

Destructive Cults Religious Brainwashing

brainwashing / n. 1: a forcible indoctrination to induce someone to give up basic political, social or religious beliefs and attitudes and to accept contrasting regimented ideas 2: persuasion by propaganda or salesmanship. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary)

When someone speaks of religious brainwashing, we might think of a victim forcibly held in a room while his old belief system is systematically destroyed, which is then replaced by a new, radical belief structure. However, this method has not proven to be especially effective in the last decade or so by cults, and has been largely replaced by more subtle forms of mind control.

There are similarities between mind control and other forms of persuasion, such as is found in advertising and modern sales techniques. Both the religious cult and, let's say, a doortodoor salesman are offering a product (the religion offers God's approval and a future reward). Both exert persuasion to "try it out", as time is supposedly short or limited; soon they won't be able to choose. It is emphasized that they must make a decision. High pressure tactics are used, with an attempt to overwhelm their listener with positive statements regarding their product or organization. This is done in an attempt to rush the decision before all angles can be considered, or before someone can come along who can effectively challenge the product or organization.

The differences, however, are important. A salesman is out to make a buck and is usually not interested in the person he is speaking to except to make a sale. If, after his or her presentation, the customer is not interested, the salesman goes on his way. A cultist, on the other hand, will usually be interested in the person for more than just their money, and the recruiters are quite sincere in showing affection towards the potential recruit. For the most part, the recruiter **STRONGLY BELIEVES** deep down that what he has to offer is the best thing going, and he may go to great lengths to convert the person. Sincerity comes through accepting their program as "God's program", thereby adding an element of fear and mystery to it; fear that if you don't join, you will meet the wrath of God, and mysterious in that it is for a select few who meet the qualifications.

Additionally, the religious cult will seek to establish themselves as the sole channel to God, and will warn you that the devil is very real, and he is out to deceive you by means of all the other religions. Their particular approach is slanted to prejudice you against other beliefs before you can investigate them. You learn to fear those who do not agree with you, and will run from them or avoid a confrontation with them. Because religious cults are seen as "extreme" in their methods and behavior, they are often maligned by others, and the recruiter capitalizes on this by claiming he is being persecuted for his faith. So from the start, the recruit develops "tunnel vision" when it comes to

investigating all the facts. He is led to believe that the recruiter can be trusted to possess the truth, but the rest of the world cannot.

This can be referred to as "intellectual myopia." Many will have dropped out of the program once they recognize how they are being programmed by the recruiter, but a few will remain. They are enticed by what is offered, and cross the barrier of their own common sense to get more involved. They desire to live in the imaginary world of the cult. As Deborah Davis, a former member of the Children of God says,

When a cult recruit crosses the invisible barrier in his mind when he enters the world of the cult and its doctrine at some point during his flirtatious sampling of the cult he is tripping the switch of his voluntary suspension of disbelief. Brainwashing or mind control then occurs naturally, sometimes effortlessly. In many cases the new cult member will struggle hard to brainwash himself. He must do this in order to balance the guilt he feels. When doubts rush in like a flood, he tells himself, "I am following the truth. The rest of the world may be going to hell, but I am following the truth!"

Other brothers and sisters are there to encourage the new recruit. He either accepts their help and counsel, or he rejects it. If he rejects it, he doesn't stay around long. If he receives their help, he goes deeper into the cultic doctrine. He will sell flowers, chant, memorize . . . whatever it takes, to the utmost of his ability to prove to himself and others that he is right. The brainwashing that occurs in the cults is the finest, purest and most effective around. (The Children of God, Zondervan, 1984, p.172)

High pressure techniques almost always utilize a measure of deceit; often in the form of halftruths and redefinition of terms. Popular phrases such as "born again," "Christian," "heaven," and "saved" are redefined in new terms, giving outward acceptability to the group's beliefs. Select truthful phrases or even quotations from the Bible are taken out of context to bolster their belief structure. A new recruit is not told the full range of beliefs of the group for fear that he will bail out, so the more socially acceptable beliefs are taught to him first. This is not seen as deception by the recruiter, but merely as a gentle conditioning for what lies ahead. Deborah Davis comments on studies done by Richard Delgado in Stoner and Parke's *All God's Children* (p.248):

However, from the cult's perspective this deceit is merely part of the "training process" of a new convert. The mature cult member doesn't feel he is being the least bit deceptive. He is simply presenting truth in doses suitable for a "babe", or new member. The salvation of the new convert is at stake, and the disciple has a divine responsibility to assist the convert into the cult 100 percent. Delgado acknowledges the fact that the convert does "consent to each step" of the conversion process that is, there is a voluntary choice. But the wrongdoing, as Delgado sees it, is that the cults misrepresent themselves; they don't honestly display themselves for what they truly are. *The Children of God*, p. 177.

