

Cult Attractiveness and Avoidance

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Introduction

In recent years, cults have made a surprising resurgence, and that with a big bang! When one would have expected them to retreat, fizzling out with time in the presence of freely available correct information, cults have done just the opposite! They seem to grow from strength to strength, easily surmounting hurdles which those holding to authentic truth fail to scale. There seems to be an outbreak of literary any and every cult, showing no sign of diminishing or reducing any time soon. What is worse is that these cults seem to grow in potency, influence and reach, capturing many gullible and naïve people, given the post modern context that allows for any and everything. Nothing is wrong or right in the times into which our lot falls. The startled Christian is right in enquiring why this should be so. Why should so much heresy and error flourish in the light of so much truth littered all over the globe, internet and in print? These and several other questions are what this paper is all about, or at least attempts to address.

Importance of Studying Cults

A consideration of cults is one of the most revealing, if not scary to this reader. Cults are more potent and closer to our door than we imagine or realize. They are literary all pervasive and have invaded about every sphere of life including the very means of communication whether electronic or otherwise. In addition, their vast global spread and popularity have been fostered by the all powerful global network of technological development. As though that were not bad enough, the context and culture in which they flourish fans them to higher heights. Post modern relative thinking has open the door to acceptance of about every practice whether good or bad. The spread is therefore rather fast akin to a lit match stick on a petrol doused cloth. These, among other reasons necessitate Cult study in order to effectively and competently manage or push back the deadly snares introduced by the cults, major or not. That is why we commend champions at the fire front of cult detection and combat.

Why Cults are Attractive

Why should cults prove to be so popular and attractive? Why should what is obviously erroneous be readily espoused and defended when the scripture, the ultimate guide for believers and non-believers is free available? This puzzle cannot be fully resolved, let alone satisfied because the reasons for this are as many as the questions themselves! However, in the following brief points, we attempt to highlight what we think could be the root causes as well as the probable propellers of this cult resurgence or 'revival' if you like.

The basic reason why cults are magnetic to people is to be found in the nature of human beings. After the fall in the Garden of Eden as demonstrated in the scriptures (Genesis 3), the human mind has been corrupted by sin to the extent that human beings' sense of judgment, preferences and desires are warped and inclined towards things opposed to God or His revelation (Genesis 6:5). In Genesis three, the effect of the fall is so devastating to the extent that human beings are said to be totally depraved though not absolutely. By '*total*' we mean that there is no faculty of a human being that was not left unaffected by the fall and thus affects the way one operates, interprets reality, values system, thought pattern or reasoning (though in and of themselves think that they are fine, objective and on track!). The sin nature has been devastatingly affected the heart towards evil at all times, preferring darkness rather than light. After all, don't we know from the scriptures that the heart of man is desperately wicked? (Jeremiah 17:9) Isn't it true to say that the heart and mind of a human being is darkened and hardened against the truth? Human beings, therefore are not essentially good in themselves nor even primarily victims/products of their social environment as sociology or psychology would have us believe but are inherently affected by the ramifications of the fall. This fall therefore colours the mind, judgement and preferences. Thus, when error or heresy comes along, the fallen mind is not able to "judge all things" with a right discerning eye that comes about as a result of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Thus, we may further conclude and assert that when Cults come around with their alluring attractions, they easily find a fertile haven to survive, flourish and exponentially replicate. This Cult doctrine is craftily well designed to captivate the unsuspecting mind or eye thus easily entangled in its grip. This is the first and root cause of why cults appear attractive to the average eye, now that they are allowed to propagate themselves freely.

The second reason why cults are successful and easily proliferate is that they are carefully designed by expert people who have studied the human mind, needs and preferences. These professionals, with big names and titles, meticulously craft attractive well packaged products that the human eye fails to resist. Their bait comes across as harmless, solution based and ready to instantly sort out a problem when in fact they are sugar coated poisons that people drink in to their consequent detriment. They discover too late that they are in the very clutches of Satan, in effect, are in a double bondage to Satan and sin. The worst part is that many of them never even get to realize that they are on the broad road leading to destruction.

