The Place of Mind Control in the Cult Recovery Process

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Denver Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Philosophy of Religion

by

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November, 2000

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.

The purpose of this paper is to critically examine both the mind control (thought reform) model and the free will (conversion) model of cult involvement. The thought reform model is represented by the Wellspring Retreat and Resource Center (Wellspring/Paul Martin). The conversion model is exemplified by Bob and Gretchen Passantino. This paper tests the philosophical and theological adequacy of these two models and identifies their strengths and weaknesses. It then suggests and defends an alternative hypothesis, the family systems model, regarding the existence of mind control and its role in cultic influence.

Mind control denotes a set of techniques used *manipulatively* to *unethically* influence how a person thinks, feels, and acts, with the *purpose of creating a detrimental dependancy* upon another.[1] Synonymous terms include: coercive persuasion, undue influence, and thought reform.

By cult is meant a group that holds to beliefs or practices that clearly contradict the Bible in many of its central teachings, while promoting a sinful form of dependency on others, especially on its leader(s). A synonymous term is a totalist organization. The contention of the thought reform model is not only that mind control exists, but also that it is a foundational factor in cultic involvement. The conversion model claims that mind

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[1] The primary difference between the way this writer uses the term mind control and those typically holding a thought reform position is that they attribute more influential capacity to those who exercise the techniques associated with the theory. Additionally, this writer views mind control as a useful descriptive term illustrating much sinfully manipulative behavior, yet it is only sufficiently understood in a context of a biblical world view of the family s influence. This is described in more detail in chapter four.

control does not exist and is therefore not a factor in cultic influence. The family systems model that this paper supports believes mind control exists, but that it is only one of several factors in a larger system of influence significant for cultic involvement.

In order to evaluate these three models, this paper variously applied a three-fold test for determining what is true.[2] This test includes examining the internal consistency or the level of cogent reasoning, assessing the relevant empirical data to account for the adequacy of the view and examining the degree of existential viability in utilizing the model.

Chapter one presents the inherent qualifications and limitations of this study and summarizes the historical background of mind control in the original research of Robert Lifton.[3] Chapter two explains and evaluates the conversion model of cult involvement, showing both its strengths and weaknesses. Chapter three explains and evaluates the thought reform model of cult involvement. Chapter four presents, illustrates, and defends an alternative family systems model of cultic involvement that more coherently explains the level of influence and role of mind control in the cult recovery process.

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[2] Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity s Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1976), 176-285.

[3] Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: The Study of Brainwashing in China* (Chapel Hill, Ill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

Chapter One   A Brief History of Mind Control

This chapter provides a brief historic overview of the theory of mind control as described by the father of modern day mind control research, Robert Lifton. It also seeks to develop an informed and responsible perspective on this important topic.

One of the greatest limitations when considering the topic of mind control is the incredible depth and range of emotion that it draws from within a person. Consider the devastating effect upon the family and friends of the 900 people who died at the Peoples Temple or the eighty Branch Davidians who perished in the Waco disaster or Kim Miller s Concerned Christians group that recently disappeared from Denver without any warning to relatives and friends. Having strong emotive responses to the effects of cults are important, but such traumatic events can easily cloud the rational thought process when the topic of mind control is raised.

Closely coupled with the emotive issues raised by the involvement of family and friends is the fact that many who work with those affected by cults are themselves ex-cult members with some unresolved problems of their own. The existential experiences of these former cult members can provide a great deal of emotive support and practical assistance. However, these same ex-cult members also can bring their own unresolved psychological and social issues, as well as false beliefs to the recovery effort, resulting in unhelpful distortion or simply false suppositions and expectations.

The problems associated with those affected by cults are compounded by the difficulty of communicating truth claims in a culture that has given itself over to a postmodernist relativism. The postmodernist view has very little concern for objective

reality, instead subjectively imposing merely felt needs of a community, (*i.e.,* image control, propaganda, and/or political posturing) as the epistemic standard. Dr. Douglas Groothuis accurately points out that much of our culture has given up the classical correspondence view of truth.[1] The correspondence view of truth holds that propositions claimed to be true must correspond to relevant empirical data or actual states of affairs in the external world. Those involved in the arena of cult recovery can easily be affected by this epistemological shift away from objectivity, so making consistent truth claims regarding mind control difficult. It should also be noted that for the Christian the external world includes the inscripturated revelation of God s Word given in history.

