



STATEMENT DC845

Combating Cult Mind Control

by Steven Hassan

(Park Street Press, 1988)

How can an otherwise intelligent member choose to remain in a cult even after he or she has seen proof that it is false? What enables some sects to keep such a tight grip on their followers? Steven Hassan's *Combating Cult Mind Control* offers amazing insight into these and other puzzling questions. The author probes beyond doctrine to uncover the thought control techniques common to many cults.

Hassan argues that whether leaders of such groups are conscious of it or not, they employ principles of psychological manipulation that originated in Chinese communist re-education camps and that have been refined and perfected in a modern religious context.

After reading *Combating Cult Mind Control* I feel more comfortable with the fact that I myself fell for the Watchtower Society's deceptions and remained in that system for 13 years. I can see now that I was not simply "taking in knowledge" at my "free home Bible study" and at Kingdom Hall, I was also the target of powerful manipulative techniques that can induce a person to believe virtually *any* cultic doctrine, regardless of how bizarre it may be. Hassan shows how the same psychological devices are used to convince Unificationists that Rev. Sun Myung Moon is the second Messiah, and to persuade UFO enthusiasts that contact with extraterrestrial beings will occur on a certain date.

Why do many cults put such a heavy emphasis on proselytizing activity, even by new members? Aside from the numerical growth that this produces, it also has a reinforcing effect on the new devotee: "Research in social psychology has shown that nothing firms up one's beliefs faster than trying to sell them to others" (p. 72).

Why is leaving the sect so unthinkable for the fully indoctrinated member? "In a destructive cult," Hassan says, "there is never a legitimate reason for leaving. Members are told that the only reasons why people leave are weakness, insanity, temptation, brainwashing (by deprogrammers), pride, sin, and so on" (p. 84).

Happily, the author also shows how understanding the mind control techniques that draw people into cults and keep them there can be a key to unlocking the door and setting prisoners free. Without this insight into the mental processes involved, a Christian worker can expend great effort trying to reach trapped individuals with no positive results. Apologetic arguments are important, but those who rely on them solely are only looking at two dimensions of a three-dimensional problem. With a grasp of how the organization hems in people's minds, he or she can see more clearly how to penetrate the barrier with the scriptural and historical facts the cultist needs to hear.

Reared in a conservative Jewish family in New York City, Hassan was drawn into the "Moonies" while in college. He quickly rose to a high position in the Unification Church before being deprogrammed.

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Hassan's perspective appears to be neither evangelical nor antievangelical, per se. He takes aim mainly at "destructive cults" (including ostensibly evangelical groups) in which strong leaders control the lives of followers. He largely ignores those cults in which doctrinal error abounds but there is little evidence of totalistic leadership or organizational structure. Thus, he briefly warns of "dangers of cultism in the New Age movement" (p. 195, emphasis added), singling out channeling (p. 195) and "UFO cultism" (p. 196) — without broadly condemning the New Age movement as a whole.

While the book's lack of an evangelical Christian perspective may disappoint some readers, those who accept it for what it is — a practical psychological discussion of manipulative techniques — will find it useful in understanding and combatting the destructive sects that employ such methods,

— *David A. Reed*