The third broad reason is that cults are aggressive in the use of the cutting edge technology which they fully exploit to their advantage. While the people with authentic truth and genuine sound solutions to the world's greatest needs are lingering or struggling to raise cash, the efficient, well financed cults hijack everything, pouring in billions of dollars into advertising or image building. Christians spend more time arguing, debating and finger pointing at times while the enemy insidiously swiftly moves along, only to catch saints napping, forcing them into the reaction mode, often times too late.

Fourth, cults use any and every method to capture their prey and target. They know all too well that people have different needs (whether psychological, physiological, cognitive or material etc.) and thus come close to them to offer help, psychosocial support, care and love, which recipients could not ever dream of getting anywhere, not even the Church! Thus, they prey on the vulnerabilities of people and exploit them to their own advantage.

Fifth, cults are extremely well funded, have invested heavily in about any and every profitable industry. The Roman Catholic Church, New Apostolic Church or the Jehovah's witnesses for instance have invested heavily and thus minting millions of dollars which they use to advance their cause. They are exceptionally well organized around one central core where all resources are pooled and as we know, there is power and leverage in synergistic integration. The cults have mastered this and thus used it to their advantage. Thus, they have the critically needed financial muscle to succeed sorting out about anything thus naturally attracting the world's paupers.

Sixth, cults are very subtle in how they communicate their message(s), ensuring that all the rough suspicious edges are blunted, smoothed, veiled or removed from public view. Take the Mormons for instance or even the Free Masons, these are well resourced, well networked, and rich in philanthropic works. They will tell the public what they want to hear when in fact underneath that skin are the claws that dig deep into their hearts. Once these fangs get into one's system, only God can set one free.

Seventh, cults operate around a clandestine unaccountable system. In as much as they do very good public relations, thereby blinding millions, they are aggressively secretive how they source their money or how it is spent.

Eighth, cults are built around an individual that followers can see, feel and identify with unlike the true Christian who walks by faith in Jesus. As much as they are mystical in their sacred secretive ceremonies and rituals, people are kept spell bound by the mysticism that surrounds these cults. Further, these cults have a well defined and organized structure or system ensuring continuity, far outstripping the Christian Church.

Ninth, although indirectly alluded to, cults are experts at mind control and know that if they can catch one there, they have the whole person. They use different methods and means, at times even good genuine subjects such as science but secretly introducing their deadly toxic doctrines in the process. The harmless looking pragmatic *Watch Tower* magazine is one case in point that has some good articles, purporting to answer important key life puzzling questions from various relevant aspects of life. Once one is subtly captivated, they then cannot resist the consequent *Awake* magazine and other JW literature which essentially is un-Christian. The same applies to other cults.

Tenth, cults have read the times and cleverly tailor their messages to attract the mind. In a post modern relative context, their materials ask leading and eye catching questions aimed at eventually captivating the reader. They may not come across dogmatically (which dogma the post modern mind detests), but gently introduce deadly doses of toxic venom in clever ways ensuring the poison is securely tacked away in the catacombs of the victim's mind. Unawares, the "faulty software" or thought begins to play on the mind and later leads one to perceive heresy as correct or acceptable. Error is sanitized at that point. The Christian must guard the mind!

Finally, these cults are intensely personal, interactive and will aggressively follow up a potential proselyte offering practical solutions, care or attention which is sadly absent even in the body of Jesus Christ!

How to Avoid this "irresistible" Cultic Allure

To escape all the different baits that the cults throw around, the Christian is strongly advised to prayerfully study the scriptures, know what they believe, be content with what they have and be busy in the vineyard of the lord. The Christian must also be careful how or what they expose their minds to. Unless they are well trained, mature or discerning, they do well to avoid all contaminating contact with cultic literature or media. It is a known fact that what we allow in our minds through the eye gate eventually finds a place in our brains progressively affecting how we perceive or interpret the world. The cults know that if they can capture the mind, then they have the whole man. There is need therefore to meticulously watch what we, our colleagues, family or church are exposed to via the ear or eye. Sadly, many churches have a huge appetite for money to the extent of idolatry but exposing the members to grave danger in due course. Granted, we all need money, it however matters how this message is packaged or communicated. Repetition eventually programs the mind into believing/considering something as true. We further suggest that once one lets the word of Christ dwell in them richly, they may be somewhat equipped and able to discern error from afar. This gives them time to escape or institute the corrective antidotes.