Of those involved in cult recovery, different definitions of what constitutes a cult or new religious movement or for that matter, any other basic descriptive term or concept can significantly effect this study. For instance, among those discussing the question of mind control, there have been myriad definitions of mind control and brainwashing. Some consider these terms synonymous while others do not. Some define these terms in an all-or-nothing absolutist sense, while others understand the terms in a more relative or conditional sense. This can easily lead to accusations of misrepresentation and limit the amount of productive cooperation among those with a similar passion for assisting those effected by cults.

Cooperation and maintenance of a productive dialogue is additionally exasperated by differences of opinion concerning the role of religious experience within cult recovery.

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[1] Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay, Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 9-110.

Some view the concept of mind control as incompatible with the traditional philosophical and Christian view of man as a responsible moral agent. [2] Others, however, would not entirely disjoin the Judaeo/Christian worldview from the theory of mind control, instead insisting that eventually ex-cultists should view their experience within a consistently biblical world view as an essential part of full recovery from a cult.

There are also difficulties in acquiring information on various groups, thus hindering definitive conclusions concerning mind control. While it would be helpful to interview cultists before, during, and after their cult involvement, this seldom occurs. Instead, Steven Hassan says, the self-reports from members of groups whose willingness to deceive is well documented [and] can be untrustworthy. [3] This leaves researchers with less-than-optimal conditions and data from which to evaluate this subject of mind control.

Because of the limitations in addressing trauma, cultural postmodernism, differences in defining terms and concepts, differing religious assumptions, and difficulties in gathering accurate and unbiased information, one must approach this topic with critical care, and above all, with humility. To assist in combating the inherent limitations of this study, it is helpful to begin with the historic picture of mind control found in the early research of Robert J. Lifton.

Lifton s pioneer research on this topic has made him one of the first to popularize the concept of mind control. As an Air Force psychiatrist who later became an associate

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[2] Steven Hassan, Combatting Cult Mind Control (Rochester, Vt.: Park Street Press, 1988), 43.

[3] Michael Langone, *Recovery From Cults* (New York: Norton. 1995), 35.

professor of psychiatry at Yale University, Lifton studied the subject of mind control

(thought reform) by conducting research in Hong Kong from 1954-1955, with ex-

prisoners of war. With the assistance of two research grants, he spent seventeen months

in psychiatric investigation. His research involved multiple in-depth interviews with forty

research subjects, fifteen Chinese, and twenty-five Westerners, whose personal

experiences as Korean War prisoners of war were significantly affected by the Chinese

communists brainwashing attempts. As a direct result of this research, Lifton

concluded that mind control (thought reform) consists of two basic elements:

confession, the exposure and renunciation of past and present evil ; and *re-education*, the

remaking of a man [4] in the image of the manipulator. He states that these two elements

bring on a series of pressures and appeals intellectual, emotional, and physical aimed

at social control and individual change. [5]

According to Lifton, there are eight psychological interactive themes that

contribute to the formation of thought reform (mind control or as some have described it,

ideological totalism). These eight key themes follow,

1) Milieu Control

Lifton writes:

The most basic feature of the thought reform environment, the psychological
current upon which all else depends is the control of human communication.
Through this milieu control the totalist (thought reform) environment seeks to

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[4] Robert J. Lifton, Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism, A Study of Brainwashing in China (Chapel Hill N.C.: University of North Carolina, 1989), 5.

[5] Ibid., 5.

establish domain over not only the individual s communication with the outside (all that he sees, and hears, reads and writes, experiences, and expresses), but also in its penetration of his inner life over what we may speak of as his communication with himself.[6]

When Don Beck, an associate of this writer in counter-cult ministry, was a member of the Tony and Susan Alamo Foundation, a communal Bible-based cult,[7] he had severe limitations placed upon him. The books he read, the music he listened to, and access to radio and television where tightly restricted. The leadership determined with whom he could and could not have personal relationships. While his was perhaps a more extreme example because it was experienced in a communal group, others have experienced similar controls in groups that are non-communal.

When the writer of this thesis was involved in another Totalist Aberrant Christian Organization (TACO),[8] called Bethel Christian Fellowship (BCF), he experienced similar intense levels of control even while 4,000 or more miles away when in the military. There were letters and tapes received from the group s leader almost daily for the fifteen months he was stationed in Landstuhl, Germany. These communications all carried the same emphases: stay out of corrupt churches (referring to all those outside of BCF), start a new extension of Bethel if necessary for immediate fellowship, and read only books that

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[6] Ibid., 420-422.

