

Apostates and the Legitimation of Repression: Some Historical and Empirical Perspectives on the Cult Controversy*

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Atrocity tales recounted by deprogrammed former members of controversial religions constitute one of the epistemological cornerstones of anti-cult ideology. Although scholars of new religious movements have often criticized these testimonies, empirical research in this area has been minimal. The present study systematically contrasts the attitudes of former members of such groups and finds, as certain social scientists have predicted, a high correlation between negative, cult-stereotypical attitudes and exposure to anti-cult socialization. The paper also sets these findings in the context of a historical analysis that examines the continuities between anti-cult, anti-Catholic, and anti-Mormon atrocity tales.

A phenomenon which can often be observed in the wake of a dynamic social movement is the emergence of a counter-movement which comes into being for the sole purpose of opposing the original movement. Of particular interest for students of the "cult" controversy who would like to set this phenomenon in historical perspective are the anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon movements that emerged in the United States during the nineteenth century. Both of these movements produced extensive bodies of literature which show distinct parallels with anti-cult literature, particularly if one focuses on the subgenre of apostate stories.

For example, the contemporary themes of the "psychological kidnapping" and exploitation of young people by sinister cults are paralleled in anti-Catholic literature by the themes of the "captivity" (Slotkin, 1973:444) and abuse of young females in Catholic nunneries. This Protestant fantasy led to the production of numerous apostate tales authored by "escaped" nuns. These women were sometimes genuine ex-nuns who presented highly embellished accounts of their experiences (e.g., Reed, 1835), or fake ex-nuns who fabricated their stories from whole cloth (e.g., Monk, 1836).

The tales most typically consisted of the recounting of one atrocity after another, held together by a thin strand of narrative. In the more extreme stories, these atrocities ranged from sexual abuse to murder. Maria Monk, for instance, claimed that infants born to nuns (a supposedly frequent event because of regular sexual intercourse with priests) were murdered. Monk recounted observing, for example, two infants who, after being baptized,

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were then taken, one after another, by one of the old nuns, in the presence of us all. She pressed her hand upon the mouth and nose of the first so tight that it could not breathe, and in a few minutes, when the hand was removed, it was dead. She then took the other and treated it in the same way. No sound was heard, and both children were corpses. The greatest indifference was shown by all present during this operation; for all, as I well knew, were long accustomed to such scenes. The little bodies were then taken to the cellar, thrown into the pit as I have mentioned, and covered with a quantity of lime. (Monk, 1836:155-156).

Such apostate tales were designed to evoke public reaction, and they often succeeded in this purpose. For example, very soon after ex-nun Rebecca Reed began to tell her story, a Protestant mob burned her former convent to the ground (Billington, 1938:71). These narratives usually also contained calls for governmental action. At the conclusion of one ex-nun's story, for instance, she pleaded that "the Legislature [should] enact laws for the inspection of Convents . . . Let the prison doors of monasteries and Convents be thrown open to their deluded inmates." (O'Gorman, *circa* 1881:131)

In anti-Mormon literature, polygamous wives played essentially the same role that nuns played in anti-Catholic literature, and apostate (and pseudo-apostate) Mormon females composed similar captivity narratives. However, a certain conceptual problem emerged in Mormon apostate stories: How could one make the case for a state of bondage in a situation where the alleged captive was apparently free to walk out at any time? Nunneries could be portrayed as prisons, but Mormon women were obviously not so confined. Thus, in addition to the "deluded follower" theme used to describe Catholic bondage, one finds the first theory of "hypnotic mind control" in anti-Mormon literature. For example, in the (total fabricated) apostate tale, *Female Life Among the Mormons*, Maria Ward described her "capture" in terms of mesmerism:

At this time I was wholly unacquainted with the doctrine of magnetic influence; but I soon became aware of some unaccountable power exercised over me by my fellow traveller. His presence seemed an irresistible fascination. His glittering eyes were fixed on mine; his breath fanned my cheek; I felt bewildered and intoxicated, and partially lost the sense of consciousness, and the power of motion . . . I became immediately sensible of some unaccountable influence drawing my sympathies toward him. In vain I struggled to break the spell. I was like a fluttering bird before the gaze of a serpent-charmer. (Ward, 1855:12)

Via such pseudo-scientific notions, the captivity motif could be extended to situations where it would normally have been inappropriate except as a metaphor.