Lethal Dangers of Cults

As highlighted above, cults are very deadly leading to bondage. Although what may seem at first to be innocent and harmless, it may eventually turn into a nightmare not stopping at anything short of swallowing the subject. Those that, peradventure, escape its grip come away with serious claw marks and scars on their souls. One cannot escape unscathed hence, the best is, therefore, to avoid ever getting entangled with these cults in the first place. A further thought perhaps will do. Cults rarely come alone. Akin to demons mentioned in the Bible, cults often come in “legions” or with other secondary but harmful attachments. The New Age Movement “*NAM*” with its processed ‘tolerance’ mantra often opens a door to all manner of problems.

Lessons Learnt from or About Cult Power

From the foregoing, we can learn the following as take home lessons:

1. Cults are very powerful, influential and have a clear agenda.
2. Cults revolve around a central core or a potent individual. This significant individual dictates, controls adherents’ lives, literally commanding unquestioned loyalty among followers.
3. Cults often possess secret information available only to cult members.
4. Cults are very aggressive, subtle and far more organized, obviously better refined than many people realize. They can worm themselves into a good system and literary hijack it!
5. Christians need to learn from the persistence, consistency, zeal, sacrifice and innovation of cults, of course, retaining Biblical ethical balance.
6. Cults aim at the mind as an entry control point. Once one is entangled at cognitive or indeed, emotional, very few ever escape the cult’s grip.
7. Not only are cults aggressive but very careful in their planning and packaging their information, hiding away all the ‘rough edges’ only highlighting what the human eye wants to see or hear.
8. The effects of the fall in the Garden (i.e. Genesis 3) are especially grave having affected human judgment. That is why cults find it so easy to penetrate the human soul unless the Holy Spirit transforms one then they will have the stamina to detect and with stand or repel heresy.

9. Usually, cultic information comes across as harmless at face value but is actually toxic beneath the sugar coating. The best is to avoid this entire toxin ever entering one's mind and heart lest they end up in bondage.
10. More Christians need to be trained in how to detect, repel and avoid heresy no matter in what form it comes. A discerning eye is key granted only by the Holy Spirit.
11. In a poisoned relativistic environment, cults are poised to flourish even further because nothing is considered wrong or right. Anything goes and is allowed free reign, regardless of the damage it does to souls. Postmodernism is premised on humanistic evolution and thus ties in well with what the New Age inclined cults would teach or propagate.
12. Cults exploit the spiritual vacuum as well as vulnerability in the unregenerate and make inroads. They easily take over the person.
13. Cult members each have a sense of mission and work hard to contribute and thus earn their keep, salvation and recognition. The cults are so organized to keep the pressure on every one to keep doing something. Their succession plan is also superb and roams to life when needed. This reduces the vacuum or power struggles that often buffet organizations.

What Others have Written or said About Cults

Many have written on this matter including Dr Johnson Philip, Dr. Cheerian (whose great work has deeply informed this paper) and well known cultists like Dr. Walter Martin or Dave Hunt. They have investigated these cults, their nature and how lethal they are. Dr. Martin states in his *Kingdom of cults* that cults are consistently popping up with a special appeal, pragmatic and always inflexibly emphasizing a point of view or so. Any one who differs from them is treated or perceived as an outsider, a danger. Cult power lies in mind manipulation and strategic isolation of adherents. Further, the said effective cultists have stated that fresh cults consistently coming up all the time, hence the need to keep a vigilant analysis on the landscape.

Conclusion

Cults are very potent today and will continue to be unless a Spiritual awakening takes place. Their ravaging effects must urgently be mitigated, checked, pushed back or stopped before worse things result. For as long as the Church remains "*asleep in the light*," to borrow Keith Green's apt phrase, heresy will continue to have a hey-day, doing much irreparable harm and damage in the process.

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