[7] By Bible-based, this writer means the Bible is erroneously drawn from for the purpose of control and manipulation; not that the Bible promotes or encourages the behavior or beliefs of the group.

[8] TACO is a particular type of cult that claims authorization by Christ and the Bible but neglects or distorts several of the basic teachings or practices of the historic orthodox Christian church. This acronym is commonly used in thought reform literature and is used synonymously with Bible-based cult.

conform to the teachings of Bethel. He was strongly encouraged to write and send cassette tapes to the leaders of BCF asking their interpretation of his experiences while in Germany. The net effect, coupled with many other factors, was a sustained level of control. When he was offered a position in an officers candidate school that would have required another three years of military service, most of which would have been spent in Germany, he declined the advancement and returned to Denver for the comfort and familiarity of BCF.

The milieu of TACOs severely limited both Don Beck and this writer. Reality-based testing of their environment was limited. The prevention of rational criticism and analysis of their situation posed a serious threat to their personal autonomy (particularly when combined with other behavioral conditions found within their groups) and profoundly limited their quest for truth.

2) Mystical Manipulation.

The mind controller arranges another person s environment with the intent of stimulating specific patterns of behavior and emotion. With a forced form of spontaneity, one is encouraged to seek a sense of a higher purpose to be directly involved in. One is asked to accept these manipulations on a basis of ultimate trust (or faith): like a child in the arms of its mother. [9] The result is an illusion of confidence which is not closely examined.

On one occasion, indicative of many, the leader of Bethel had a revelation that involved leaving his wife of seven years and marrying another member s wife (who

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[9] Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism.,* 422-423.

happened to be twenty years younger). He couldn t explain how God had given him such a vision, as it appeared so contrary to Scripture, so the members had to trust that there *had* to be a very special spiritual reason, for God to make such a seemingly unbiblical demand of his servant. The woman whom he was to eventually marry had a similar revelation after reading the story of Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 2-4).[10] The members of the church were then told that they too could enter into this new work of God by accepting this revelation by faith.   Pressure was applied to members to not only tacitly accept this special vision given by God, but to proactively promote the revelation as being sent by God.

Manipulative actions of this type often takes the form of reinterpreting events in one s life to conform to the wishes of the leader(s) of the group. This behavior significantly reinforces a high level of trust and dependence which is not legitimately warranted.

3) Demand for Purity.

Cult leaders assume that all aspects of the world can be unequivocally divided into clearly defined categories of the completely good versus that which is entirely evil. The expectation of the group is that members will become personally responsible for rooting out evil and identifying clearly all that is supremely good. Abundant guilt and shame are then used to bring about a personal commitment to the ideological values of those who are manipulating the environment.

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[10] Unless otherwise noted, all references and quotations from the Bible refer to the *New International Version.*

A cult member might be told to pray all night for the leader of a group who is having some difficulty, and when the member objects because of work the following day that requires his full cognitive attention, he is asked, What is more important, spiritual victory or your sleep? In this situation the milieu control limits critical questioning and the mystical manipulation justifies the truth of the group s rules.

4) The Cult of Confession.

An obsession with the need for personal confession conforming to the values of those exercising control of the group can become cultic. This type of manipulation can take place through verbal, written, or other behavioral requirements that promote the interests of the controller(s). This type of confession does not include the generally accepted expression of wrong doing or thinking, but an exploitative insistence of admission to that which is either totally untrue or highly exaggerated. According to Lifton, it is an act of symbolic self-surrender, the expression of the merging of individual and environment. [11]

Examples of this cultic form of confession can often be found in public declarations of sin that inappropriately involve the whole membership. Personal boundaries are expressly violated in such inappropriate disclosure. Doctors Henry Cloud and John Townsend rightfully point out:

> Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership.
> Knowing what I am to own and take responsibility for gives me freedom.

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[11] Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism,* 425.

If I know where my yard begins and ends, I am free to do with it what I like. Taking responsibility for my life opens up many different options. However, if I do not own my life, my choices and options become very limited.[12]

With inappropriate self-flagellation comes a serious collapse in normal and healthy personal boundaries regarding one s inner self. What results then is a morbid preoccupation with self-examination and a revision of one s basic identity. Healthy forms of confession should be truthful and appropriate, not exaggerated, and what results is genuine personal healing of relationships rather than authority being used as a club of submission to bring conformity to the whims of those in leadership.

