

## Youth Culture and Religion

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Today's youth are searching for a code of moral behavior. In the past, a reference point was generally provided in the home through religious or nonreligious moral principles. Today various institutions outside of the family are left with this responsibility. There is a growing attitude that young individuals must discover their own standards and principles -- often on the basis of immediate gratification of needs and desires. As a result, many individuals are faced with situations which they don't have the emotional maturity to handle. The standard of moral behavior has become increasingly vague and individualistic, resulting in a generation of individuals with no unifying social consciousness, a generation whose individualism has extended into alienation.

### Seeking Absolutes

It is in this climate of frightening alienation that many youth are seeking absolutes, a frame of reference and a code of moral behavior. It is often newer, less established religions which provide this frame of reference, meeting the need in what can be a meaningful way.

In a culture where great value is placed on freedom and a "do-it-now-do-whatever-you-feel-like" atmosphere, concepts like sacrifice and delay of gratification are almost obsolete. At the same time most people would agree that there is a certain mobility, maturity and health about being able to rise above more immediate needs or desires for the sake of a greater future gratification or achievement. Although sacrifice may have a negative connotation, certainly many of us would find occasions in the process of our lives when we give up one desire as an investment in the fulfillment of an even greater desire.

One indicator of a certain level of maturity and mental health is the ability to make a strong commitment to a religion, a philosophy, a job, a marriage, a friend, etc. Our present trend indicates a weakening of marital commitment as reflected in the breakdown of the family unit.

Also, the use of drugs and a "now" orientation has rendered many American youth almost incapable of making commitments to anything. This is not a generation of crusaders! Yet, historically, those people who have been able to make great contributions to mankind have done so only through a strong commitment to their cause.

### Conversion Experience

The needs for a frame of reference, a code of moral behavior, a way out of alienation, sacrificing something, and commitment are being met in a number of ways, one of which is the development of newer religious movements of a less-established or less-formal nature. Because there is a definite commitment to something larger than oneself -- whether it be God, other people or a meaningful philosophy of life, there is a specific accompanying emotional experience. This can be described as a conversion experience which can drastically change one's outlook on life and consequent lifestyle.

To love and to be loved, to find a purpose in life to which one can devote oneself, to gain a new sense of value and self-esteem, to work toward a common individual and collective goal, to find meaningful answers to basic questions of morality and a philosophy of life -- all of these may converge to bring about a dramatic change. Traditionally we have accepted this kind of change as a meaningful and valid experience of faith. Man has basic mental, spiritual and emotional needs. To the extent which he can lose himself in the "good life" or even in less-wholesome activities these needs are artificially compensated

for. We have yet to prove that a meaningful belief in something greater than oneself (God) is not ultimately the answer.

However, religion today, in addition to serving as a supplement to family life, may be called upon to become a full substitute where the family has failed. This is the spiritual atmosphere in which many religious and pseudo religious groups have developed, all of which reflect the common needs of youth today. However, the merits or demerits of each must be considered case by case.

### **Total Commitment**

One religious group, the Unification Church founded by Sun Myung Moon, has recently received wide media coverage. Being linked with other groups generally designated as "cults," it is unfortunate that generalities have been made which in no way concern all of the groups. In fact, probably the only common denominator one would find is that young people have joined a church or cult involving their total commitment.

This in itself is a threat to many of their parents. Some references go so far as to mention the Unification Church in the same sentence as a reference to Charles Manson's family, the S.L.A. [Symbionese Liberation Army], Satanism, witchcraft, Scientology, Children of God, Jesus people, and meditation and yoga groups. In life-style, indoctrination, and philosophy, each group is different. Some of these groups have elements of occultism, atheism, and even violence which would give parents and society real cause for alarm.

The Unification Church is a church, rooted in Judea-Christianity, with a substantial theology (including a seminary). In its organization, its historical development, and the uniqueness of its theology, it is more similar to the Mormon Church than any of the abovementioned groups.

Conversion experience and a change of life-style are real components of the Unification Church and are the very phenomena which are causing people to observe, with a variety of reactions, changes in their friends and relatives. One reaction of a number of parents, fanned by the "deprogrammer" Ted Patrick, who has made a business of their frustrations, has been fear of the changes in their sons and daughters. Before this fear is allowed to mount, the actual causes of it must be carefully ascertained.

Because the Unification Church is a young church drawing membership largely from among idealistic youth, and because it has a definite concern for addressing itself to the broader issues of humankind as well as the meeting of individual needs, there is a strong emphasis on evangelism. In some isolated cases this "evangelical fervor" might be construed as fanaticism. Anyone familiar, however, with the total spectrum of the church internationally, would find in its members all the varieties of human nature and responses, the mellowing out of the older maturer members, and the deep incorporation of a great spiritual philosophy of life.

### **Opportunities for Growth**

I would like to point out several aspects of the life-style and philosophy of the Unification Church which offer a unique opportunity for its members' personal development and spiritual growth.