The Mormon apostate tales, like the Catholic apostate stories, were loosely connected accountings of one atrocity after another, containing a substantial amount of violence and (within the limits of nineteenth century taste) sexual allusions (Arrington and Haupt, 1968:244). As with the anti-Catholic literature, the Mormon apostate narratives were designed to evoke public outcry and governmental action against the Mormon Church. Their propagandistic purpose was often overtly set forth, even in transparently fictional tales. For example, toward the end of one of the earliest Mormon apostate stories, the author wrote:

[I prayed] that I might be permitted to reach the States, and, by my pen, put forth the horrors I had witnessed, in order to swell the outcry for the speedy destruction of such a hell of vice as the Mormon colony, and do my "little all" towards arresting further horrors. (Bell, 1855:69)

Like sensationalistic anti-Catholic stories, anti-Mormon tales were capable of evoking violent, vigilante-style activity—as is evident in such events as the murder of Joseph Smith—and governmental intervention—as witnessed by such actions and the 1857 invasions of Utah by federal troops. (Arrington & Bitton, 1979).

Contemporary anti-cult literature once again replicates this structure, but here the metaphor of captivity is even more strained: Nuns were behind walls and Mormons were at least geographically isolated, but the stereotypical cult member is out on the streets every day hustling strangers and is thereby fully immersed in the non-cult world. It is thus in the contemporary period that we see the full development of notions of brainwashing techniques that “make captive” the individual’s “information-processing capacities” (Conway et al., 1986:45). Yet, despite the greater sophistication of current theories of mind control, the link with notions from prior eras is still evident, particularly in more popular tales. For example, compare the following with the description of Mormon mesmerism cited earlier:

She took my hand and looked me straight in the eyes. As her wide eyes gazed into mine, I felt myself rapidly losing control, being drawn to her by a strange and frightening force. I had never felt such mysterious power radiate from a human being before . . . touching something within me that undermined thought itself. (Edwards, 1979:60)

Although the stage settings are different, the plot has not changed substantially. Former “cult” members recount the same stories of deception and exploitation (Bromley *et al.*, 1979), which in turn evoke vigilante-style violence in the form of kidnappings of current members of controversial religions (Patrick & Dulack, 1977) and, in some instances, the destruction of “cult” facilities (Terry & Manegold, 1984). Although success in stimulating governmental intervention eluded the anti-cult movement during the height of the cult hysteria in the late seventies, the relatively recent actions of the Internal Revenue Service against unpopular religious groups appear to indicate a belated victory for anti-cult forces in this area.

Despite the variations in surface characteristics, the deep structures of anti-Catholicism, anti-Mormonism, and anti-cultism are strikingly similar. In particular, the role of the apostate and the function of the apostate’s atrocity tale are constant throughout each historical period. One of the inferences which might be drawn from these parallels is that current cult “captivity” tales (which constitute the bulk of anti-cult literature) are, like Catholic and Mormon captivity tales, untrustworthy descriptions of their respective religious groups (Lewis & Bromley, 1987). However, in spite of the force of this inference, it is possible to object that while many Catholic and Mormon apostate stories were obviously fabricated by individuals who had no firsthand knowledge of these religions, most current atrocity tales have been composed by genuine ex-members (Shupe, 1981:231). Thus current apostate narratives, someone taking this counter-position might argue, are far more accurate descriptions of these religious groups than their nineteenth century counterparts.

This counter-position has a certain logic to it until we consider that one of the more prominent characteristics of “cult” apostates which set them apart from their historical predecessors is that most current ex-members who compose atrocity tales have been through some form of deprogramming—some form of intensive counter-indoctrination at the hands of anti-cultists. Although anti-cultists claim that deprogramming (and voluntary deprogramming, which nowadays goes under the name of “exit counseling”) does no more than simply get the individual to start thinking again (Conway & Siegelman, 1979:69), Solomon’s (1981) study of former members of the Unification Church—which contrasted the attitudes of deprogrammees with voluntary defectors—indicated that one of the principal effects of deprogramming was that successfully deprogrammed ex-members (in contrast to non-deprogrammed ex-members) evidenced a marked tendency to describe their membership experi-

ences in terms of negative stereotypes. The existence of this system of counter-indoctrination (which has often, at least in the recent past, been imposed against the will of the indoctrinee) calls into question the accuracy of such ex-members' descriptions of their "cult" life.