5) Sacred Science.

This interactive theme involves an aura of sacredness around the group s basic dogma, holding it out as an ultimate moral vision for the ordering of human existence [13] that is to be venerated and unquestioned. These assumptions held by the group can be conveyed either directly or indirectly and may be presented as divine. All thoughts and actions are put through an interpretational grid composed of the sacred science (beliefs or dogma) of the group. Authentic self-expression and creative development are tightly controlled.

Typically, this characteristic quality of thought reform involves a very ethnocentric view of the groups teachings, which can be found in such groups as a local Denver TACO called Good Ground. In the course of several months of contact, a long-term member of

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[12] Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No to Take Control of Your Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1992), 29.

[13] Lifton*, Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism,* 427.

this group named Bruce repeatedly told this writer that his leader s method of renewing the mind, was far superior to any other Christian s perspective. Additionally, other characteristics consistently found within this group, as illustrated by Bruce, concern the leader s lack of formal Bible training and his reputation of controlling and manipulating people. Mystical manipulation, in the form of personal revelations given by the leader and others that supported him gave a sense of credibility to this group s doctrine.

The nature of this control has led Bruce to divorce his wife of thirteen years after she identified the group as cultic. This was brought on in large part because he allowed his epistemic grid to be tightly controlled by the requirements of the group.

6) Loading the Language.

In totalist organizations there exists extensive use of thought-stopping cliches. Blatantly oversimplified terms and concepts are used to condense otherwise complex human questions or problems. The language typically is repetitiously centered on all-encompassing jargon, prematurely abstract, highly categorical, relentlessly judging, and to anyone but its most devoted advocate, deadly dull. [14] To some degree, normal cultural relationships depend on this loading of the language to describe the common events of life. What makes this social theme a contributor to the environment of mind control is the pervasiveness of its presence and uniquely utilitarian quality within the group in question.

Groups that practice this behavior give simple labels (such as fall-away, reprobate, or simply an unbeliever) to those that leave such groups. An appeal to

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[14] Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism,* 429.

these labels replaces the answering of criticism and questions. In the group that this writer

came out of in 1984, there was a practice of labeling undesirable behaviors or beliefs as

being soulish, rather than spiritual. [15] Once this disparaging label was attached to the

person, then all discussion ceased and the message to the member was *Don t think*, just

pretend everything is okay; just *comply with* the system.

7) Subordination of Person to Doctrine.

By this, Lifton means the subservience of human experience to the demands of

doctrine. The goal of the thought reform system is to reshape the individual to the

particular needs or desires of the group s orthodoxy. Noteworthy is Lifton s claim that

> The underlying assumption is that the doctrine   including its mythological
> elements   is ultimately more valid, true, and real than is any aspect of actual
> human character or human experience.[16]

When this technique is applied to human experience, one s interpretation of reality is

shaped by the doctrine held by the group with little or no consideration given to the

thoughts, background, or temperament of the individual member.

In a cult group this can take place with the unspoken message,   You don t

count   your feelings, your thoughts, your goals, who you are   are not as important as

the beliefs of this group or system.   In Christian Science, even pain is an illusion. Even

though you may have a headache, you cannot acknowledge it; you must *pretend*

otherwise.

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[15] Watchman Nee, *The Latent Power of the Soul,* trans., (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1972).

[16] Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism,* 431.

8) Dispensing of Existence.

This social theme involves the devaluation of a person to a class of nearly non-being.   People are placed in one of only two categories, either acknowledged as people of value (those that agree with and live according to the beliefs of the group) or those that have no genuine worth. The only way a person can move from a devalued status to one of significance is to conform to the values and beliefs of the totalist organization. As a person makes the transition from being of no worth to being valued, he/she is at the same time continually reminded that whatever worth is imputed by the organization can be easily taken away, and the process can quickly begin all over again at any time. Relationships with the group can then easily take on a roller-coaster quality that undermines one s long-term sense of safety and security.

