year to allow him to form a Cult according to the parameters put forth above; and even if he did, he would most likely spend more of it reading, researching and surfing the web. In general Occultists are information junkies and wouldn't be interested in anything as limiting or time consuming as a cult must be.

Now it would be irresponsible of me to say that there are not occult based cults. I have run into small, Cult-Like organizations with an occult theme. These are not true Occult Orders, Schools or Lodges, but rather are run for the personal glory of a few individuals who have read a few books. For the uneducated it can be difficult to tell the difference between a valid Mystery School and a sham, but hopefully the above discussion will help the individual to avoid some of the more dangerous groups as they walk upon their path of discovery.

So the next time someone uses the words cult and occult as synonyms, you can give them some facts, and help us to keep the good Latin word for “Hidden”, occult, free of these, less than honourable associations.

In LVX
Greg Wotton