The present study proposes to test the hypothesis that the perspective of deprogrammees on their former movements has been decisively (and negatively) shaped by their contact with the anti-cult movement. In the following pages, an attempt will be made to replicate Solomon's study by contrasting the post-involvement attitudes of deprogrammees with the attitudes of voluntary defectors.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

The data for the research presented here were gathered by means of a mail survey conducted in 1984. The sample consisted of 154 ex-members of groups often label "cults": the Unification Church (26%), Yogi Bhajan's 3HO (23%), the Hare Krishna Movement (20%), the Way International (16%), the Divine Light Mission (8%), the Church of Scientology (1%), and miscellaneous groups (5%). Anti-cult groups put me in touch with 72 ex-members, 72% of whom responded, plus 37 snowballs (contacted on reference of other respondents). I was directly or indirectly acquainted with 25 ex-members, 68% of whom responded (plus 4 snowballs). The Unification Church gave me a list of 16 former Unificationists, 62% of whom responded. The lists of former followers/devotees which the Way International and the Hare Krishna Movement passed on to me contained many partial and out of date addresses, so it is difficult to estimate response rates for these sample sources. As well as could be determined, there was no evidence of intentional bias in the lists of ex-members which the anti-cult groups and the new religions passed on to me. The strongest evidence for non-bias was the similarity of the two subsamples. For example, 21% of the former members in the sample from the new religions were coercively deprogrammed, while 26% of the ex-members in the anti-cult sample were coercively deprogrammed. Of greater importance for indicating the non-presence of intentional bias, the patterns of responses relative to mode of exit were comparable.

Forty-five percent of the respondents were females and 55% were males. Median age at recruitment was 21, with a broad range of 14 to 55. Average length of involvement was 4-1/4 years with a range of several weeks to 13 years. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Solomon, 1981; Wright, 1984), the great majority of respondents were Caucasian (all but 3 Blacks). In terms of religious upbringing there were, again consistent with previous research, a disproportionately greater number of subjects from Jewish and Catholic backgrounds: 18% Jewish, 34% Catholic, 39% Protestant, and 10% who either had no religious affiliation or who did not respond to the item. At the time they joined, 4% had some kind of advanced degree, 26% had completed college, 41% had at least some college, 23% had completed high school, and 6% had not completed high school. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents left voluntarily and were not exposed to any form of anti-cult counseling, 19% voluntarily experienced some form of anti-cult counseling, and 23% were coercively deprogrammed.

FINDINGS

These latter three subdivisions, which will be designated as "no exit counseling" (NEC), "voluntary exit counseling" (VEC), and "involuntary exit counseling" (IEC), constituted three distinct "treatment groups"—three clearly distinguishable levels of exposure to the

socializing influence of the anti-cult movement. While there are, of course, other factors involved in anti-cult socialization, the intensity of the counseling experience appeared to be the primary operant factor. (A more detailed rationale for this particular categorization can be found in Lewis, 1986.)

Four questionnaire items measured respondents' attitudes toward their former movements. These items asked respondents to evaluate the extent to which they felt that (1) they had been recruited deceptively, (2) they had been "brainwashed," (3) their leader was insincere, and (4) the group's beliefs were spurious; for example:

Evaluate the doctrine/ideas/world view of your former group.

1. Completely true
2. More true than false
3. More false than true
4. Completely false

The response to each of these measures were treated as interval data for the purpose of analysis. All four attitude measures were found to be highly correlated with the degree of one's exposure to anti-cult counseling (which was also treated as a variable by assigning values to each of the treatment groups; NEC = 1, VEC = 2, and IEC = 3). The correlation coefficient (r) for deceptive recruitment was .392, for brainwashing .587, for leadership insincerity .407, and for spurious world view .551—all significant at the .001 level.

Three other variables which might possibly have been factors in shaping attitudes were computed as controls: (1) length of membership, (2) age at recruitment, and (3) time between exit and the point when they completed the questionnaire. None of these calculations yielded significant correlations.

The four forced-choice items were replicated elsewhere in the survey instrument by open-ended questions that requested essentially the same information. For example, the open-ended question corresponding to the multiple-choice item cited above was:

How would you describe and/or evaluate the doctrine/ideas/world view of your former group?

Consistent with the quantitative data, qualitative expressions of post-involvement attitudes were found to vary according to the extent of one's anti-cult socialization: Ex-members who had experienced coercive deprogramming tended to express negative, stereotyped attitudes; voluntary defectors who had no links with anti-cultists tended to feel ambivalent or positive about their former movements; and the attitudes of respondents who were not kidnapped but who had experienced some form of voluntary counseling at the hands of anti-cultists tended to lie somewhere in between.