Applying this condition of mind control to the cult experience, Lifton states:

Those who have not seen the light and embraced the truth are wedded to evil, tainted, and therefore in some sense, usually metaphorical, lack the right to exist. That is one reason why a cult member threatened with being cast into outer darkness may experience a fear of extinction or collapse. [17]

It is not difficult to see some parallels in the application of behavioral characteristics that Lifton identified in POWs to the experience of those in today s cults. It is therefore not surprising that those holding a thought reform perspective of involvement, as seen in chapter three, draw heavily from these behavioral conditions.

Lifton holds that the more consistently the group expresses these eight

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[17] Robert J. Lifton, Cult Formation. Reprinted in AFF News 2, no 5 (1996) from *The Harvard Mental Health Letter* 7, no 8 (February 1981). Lifton applies these conditions to current day cults in this article.

psychological themes and the more the totalist leader(s) manipulates these devices to change people, the greater it s resemblance to mind control (thought reform). Existence within the totalist organization (those with thought reform characteristics) depends upon creed (I believe, therefore I am), upon submission (I obey, therefore I am), and beyond these, upon a sense of total merger with the ideological movement. [18] While these claims convey a rather forceful quality, Lifton does place some limitations on his findings.

Lifton acknowledges the limitation of even the most stringent of totalist environments by saying that,

> ...no milieu ever achieves complete totalism, and many relatively moderate environments show some signs of it. Moreover, totalism tends to be recurrent rather than continuous. [19]

The emphasis is on uncritical submission to human authority and tradition. Throughout the report of his findings, Lifton carefully qualifies both his research methodology and resulting conclusions concerning mind control. This also is repeatedly seen in Lifton s comments on his research methodology. [20]

Not all of Lifton s eight psychological themes that contribute to mind control are found with clarity in every variation of the mind control model. [21] What is consistent with

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[18] Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 434-435.

[19] Ibid., 435.

[20] Ibid., xi-xiii.

[21] Margaret Singer, Ph.D., is emeritus adjunct professor of the Department of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley. For more than fifty years as a clinical psychologist, her field of interest has been how people influence one another and also has involved the study of cults. She reduces these eight conditions to six of her own. Singer credits Lifton s model of thought reform as representative of her views on mind control. See Singer s Cults in *our Midst*, chapter 3.

those holding to a thought reform model, however, is the identification of mind control whenever several of these themes of psychological manipulation are present. Lifton and others place most, if not all, of the culpability squarely on the shoulders of those exerting thought reform pressures.

Especially in respect to his notion of culpability, one might begin to question the value of Lifton s research and conclusions as applied to cults. Some of the less convincing elements of his conclusions can be generally identified:

1) The secular neo-Freudian[22] influence coupled with his admittedly liberal bias toward the philosophy of Albert Camus[23] should cause one to question Lifton s assumptions that fail adequately to address human nature and its level of depravity. This writer could find nowhere in Lifton s writings any hint of a biblical view of the total depravity of humankind (Rom. 1-3). This should cause one to question some of his conclusions regarding the desire and ability of people to resist captors such as those of the POWs. There may be, therefore, some overstatement in the level of victimization of prisoners and others included in his research. Describing how the victim was manipulated, abused, deceived, lied to etc., is helpful in understanding the controlling nature of the captors. But, Lifton s secular view of human nature is limited in explaining *why it happened on purely behavioral grounds,* providing us with only a victimization model as

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[22] Lifton readily acknowledges the significant influence of Erik Erickson (a well-known secular neo-Freudian psychologist), on his model of mind control.

[23] Lifton praises Albert Camus for his brilliant philosophical essay, The Rebel...that no one understood better...the human issues involved in this book. *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, xiii.

opposed to a more accurate *interactive* picture of cult involvement which takes human fallenness and responsibility into account. This interactive theme is explained and defended further in chapter four.

2) One very natural concern that arises as one applies Lifton s POW research findings to his understanding of cults, concerns whether it really applies equally to religious experience. POWs live within a situation conditioned by physically coercion and enforcement, while cults typically do not use very tight physical restrictions, but rather other forms of persuasion. This difference could limit or discredit Lifton s findings when it comes to comparing the experience of POWs with the experience of cult members. This is addressed further in chapter three.

3) Likewise, the captors of POWs were clearly identified as the enemy, while this is not so in a cult. The leader of the cult is viewed, at least initially, as someone who is friendly and supportive. The effect of this difference is quite significant. Attempting then to draw a direct parallel between the experience of the POW and the experience of the cult member seems again questionable.