First of all, the environment of communal living in the church centers is based on a philosophy of sharing, working and worshipping together and offers a wealth of personal relationships. In the teachings of the Unification Church there is a positive, forward-looking attitude toward life, growth and development, and individuation within the context of the group.

There is an extending beyond the other-worldly view of orthodox Christianity, with its hope of future fulfillment, to a more present, this-world hope. To quote from A Prophet Speaks Today:

"We are looking for the ideal man or ideal woman. However, having looked at the people of the whole world, you will come to the conclusion that there is no person who can truly be the model for you. Ultimately speaking, however hard you try to find such a person, you will not find one. You must finally decide that you had better find the perfect model for you in yourself. Then you have started in search of your original self."

Secondly, the international and inter-cultural nature of Unification Church projects offers a unique opportunity for intermingling of cultures centered around a religious frame of reference.

There is an easy flow of give and take in the working, living, and worshipping together, thus setting a precedent for a future world in which continue advancement can lie only in the development of one free world.

Reverend Sun Myung Moon, as the founder of the Unification Church, stresses the virtue of the individual in relation to the whole: "If too much stress is placed on individualism, then collective virtues are lost, love of the nation, brotherhood of the people, family integrity, relationships between parents and children and even the values of the individuals themselves."

### **Brainwashing?**

The recent interest in brainwashing and the concern that brainwashing techniques may be used to change the life-styles or goals of American youth poses an issue which is also presently being related to religion. While we might be concerned about possible coercive methods of persuasion and their harmful effects on individuals and society, we must preserve that freedom which allows people to choose their own constructive goals and life-styles.

The recent publicity of the Unification Church is one of the most striking examples of this controversy. It is most important to clarify some points and present a true picture.

Prior to December 1973, when Ted Patrick\* had parents kidnap their daughter and unsuccessfully tried the first deprogramming of a Unification Church member, parents of young Unification Church members had various reactions to the involvement of their sons and daughters. These reactions ranged from joining the church along with their children to disowning their sons and daughters for choosing a church of a different faith.

However, since that time, Ted Patrick and his associates have been developing a technique of either deceitfully or forcibly taking young people from their chosen religious group, keeping them under guard for as long as 2½ months and systematically repudiating their religious beliefs, discrediting their religious leaders, and ultimately slandering and terrorizing the young people themselves with verbal abuse, obscenities and even physical attack. After this haranguing which may last for 30 hours without sleep, a point is reached where the young person's will may begin to break; at this point he is asked to denounce his religion and take up a crusade against it, believing now that his religious beliefs were all evil, exploitive, and destructive to himself as well as others.

In cases where the deprogrammer has been unsuccessful, he encourages commitment to a hospital for psychiatric evaluation, further demoralizing his subject. As a result of indoctrination and emotional pressure, parents have been led to believe that their youths have been brainwashed and that definite techniques of mind manipulation at the least are justified in order to "rescue their sons and daughters." Several groups have been formed whose sole goal is to encourage other parents to "deprogram" youth and remove them forcibly from this church in the name of re-uniting families.

Only since the kidnapping and forcible deprogramming began, a specific kind of suspicion, and mistrust are developing between some members of the church and their parents. The number and degree have been exaggerated and multiplied by the media.

### **Freedom to Worship**

The above is a short summary of the situation. In closing I would like to clarify several points.

(1) The behavior of Ted Patrick and associates is definitely criminal and he has numerous charges against him. However, groups and individuals are paying highly for his services and promoting this activity.

(2) The freedom of young adults (18-30) to worship as they please is being taken from them forcibly through techniques involving mind manipulation methods and even brainwashing.

(3) Ted Patrick recruits candidates for deprogramming by enticing parents through use of fear, emotionalism, and distortion, insisting that the church's weekend retreats, where a series of religious lectures and discussions are presented, are in themselves brainwashing.

(4) The "deprogramming" of church members has proven to be extremely destructive to their mental stability. They are put through "culture shock," having been involuntarily "stripped" of their beliefs and given another set of values -- a new anti-religion which is exactly the opposite of the one they had.

They move from positive goals to destructive goals and are pressured to join in a crusade against what they formerly stood for.

For the Unification Church, the activities of Ted Patrick and those groups encouraging him are more than frustrating. The reputation of a total church and its members are at stake. But for the public -- for the future of Americans, the effect is far more serious. The charge that religious indoctrination is brainwashing holds many legal implications and the potential loss of religious freedom.

I close with a quote from Newsweek, March 1. "And last week 300 parents contended that Korean zealot Sun Myung Moon had brainwashed their children. But as the experts see it, none of these examples constitutes brainwashing. Says Chicago psychiatrist Marvin Ziporyn: 'Brainwashing is a myth perpetrated on the American public. People can be propagandized and taught new ideas, but that's not brainwashing.'"

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Note: \*Ted Patrick is the originator and organizer of a process called deprogramming. "By all counts deprogramming rated as one of the top religion news stories of the year: members of a wide variety of sects and groups were being kidnapped, as the headlines put it, and held against their will and pressured to renounce their religious beliefs." John McCandlish Phillips, Christian Life, Nov. 1974.