What follows is an informal, qualitative analysis of some exemplary sample responses, which have been selected according to treatment group and according to the four cult-stereotypical attitudes mentioned above. The pattern of responses to each of the four attitudes will be discussed in turn.

1. Recruitment

IEC-At the time of recruitment there were unethical techniques of coercion being utilized against me.

VEC-I was not lied to. However, I didn't really know what I was getting into.

NEC-The people were very sincere.

These three responses reflect reasonably accurately the overall pattern of post-involvement attitudes with respect to the three treatment groups. Voluntary apostates tended to discount the idea of deceptive recruitment unless they had joined the Unification Church via the Oakland Family's well-known recruiting operation. For instance, one such voluntary defector wrote that,

I did not know it was the Unification Church until four weeks after meeting church members in San Francisco.

The presence of a number of such subjects in both the NEC and VEC groups explains why the correlation between the deceptive recruitment attitude and the degree of exit counseling was somewhat lower than for the other three attitudes. Many deprogrammees tended to draw on mind control type explanations to explain their recruitment, but other deprogrammees made use of less exotic notions of deception to describe their recruitment experience such as, "I was lied to." Respondents in the second (VEC) group sometimes claimed that they had been tricked into joining, but more often they expressed the kind of mixed evaluation which is evident in the intermediate response cited above.

2. *Brainwashing*

IEC-I was hypnotized, also performed self-hypnosis to block out my old self, any doubts.

VEC-I was exposed to only one doctrine, and not encouraged to question or doubt.

NEC-Someone who says "I was brainwashed" has little self-esteem and/or sense of who they are.

Here once again, the general pattern of response was clear-cut. Predictably, deprogrammees claimed to have been brainwashed while voluntary defectors did not. In about a dozen cases, deprogrammees wrote something like, "Yes, I was brainwashed. Refer to Robert Lifton's book, chapter 22." Individuals in the intermediate group who said they had been brainwashed tended to describe "brainwashing" more in terms of indoctrination into a rigid, narrow belief-system than as some type of hypnosis. Responses from voluntary defectors ranged from opinions such as the one cited above, to remarks about intense peer-group pressure. A few of the individuals in the NEC group turned the question back on itself with responses like:

My brain was really dirty and needed a good washing.

3. *Leader*

IEC-He has psychologically "raped" or taken advantage of thousands of people. I would like to see him dead.

VEC-I think he's sincere, but [his sincerity] gives him an excuse to use people and manipulate because he believes in himself.

NEC-A spiritual teacher of considerable merit and great sincerity, somewhat limited by his own culture, and especially by many of his close disciples.

With respect to sincerity or insincerity of the leadership, the same, predictable spectrum of attitudes was found. The lower (relatively speaking) correlation for this item appeared to be partially the result of certain respondents in the exit counseled groups who evaluated their former leader as "sincere but deluded." Also, the evaluation of the leader by voluntary defectors tended to be far more ambivalent than their evaluation of such claims as "brainwashing" because difficulties or disenchantment with the leadership often figured in apostates' decisions to leave their movements. An alternative (or, better, a complementary) explanation for this ambivalence among voluntary defectors is that, for whatever reason one leaves a movement, there is a natural propensity to attribute the cause of defection to problems within the movement rather than to assume the entire burden of responsibility oneself. The leadership, as the most concrete embodiment of the movement, is one of the more likely targets of self-justifying criticisms. Thus voluntary defectors often made such remarks as, "I think he started out sincere, but became corrupted." In a movement such as ISKCON, whose founder died in the late seventies, this same pattern often worked itself out as a tendency to speak well of the founder while criticizing the current leadership:

[Prabhupad was as] great and as sincere as they come. After my Guru's departing from this mortal plane, some somewhat greedy disciples of his "self-appointed" themselves in a manner too pushy and political for my taste!

4. *World view*

IEC-The doctrine states that the world is a miserable prison and people are simply pigs, dogs, camels, and asses in human form. They must be converted or killed.

VEC-There is much truth in the philosophy which I still believe in. There is also much I don't believe in.

NEC-Pure, just not represented in a perfectly pure way by neophyte practitioners.