By this gradual process of learning a new "language," gaining new friends and rejecting old ones, adopting new behavior, developing intellectual myopia and actually learning how to gradually "condition" others himself, the new recruit becomes a fully brainwashed member of the cult. Within a period as short as a few months, he can adopt a radically different way of thinking as a result of this process, and his personality may even appear unrecognizable by old friends.

How does this process differ from Christian evangelism?

A Christian is generally up front in presenting the message of Christ's death and resurrection to the listener. He may give the whole sermon from "heaven to hell" in one hour without fear that he may lose a convert, for he knows it is not his work, but God's. The potential convert is encouraged to check the Christian faith out from any angle, historically, logically and experientially. Additionally, salvation is a gift, so there is no "price" to pay; it is not for just a select few. The convert is not dependent upon a particular church or religious group for their salvation. In other words, there are no strings attached.

Why do people start cults?

Few set out to "start a cult," at least intentionally. Rather, they are individuals who feel they have something to offer that no one else has; some special understanding or anointing from God, etc. Their opinion of themselves gets inflated, and they soon allow for no dissent or differences of opinion among their followers. Their growing number of recruits give them a sense of power and affirmation, further corrupting their fallen nature. Gradually they lose any real humility, fully believing they are God's sole spokesman to the world.

Why do these leaders reject orthodox Christianity?

Orthodoxy has been established over a period of 1900 years by Christian leaders and theologians who have battled heresy with sound logic from the Word of God. They recognize that theology is complex. Within orthodoxy, many of the finer points of belief can be debated over and over, leaving differences of opinion, while both sides retain the same basic beliefs. An upandcoming cult leader, however, considers himself superior to the church and its scholars, writing them off as uneducated fools; while nurturing the belief that he is God's spokesman to the world. Often ignoring the work of Greek and Hebrew scholars and seminarians, he sets himself up as the sole interpreter of the Bible.

The doctrinal structure of the new cult must be simple enough for the average person to grasp. If it were to be complex, dissent might easily arise within the group over finer points of doctrine, destroying the tight control that is so desired. The simplicity of the system works towards greater unity of thoughtthe simpler the theology, the easier it is to control the ranks. The seemingly simple logic will also help in the recruiting process, as the recruit wants simple answers to his and the world's problems. The cult will provide

these answers. The price of simplicity is lack of depth, however, and their incomplete logic can be refuted by mature Christians who study the Bible.

The identity of Christ is a barrier to the cult leader. He must either reduce the authority of Christ (elevating himself), or claim equality with Christ. This can be done by (1) claiming he himself is the returned or reincarnated Messiah, or (2) demoting Jesus to a fellow spiritual leader or a created being.

THE THERAPY FOR THE EXCULT MEMBER

The most important factor in therapy for the cultist or excultist is prayer. Pray for wisdom, for a receptive heart, and for the Holy Spirit to be present. Unlike street corner evangelism, it is not always wise to try and convert the victim of a cult to the Christian faith on the spot. If they have a desire to know God as he really is, your prayers will help bring them around to the point where they will seek help. If they are receptive right away, the gospel of Jesus Christ can be presented, and they may ask Christ into their life on the first encounter.

One of the best remedies is natural human love and concern; being a friend to the victim. Coming out of a cult is a very emotionally draining experience, and one has need of close friends with which to talk. A whole host of negative emotions including fear, bitterness, despair, anger, sadness, loneliness, dejection and depression may have to be singled out and discussed with mature Christians. Prayer is also very important.

Don't expect them to see Christianity objectively; they have been taught that the churches are wrong, or even of the devil. They will see more than anything from your example that Christianity is real and it works.