4) There should be some concern regarding the milieu control (the control of internal and external forms of communication) that Lifton found to be the basic feature of the thought reform environment. The applicability of the available military data (which was primarily gathered in the 1950s), is questionable when compared with what is available today. For instance, the level of the control of information found in a POW camp in the late 1940s cannot truly be compared to a modern day cult, even a communal one. Today s society has greater access to information than ever before, and with that

comes a greater capacity to find and use information that is contrary to a cult s doctrines and practices. Present-day culture is starkly different regarding the level of access and exposure to information potentially damaging to a totalist organization.

It has been argued that the collapse of the Soviet Union can be partly attributed to the leaders realization that they could no longer maintain their traditionally closed society if all computers could talk to each other. In a modern industrial society it is essential that computerized information be easily transmitted from computer to computer in order to compete in the new computer age. But this state of affairs is incompatible with the closed society required for communist political control. It was, therefore, no longer possible for this seventy-year-old society to continue to exist as a closed culture and still be economically competitive. The computer was one significant factor in bringing down the Berlin Wall. Totalism, in some respects, is incompatible with our information age.

While there are some legitimate concerns regarding weak areas of Lifton s research and conclusions, there are also some very helpful elements that can be beneficial if understood and applied from a consistently Christian world view. Some of Lifton s positive contributions concerning his research and observations are:

1) Having been involved in a cult, and having counseled many ex-members of cults, this writer can affirm that his behavioral description of the eight psychological interactive conditions found in totalist organizations do appear quite similar to what takes place in a cult. This tagging, or identifying bad group behavior, can provide some helpful insights to the ex-member. From the perspective of a person who believes what is taught in the Bible, this behavioral identification can be seen as a form of valid scientific

study that assists in at least approximating that which occurs in a cult.

2) Coupled with this, the notion that our environment plays a significant role in our external interpretation of the world is also correctly identified in Lifton s research. Without having an accurate identification of our external environment, our search for truth will be disoriented.

3) While Lifton does not directly address the importance of personal boundaries, his research certainly points to the human need to exercise such boundaries in order to accurately assess inappropriate behavior such as group confession and self-condemnation. Once bad behavior is identified, appropriate choices can more easily be made.

4) The importance of the proper use of language, found in theme six loading the language, illustrates how to correctly use human rational faculties. Identifying this negative behavior can help illustrate the need everyone has to think through what they believe and make a defense of what they hold to be true.

Much more could be said about the weaknesses and strengths of Lifton s original research and conclusions, but the rest of this paper is limited to more recent formulations of his theory of mind control as applied to cult involvement. The next chapter examines and evaluates how modern day formulations of the mind control model have been criticized by adherents of the conversion model of cult involvement.

Chapter Two   The Passantinos Denial of Mind Control

The previous chapter provided historical background on the study of mind control as found in the early research of Robert Lifton. This chapter explains and evaluates the attempt of Bob and Gretchen Passantino to disprove the theory of mind control and therefore deny any contribution it has provided for an understanding of cult involvement and recovery.

Their view has been endorsed by the Christian Research Institute (CRI), an evangelical counter-cult apologetics ministry founded by the late Dr. Walter Martin[1] in 1974. CRI seeks to educate and evangelize those who have been affected by various cult and fringe groups. CRI is currently directed by Hank Hanegraaff who was the general editor of *The Kingdom of the Cults* (edn. 1997), which contains chapter four, Critiquing Cult Mind-Control Model.   This chapter, written by Bob and Gretchen Passantino and originally titled Overcoming The Bondage of Victimization: A Critical Evaluation of Cult Mind-Control Theories denies that mind control is a factor in cult influence.[2]

In a letter dated December 29, 1999, Steve Parks, a research consultant with CRI, confirms that the position presented by the Passantinos is representative of the position of

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[1] Walter Martin has often been fondly referred to as the father of Christian cult apologetics. He authored many books, booklets, articles, video, and cassette tapes, and was host of a popular national syndicated call-in radio program, The Bible Answer Man.   For many years his publication of *The Kingdom of the Cults,* (editions 1965, 1977, 1985, 1997) has been considered the standard evangelical reference work on American cults. Dr. Martin died in 1989 after having worked in the cult apologetics field for nearly forty years.

[2] Bob Passantino and Gretchen Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, *Cornerstone* 22, no. 102, 103 (undated): 31-34, 37-40.