Deprogrammees described their former group's ideology as being fanatical, twisted, fabricated by the founder, and the like. Individuals in the VEC group, although they sometimes resorted to the same kind of stereotyped, anti-cult evaluations, often perceived that at least some portion of their former belief-system overlapped their present belief-system, and thus tended to be less harsh in their criticisms than deprogrammées. Voluntary defectors (NEC group) tended to express positive or ambivalent attitudes toward their former group's belief-system. Like their attitude toward the movement's leadership, voluntary defectors' evaluation of the ideology tended to be critical at points. In this regard, I especially noted that apostates from groups with strong ascetical codes had adjusted their beliefs to become congruent with their new lifestyle. Despite these modifications, it was more often the case than not that voluntary defectors retained large portions of their former belief-system.

The questionnaire also contained forced-choice and open-ended items which solicited ex-members' evaluations of the anti-cult movement. Before shifting to the discussion section of the paper, it might be instructive to glance at the pattern of response to these items because, if

the interpretation of the data presented thus far has been correct, it should be possible to find a parallel but inverted pattern of attitudes toward anti-cultism.

5. *Anti-cult movement*

IEC-It warns people of the dynamics of cults and how they use unethical tactics.

VEC-The educational part is good. I think the deprogramming part has gotten out of hand.

NEC-Ignorant, closed-minded people who are unable to accept any ideas except their own.

The pattern was, as predicted, an inverted mirror image of ex-members' attitudes toward their former movements, in the sense that respondents at either end of the spectrum tended to express strong negative or positive evaluations, whereas subjects in the intermediate group tended to have mixed opinions ($r = .499$). There were also a number of people in each treatment group (though proportionally more in the NEC group) who described the anti-cult movement as an "anti-cult cult"; to cite an example:

The anti-cult movement appears to me to be a group of self-righteous do-gooders who have their own cult going on. They appear to have just as much, if not more so, of a "savior complex" as Moon, Wierwille, or any other charismatic religious leader.

As is evident in this particular response, ex-members sometimes held negative attitudes toward both the anti-cult movement and their former religious group.

DISCUSSION

If we follow certain approaches found in the study of deviance, the labeling and persecution of a minority can be understood as being more of a response to the majority culture's anxieties about its own self-identity and values than as a response to tangible threats from the minority group. In other words, a society with doubts about its own "sense of self" (particularly a society without a pressing external threat) will find a subcommunity which it can perceive as the larger community's "deviant and criminal opposite," and then persecute the subcommunity "as a means of ritually reaffirming the group's problematical values and collective purposes" (Bergesen, 1984:vii). The deviant group is forced to play a self-clarifying role for the dominant society; the minority becomes a screen onto which the dominant society projects an inverted image of itself.

Because the image of the minority group is more of a projected "otherness" than an empirical "otherness," one would expect to find a marked tendency on the part of "projectors" to blur the distinctions between various groups of "projectees." In other words, the empirical diversity should be obscured beneath a unitary projection (Gilman, 1985: 21). This tendency is not difficult to document. One nineteenth century figure asserted, for example, that "Brigham Young 'out-popes the Roman' and described the Mormon hierarchy as being similar to the Catholic" (Davis, 1960:207). Even racial otherness seemed to blend rather easily with religious otherness in the minds of certain "mainstream" Americans, as is clear in the statement of one anti-Mormon who asserted that, "The Lord intends that WHITE

FOLKS, and not Mormons shall possess that goodly land” (cited in Bunker and Bitton, 1983:86). And, to shift forward into the contemporary period for one or more example, archdeprogrammer Ted Patrick has asserted, regarding the diversity among the movements he attacks, that,

You name 'em. Hare Krishna. The Divine Light Mission. Guru Maharaj Ji. Brother Julius. Love Israel. The Children of God. Not a brown penny's worth of difference between any one of 'em. (Patrick and Dulack, 1977:11)

One of the results of this tendency to blur distinctions is that common sets of accusations are leveled against various groups which are empirically quite different. The four themes from anti-cult ideology that we found reflected in the attitudes of deprogrammed ex-members are examples of such common themes. Furthermore, if we turn back in time, it is not difficult to find parallel themes in anti-Catholicism and anti-Mormonism: Joseph Smith was often accused of fabricating the Mormon religion for the purpose of personal gain (e.g., Belisle, 1855); the Catholic confessional was frequently described as a mind control device (e.g., Monk, 1836); both Mormons and Catholics were accused of deceptively recruiting or kidnapping young Gentile/Protestant girls (e.g., Belisle, 1855; Frothingham, 1854); and so forth. Such themes seem to constitute part of a common “deep structure” through which the dominant social group perceives all forms of religious otherness (Cox, 1978a; Cox 1978b). But why, one might ask, should the same themes resurface again and again?