Not all problems can be dealt with by counseling. The victim's personal sins and their alienation from God will cause them trouble, long after they are out of the cult, unless moral issues are addressed. Deborah Davis makes the point well:

I believe one reason why many psychologists and counselors meet only partial success in helping cult victims back to normalcy is that they are not separating the two guilt factors. There is guilt born of personal failure, the result of human pride. For example, an excult victim will experience guilt because he has failed the cult, failed his prophet, and become a Judas, a backslider. The "guilt trip" placed on cult members by cult doctrine produce a form of human guilt, what I would term "unrighteous guilt". This kind of guilt can be singled out and eliminated in counseling.

But there is another form of guilt, proceeding from a man's conscience. This is the guilt of sin, what I call "righteous guilt." It cannot be counseled away. To eliminate this kind of guilt a man must seek and find divine forgiveness. The guilt of sin is a spiritual matter. Non-Christian psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors do not recognize the reality of

sin or the guilt that accompanies it. Consequently they lump all guilt into one category and view it as "unrighteous guilt." They talk of "false guilt."

If these two guilt factors are unknowingly lumped together and justified, the victim will continue to feel the pain of guilt, the result of sin. He will remain fragmented and alienated. Counselors are baffled as to why so many excult victims are not healed and continue to suffer severe depression, anxiety, and emotional trauma. They don't understand why they cannot seem to "break away" from their experience in the cult. The reason is that they are still carrying the guilt of sin. (ibid., p.180, 181)

Mrs. Davis offers advice on helping the cult victim readjust:

For millions of cult members, brainwashing is a reality. It is a deadly snare that blinds them from the truth they so desperately need to see. To step through the twilight zone of mind manipulation into the light of reality, rediscovering the truth about life and about self, is often a slow and painful process. It takes time, perhaps years.

The friends and relatives of excult victims should remember three things: Be compassionate, be patient, be sensitive. It is a difficult thing to admit mistakes, to face sins. This process reawakens all the deepseated guilt. It must be a voluntary experience. We cannot force any to examine themselves. They must do it as the grace of God is revealed in their lives. They need understanding; they need our love. They must accept their responsibility by their own choice. But when they do, they will experience a spiritual awakening. And it is most exciting.

Sin lies at the root of cultic brainwashing. To explain away sin and guilt through the dynamics of mind control is an attack against Jesus as the Savior. Guilt, the result of sin, cannot be removed psychologically. It is Christ who removes the weight of guilt. It is Christ who died and rose from the dead for our sins. . . . True mental health and peace of mind lie in the remission of sin, and that gift is open to every individual. (ibid., p. 181182)

An understanding of the Biblical view of sin and man's fallen nature is the greatest asset in aiding a person out of the cults. Bringing that individual to maturity in Christ is the goal of our therapy, and the end result is rewarding both to the patient and the Christian counselor.

Refuting Jehovah's Witnesses

The techniques used by the Watchtower are typical of modern cults. For one, their approach is subtle. Through the use of halftruths in explaining their position, misquotes of secular authorities, redefinition of the English language and even altering their own history, they succeed in convincing their followers that they are the only true religion. The WT organization is referred to in their publications as the "mother":

If we are to walk in the light of truth we must recognize not only Jehovah God as our father but his organization as our "mother." WT, May 1957, p. 274

The book 1984 by George Orwell is a testimony to how subtle thought control can be. Certain excerpts from 1984 have been chosen to make a point.

Orwell's book begins by describing a major world power that juggles with truth and historical records in order to make themselves look as if they are always "right." Oceania is the world power, and Eurasia is its rival. In the quotes, you will notice mention of "Big Brother," or the "Society." Take the time to think about the similarities of such a political system with the "Mother" organization of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, also commonly referred to as the "Society" (a term used both in the WT as well as the Communist world to cover the truth that the real rulership is in the hands of a few men).

The WT knows that in order to control the future, they must have control over the past. How? In basically four ways: By preventing the average JW from accessing their past mistakes or deceptions, by coloring their history, by passing off the past as irrelevant, or by actually changing the historical writings themselves.