Hank Hanegraaff and CRI. In this letter Mr. Parks states:

> As a result of rigorous discussion, much prayer, and earnest study, Hank s opinions on this topic have been in transition over the past several years. His current beliefs are advanced by Bob and Gretchen Passantino in chapter four of the revised edition [edu. 1997] of *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Bethany House Publishers).[3]

Bob and Gretchen Passantino contributed to the establishment of CRI and have been actively involved in counter-cult apologetics for more than twenty-five years. The Passantinos remain very actively involved with CRI as well as co-directing Answers In Action, a non-profit religious apologetic organization. Answers In Action seeks to train Christians to promote a Christian world view in every area of their lives. As evangelicals working in cult evangelism, they have written many articles and books, have been frequent radio guests, and have hosted several weekly radio programs addressing cult involvement issues.

Both CRI and the Passantinos deny the existence of mind control in the cults, claiming that cult involvement is instead based on free will and human responsibility. The Passantinos claim that the theory of mind control promotes the false belief that cult members are victimized by those imposing mind control techniques. They state that

> Cult mind control is, at best, a distorted misnomer for cult conversion that robs individuals of personal moral responsibility. While mind-control-model advocates rightly point out that cults often practice deception, emotional manipulation, and other unsavory recruitment tactics, we believe a critical, well-reasoned examination of the evidence disproves the cult mind control model and instead affirms the importance of informed, biblically based religious commitment.[4]

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[3] Personal letter from Steve Parks, research consultant, Christian Research Institute. Dated December 29, 1999.

[4] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 31- 32.

The Passantinos then proceed to outline eight assumptions of the cult mind control

model and nine specific objections that they believe disprove the theory of mind control.

The Passantinos state:

The principal assumptions of the cult mind control model can be summarized

under eight categories:

(1) Cults ability to control the mind supersedes that of the best military
brainwashers.
(2) Cult recruits become unable to think or make decisions for themselves.
(3) Cult recruits assume cult personalities and subsume their core personalities.
(4) Cultists cannot decide to leave their cults.
(5) A successful intervention must break the mind control, find the core
personality, and return the individual to his/her precult status.
(6) Psychology and sociology are used to explain cult recruitment, membership,
and disaffection.
(7) Religious conversion and commitment may be termed mind control if it meets
certain psychological and sociological criteria, regardless of its doctrinal or
theological standards.
(8) The psychological and sociological standards which define mind control are not
absolute but fall in a relative, subjective continuum from acceptable social and/or
religious affiliation to unacceptable. [5]

The Passantinos specific objections are:

1) *The Brainwashing Connection.* Representatives of the mind control model

contradict themselves by both distancing mind control from classical brainwashing yet

also seeing continuity between cult mind control and the classic brainwashing attempts in

the 1950s by North Koreans and Chinese among American prisoners of war and by

American CIA researchers. [6]

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[5] Ibid., 32.

[6] Ibid., 32-33.

2) *The Deterministic Fault.*   People join, stay in, and leave cults of their own responsibility, even if their decisions may have been influenced or affected by deceit, pressure, emotional appeal, or other means. [7]

3) *The Double Bind.* Mind control advocates provide no means of knowing, testing, or proving whether people who are under emotional pressure, personal stress, or actual deception are in fact not responsible for their actions or are not making free choices. Nor [do they]...suggest any way to clearly determine when techniques of influence or persuasion might become so great that the one being influenced is no longer responsible, no longer rational, or no longer has a personal will. [Using Hassan as representative of mind control adherents.][8]

4) *The Brainwashing Evidence.*   Neither brainwashing, mind control s supposed precursor, nor mind control itself has any appreciable demonstrated effectiveness. [9]

5) *Low Recruitment Rates.*   The vast majority of young people approached by new religious movements (NRMs) never join despite heavy recruitment tactics.[10]

6) *High Attrition Rates.*   Natural attrition (people leaving the group without specific intervention) was much higher than the self-claimed 65 percent deprogramming

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[7] Ibid., 33.

[8] Ibid., 33-34.

[9] Ibid., 34.