When the minority group forced to play the role of deviant is a religious movement, one of the obvious points of contrast with the dominant society is in the area of competing belief-systems. Deviant beliefs are “obviously” false—if not downright irrational—and can easily be demonstrated as such to the satisfaction of individuals securely enmeshed in the cognitive perspective of the dominant culture. But this “obvious” spuriousness gives rise to certain other problems, such as, Where did such weird ideas come from in the first place? The easiest solution to this quandary is to accuse the “cult” leader of having cynically concocted a spurious belief-system. This approach also enables one to explain the genesis of the movement as a whole: The entire thing was dreamed up by the leader for the purpose of gaining wealth and power. The other two accusations arise naturally out of this picture: Why would anyone ever become part of such a nutty movement? It must be because they were recruited deceptively. And why, once they were actually inside the group and could see what it “really” was, did they not leave immediately? It must be because they were brainwashed. These four themes thus fit together into a neat package which saves us from having to take seriously the vision of reality presented by alternative religious movements. These themes also serve to legitimate the repression of such groups.

The apostate fits into this structure as its epistemological foundation. In other words, the testimony of ex-members who have “actually been there,” and who have supposedly witnessed all of the horrors about which outsiders can only fantasize, provide the stereotype with its most important source of empirical evidence. What the data presented earlier in this paper indicated was that, with respect to the present controversy, the apostates who are paraded before the public by the anti-cult movement have been carefully selected out of a larger pool of possible ex-members. While few if any apostates are ever completely objective about their former movements, ex-members who have been intensively “counseled” by anti-cultists should be especially suspect as being less than neutral witnesses.

By utilizing this particular subset of ex-members, the anti-cult movement involves itself in a circular proof process. In other words, rather than forming generalizations based on a broad range of data, the anti-cult movement generates its own data set by imposing an *a priori* ideology on a select number of individual cases (deprogrammees), and then “discovers”

evidence for its ideology in the testimony of these same individuals. It is this particular subset of former members on which anti-cultists depend for the ultimate proof of their accusations. While coercive deprogramming has been on the wane for some time, various forms of voluntary exit counseling have arisen to take its place. Thus the anti-cult movement continues to be able to provide itself with a supply of ex-members ready to support its peculiar point of view.

In addition to shaping public opinion by recounting stereotyped atrocity tales, deprogrammees and exit counseled former members feed into the cult controversy in a number of other ways: At the level of basic research, these former members constitute the samples for pseudo-empirical studies designed to substantiate such claims as that "cult" brainwashing techniques induce mental illness in their members (Conway and Siegelman, 1982) and that child abuse is widespread in alternative religious groups (Gaines *et al.*, 1984). In a variety of different court battles, ex-members recruited by anti-cultists provide negative testimony against their former movements, such as in child custody cases where one of the parents is a "cult" member (Driscoll, 1983) and in cases where governmental agencies need evidence for "cult" violations of various government regulations (*Cult Observer*, 1986). Of increasing importance is the more direct deployment of ex-members in civil suits against their former movements (*Sacramento Bee*, 1985). This latter tactic appears to be the most effective weapon yet devised for inflicting crippling damage on controversial religious groups.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While few people would be prepared to argue that there is nothing to be criticized in various new movements, a careful consideration of the history of religious conflict should cause us to hesitate before accepting the more extreme accusations proffered by anti-cultists. The hypothetical response that the present controversy is categorically different from previous religious controversies is a difficult one to support, especially when one examines the continuities in overall patterns of conflict and the continuities in specific accusations from one era to another. Even the ideas of hypnotic techniques of mind control and of mental illnesses caused by "cult" membership—ideas that appear initially to be unique to twentieth century criticisms of new religious movements—have their nineteenth century parallels in such notions as Mormon mesmerism (Bunker & Bitton, 1975) and the psychological disorder of "religious insanity" (Bainbridge, 1984).

The preceding pages focused on the role of the apostate and on the recurrent themes in the apostate's atrocity tale. In the central section of the paper data were presented which indicated that contemporary apostates, because of the intensive counter-indoctrination to which they have been subjected, are probably no more reliable as witnesses than the Rebecca Theresa Reeds and Ann Eliza Youngs of the last century. Finally, it was argued that present-day apostate stories perform one of the same functions as their nineteenth century predecessors, which is to legitimate the persecution of marginal religious movements.

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