To the WT, reality is whatever they are teaching as current light from the "faithful and discreet slave" (meaning themselves). Whatever they taught in the past is not to even be believed any longer; indeed, it would amount to apostasy to go back to believing former views (old light). This means that they must gain a series of "victories" over their memory; what was taught ten years ago is not to be remembered at present, for it would confuse the understanding of present truth. If it be necessary to explain the past teachings to someone, they may use complicated explanations as to how truth is really only relative to the progression of the organization. They must be ready to deny the past, yet subconsciously acknowledge it and compensate for it in their thinking; all the while being careful not to be conscious of fooling themselves.

To know, for instance, that the WT actually did lead their people to believe that the end of the world was coming in 1975; yet to deny that and actually believe their denial of it to be truthful; to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies . . . to forget that the WT had predicted the end of the world in 1914 rather than the invisible return of Christ (which was held to have taken place in 1874 and believed all the way up till 1929); to forget this when it was necessary to forget, then when cornered to draw it back into memory and call it a mistake; only to later deny it that is the ultimate subtlety! And then, to point to other religious groups who predict the future and accuse them of being false prophets using two ways (standards) of thinking, hence the similarity to Orwell's expression "doublethink." Notice the Governing Body's own words:

True, there have been those in times past who predicted an "end to the world," even announcing a specific date. . . . The "end" did not come. They were guilty of false prophesying. Why? What was missing? Missing was the full measure of evidence required

in fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Missing from such people were God's truths and the evidence that he was guiding and using them. (Oct. 8, 1968 Awake! p.23)

How can the Watchtower make a statement like this in view of their own record of predictions? It can be easily documented right out of their own books that they predicted the end of the world several times! It is as Orwell says, ". . . to forget whatever it is necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again and then to forget it again . . . and to apply the same process to the process itself (to be unaware of this whole facade, in other words), that was the ultimate subtlety." (1984, p. 32,33) Doublethink is an appropriate word for the WT's treatment of past prophecies.

Selfdeception is a difficult thing to uncover. It is very complex, much like making up one lie to cover over another. How different this is from just plainly and simply telling the truth! How often people get annoyed with JWs because they won't directly answer questions like, "Who will be saved at Armageddon?" or, "What is needed to understand the Bible?" One notices that they cannot speak independently of the organization. Note the similarities in Orwell's world:

A Party member is required to have not only the right opinions, but the right instincts. Many of the beliefs and attitudes demanded of him are never plainly stated, and could not be stated without laying bare the contradictions inherent in Ingsoc. If he is a person naturally orthodox (in Newspeak, a goodthinker), he will in all circumstances know, without taking thought, what is the true belief or desirable emotion. But in any case, an elaborate mental training, undergone in childhood and grouping itself round the Newspeak words crimestop, blackwhite, and doublethink, makes him unwilling and unable to think too deeply on any subject whatever. (1984, p. 174)

From personal experience in serving six years at the WT headquarters, both as an elder and a factory overseer, and being wellknown as an "organization man," the author sought diligently to be the epitome of what a JW was supposed to be. In reality, this could only be accomplished, not by reading the WT, but by knowing in total how the system works, and how those in charge really think; knowing what their motivations are and what makes them "tick." If one just read the WT, without actually associating with JWs, one would get an inaccurate picture of the actual mentality of the organization. The author spent much time with the older members of the headquarters staff, and worked daily with those who had been there for 30 years and more, even some of the Governing Body.

Just as in political organizations, understanding the mentality of those you are dealing with is the key factor in your moving up in the system. You soon discover why decisions are made and who makes them. You understand why certain policies are adopted and not others. You also realize why new "rules" are made, but not actually put into print, or if they are, they may be couched in "double language." The result is that the printed expression will be interpreted by two types of minds in two different ways. For instance, by the naive JW, a statement like

Would it be wise for a brother to wear a beard in an area where this is not common? Having a Bibletrained conscience might move him to consider the feelings of others.

. . . might be interpreted as it is written; as just a matter of conscience. But an elder or an organizationally minded JW would clearly understand it to be a doctrinal position taken by the WT, meaning that if you expected to be treated as a brother, or if you desired any responsibility in the congregation, you had better not grow a beard! (Or if you had one, you had better shave it off!)

Questioning the system can undermine one's mental programming, as doubts can creep in, causing the JW to think for himself. The Governing Body knows that these doubts must be avoided at all costs to maintain their control. Note the similarity in Orwell's 1984:

. . . The speculations which might possibly induce a skeptical or rebellious attitude are killed in advance by his early acquired inner discipline. The first and simplest stage in the discipline, which can be taught even to young children, is called, in Newspeak, crimestop. Crimestop means the faculty of stopping short, as though by instinct, at the threshold of any dangerous thought. It includes the power of not grasping analogies, of failing to perceive logical errors, of misunderstanding the simplest arguments if they are inimical to Ingsoc, and of being bored or repelled by any train of thought which is capable of leading in a heretical direction. (p. 174, 175)

The JW learns early in the game to kill his speculations if they veer into dangerous territory. He either senses that they will be dangerous to his relationship to other Witnesses (who will view him with suspicion), or he finds out the hard way by voicing his dissent and either being chastised or humiliated. He learns early on that he must walk in the present light, not allowing his mind to move ahead of the organization. He is not to think independently of the organization. The Governing Body will now represent his mind on all important matters. It is the only "safe" way.

A Witness automatically learns to put aside disturbing thoughts, such as might develop if they were to go to a door where a person would take the Witnesses' Truth That Leads To Eternal Life book out of their hands and opens it to page 13 where it says,

We need to examine, not only what we personally believe, but also what is taught by any religious organization with which we may be associated. Are its teachings in full harmony with God's Word, or are they based on the traditions of men? If we are lovers of truth, there is nothing to fear from such an examination. It should be the sincere desire of every one of us to learn what God's will is for us, and then to do it.

The householder (person at the door) might try to reason with the Witness using the logic presented in their own book, saying, "Why don't we examine the record of the Watchtower over the past 100 years?" The JW usually responds with a blank stare or a response such as, "Were you ever a Witness before?" In other words, "How come you

know so much about us?" This is thereby an unconscious refusal to follow through on a logical argument initiated by others, while at the same time attempting to initiate logical arguments themselves. When on the defensive, JW's will often misunderstand or draw a blank on the simplest of arguments. They will get bored or repelled at any train of thought not initiated by themselves that could prove to be dangerous to their organizational security. Compare Orwell's world:

Crimestop, in short, means protective stupidity. But stupidity is not enough. On the contrary, orthodoxy in the full sense demands a control over one's own mental processes as complete as that of a contortionist over his own body. Oceanic society rests ultimately on the belief that Big Brother is omnipotent and that the Party is infallible. But since in reality Big Brother is not omnipotent and the Party is not infallible, there is need for an unwearying, momenttomoment flexibility in the treatment of facts. The key word here is blackwhite. Like so many Newspeak words, this word has two mutually contradictory meanings. Applied to an opponent, it means the habit of impudently claiming that black is white, in contradiction of the plain facts. Applied to a Party member, it means a loyal willingness to say that black is white when Party discipline demands this. But it means also the ability to believe that black is white, and more, to know that black is white, and to forget that one has ever believed to the contrary. This demands a continuous alteration of the past, made possible by the system of thought which really embraces all the rest, and which is known in Newspeak as doublethink. (1984, p. 175)

The Watchtower Society rests on the belief that the "mother" organization cannot lead you astray. If they are later exposed as having made a mistake or promoting an untruth, you were supposedly better off walking in the mistake or living the untruth than recognizing the truth of the matter on your own! You cannot go wrong if you remain in step with your "mother." Thus, she is, in effect, infallible (although formally denying claim to such). So within the WT (as with Big Brother) there is an unwearying effort on the part of their writing department to be flexible with "truth," always being ready to find some analogy to show how they were really on the right course all along, like using the example of how a ship, in getting from point "A" to point "B" must sometimes tack, or zigzag all over, in order to get there (see the Dec. 1, 1981 WT p.27). Or the explanation might be given that "Jehovah God was just testing you" by allowing the mother organization to lead you to believe that the world was going to end at a specific time, yet knowing well enough that it would not materialize on schedule. (Feb. 15, 1984 WT, p.26)

The latest effort made to explain away their false prophecies is to say that it was actually good for them to have been anxious for the end of the world, and that even though they made mistakes, they are better off than those who didn't expect anything. In the Dec. 1 WT of 1984 they said:

It is easy for the established churches of Christendom and other people to criticize Jehovah's Wit nesses because their publications have, at times, stated that certain things could take place on certain dates. But is not such line of action in harmony with Christ's injunction to "keep on the watch"? Is it not far preferable to make some mistakes

because of overeagerness to see God's purposes accomplished. . . ? (WT Dec. 1, 1984, p.1618)

It was only sixteen years earlier that the WT had made the statement condemning others of the same thing. (Awake!, Oct. 8, 1968, p. 23) The May 15, 1976 WT said on page 298:

It is a serious matter to represent God and Christ in one way, then find that our understanding of the major teachings and fundamental doctrines of the scriptures was in error, and then after that, to go back to the very doctrines that, by years of study, we had thoroughly determined to be in error. Christians cannot be vacillating "wishywashy" about such fundamental teachings. What confidence can one put in the sincerity or judgment of such persons?

If they only applied this to themselves! Note the similarities in 1984:

For the secret of rulership is to combine a belief in one's own infallibility with the power to learn from past mistakes. (p. 177)

This is the ultimate desire of all cults: to combine absolute authority and infallibility with the power to learn from false prophecies and bad dealings.

The mother organization wants absolute loyalty at all times. It claims to be a prophet like Ezekiel and Jeremiah (Oct. 1, 1982 WT p.26,27). It claims to be a mouthpiece for Jehovah God, the Creator of the universe, yet refuses to take the responsibility of a prophet. According to Deuteronomy 18:20-22, it is a false prophet when examined in the light of its own historical record. Sometimes the excuse is given, "We aren't false prophets, because we admit our mistakes." Yet, any false prophets who predict an end to the world are going to admit their mistake the day after! How else could they hold on to their followers? Such a response is merely a bluff. The desire of the Governing Body is absolute authority coupled with not having to share the responsibility for any mistakes.

Of course, some Witnesses will respond by saying that The Watchtower is not inspired. In their book, Reasoning From The Scriptures, they point out that that the early Christians had wrong expectations, but were not classified with "false prophets." This is an attempt at saying they themselves are not false prophets; they just have had "wrong expectations." However, they have ignored the very words of their own leaders when they say this. For example, in the trial of Olin Moyle vs. The Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, held in 1943, Fred Franz, (their fourth president) said that Jehovah himself is the editor of the magazine, and that it is set forth directly as God's Word, without any qualification whatsoever (Sec. #25962597 of transcript). Speaking of how Jehovah passes down "truth" to the "faithful and discreet slave class," the July 1, 1943 WT says on page 203:

He (Jehovah) merely uses the "servant" class to publish the interpretation after the Supreme Court by Christ Jesus reveals it.

In referring to the angelic being that Ezekiel saw in Ezek. 43:6, the book Vindication, written by Joseph Rutherford (the second president of the WT Society) says:

"The man" was the heavenly messenger, and this pictures the heavenly messengers or angels of the Lord. No doubt they first hear the instruction which the Lord issues to his remnant and then these invisible messengers pass such instruction on to the remnant. The facts show that the angels of the Lord with him at his temple have been thus rendering service unto the remnant since 1919. (Vol. 3, p.250)

Another interesting thing about Orwell's world is closely related to doublethink, namely that in a successful manipulation of the mind the person is no longer saying the opposite of what he thinks, but he thinks the opposite of what is true. Thus, for instance, if he has surrendered his independence and his integrity completely, if he views himself as a thing which belongs to the state . . . he feels free because there is no longer any awareness of the discrepancy between truth and falsehood. Specifically this applies to ideologies. Just as the Spanish Inquisitors who tortured their prisoners believed that they acted in the name of Christian love, the Party "rejects and vilifies every principle for which the Socialist movement originally stood, and it chooses to do this in the name of socialism." Its content is reversed into its opposite, and yet people believe that the ideology means what it says.

This is the most frightening aspect about the deceptions of the Watchtower. By a clever program of thought control, they have succeeded in not only causing millions to believe that black is white and day is night, but have taught them not to question the matter at all!

Source

http://www.meta-religion.com/New_religious_groups/Articles/Criticism/brainwashing.htm