[10] Ibid., 37.

success figure. [11]

7) *The Anti-Religious Bias of Mind Control Assumptions*.   A look at the historical evidence underscores the antireligious basis of the brainwashing/mind control model. [12]

8) *Creating Victims*.   The cult mind control model...focuses on victimization, claiming that a cult member joins as a result of mind control and not as the result of personal choice. [13]

9) *Theological Inconsistencies*.   If the cult recruiter s skill at manipulation is considered so coercive that members are not responsible for their own beliefs, actions, or even the decision to join/stay in the cult, then many biblical affirmations about personal responsibility and decision making are jeopardized. [14]

Due to space limitations, this writer has chosen to reduce the number of these objections, and in some cases combine these assumptions and objections into five rudimentary complaints. A close examination and evaluation of these complaints will now be considered.

The Brainwashing Connection and the Lack of Empirical Support.

The first area of the Passantino s concern is mind control s connection (made by

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[11] Ibid., 37.

[12] Ibid., 38.

[13] Ibid., 39. (Emphasis added).

[14] Ibid., 40.

mind control adherents) to the theory of brainwashing. Additionally, the Passantinos

contend there is a lack of empirical evidence that either brainwashing or mind control

exists. The Passantinos claim these two complaints provide a sufficient reason to dismiss

the theory of mind control. They state mind control adherents *contradict themselves*

by both distancing mind control from classical brainwashing and while also seeing

continuity between cult mind control and the classic brainwashing attempts in the 1950s

by North Koreans and Chinese among American prisoners of war and by American CIA

 researchers. [15]

According to the Passantinos, this contradiction is exposed as one examines

representative advocates of mind control such as Michael Langone.[16] The Passantinos

say,

> When critics of the mind control model point out the abysmal failures of classical
> brainwashing, advocates like Michael Langone say they have   misrepresented the
> [supporters of the mind control model] position by portraying them as advocates
> of a robotization theory of cult conversion based on the *Manchurian Candidate.* [17]

If one assumes that brainwashing and mind control are terms basically meaning the same

thing, then this reasoning might appear sound. The Passantinos affirm this position:

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[15] Ibid*.,* 32-33.

[16]   Michael Langone, Ph.D., is a psychologist, editor of the *Cultic Studies Journal*, (the only
secular professional journal in the United States addressing cult behavior), and executive director and
director of research and victim assistance of American Family Foundation (AFF). AFF is the leading
secular counter-cult organization in the United States addressing concerns of cultic behavior that includes
a network of over 150 volunteer professionals who generally subscribe to thought reform (mind control) as
being foundational to cult involvement.

[17] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming The Bondage of Victimization, 33.

Despite attempts to distinguish the generations of mind control development, there are no qualitative differences and what was once brainwashing became snapping, which now is mind control, coercive persuasion, menticide, thought reform, etc. Each term focuses, however, on the power of the cult recruiter and on the inability of the recruit to think and/or decide independently from the cult.[18]

The question, then, that needs to be answered is, Does brainwashing and mind control represent essentially the same thing? This writer believes they are not the same, although they are similar and representative of a subtle, powerful, and sinful attempt to control others. Mind control, while not totally controlling, does represent a growth in the level of deception (in its ability to perform) over brainwashing.

The first Ford automobile, the Model A, has similarities with the 2000 supercharged Ford Cobra. Both have four wheels, both use gas, both have windshields and they *both carry similar labels* (car, auto, automobile). There are some *similarities* between the Model A and the Cobra, because both provide mechanical challenges to their owners. The Ford Model A and the Ford Cobra are intended to encourage *similar goals*, ease of travel and at times serving as a status symbol. Likewise, classical brainwashing and current forms of cultic mind control have similar labels and behavioral resemblances and focus on many of the same goals. But when the Model A and the Cobra are put side by side, they have distinctively different levels of performance and engineering. What makes the classical brainwashing and current forms of mind control qualitatively different is their incomparable performance and basic structure.

The early forms of brainwashing, as found in the study of American POWs in

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[18] Ibid., 33.

Korea, included a decidedly antagonistic relationship between the captors and prisoners, which is seldom the case for those involved in religious cults. Instead, there is a milieu of subtlety that is significantly disarming. There is also a deliberate effort to disengage the potential recruit s defenses by such manipulation as love-bombing. [19]

In cultic involvement, the *cult* recruit s thinking process is frequently set aside because it is not seen as being required, unlike the prisoner of war example. The writer is not saying that all cognitive processes are set aside, but instead that there is a significant level of parking of the brain at various points along the way. This expression means suppressing one s powers of analytical thought in the interest of willing acceptance of what is being taught. Cult members become accustomed to frequently setting their will aside, living a life steeped in *pretending*, and giving significant levels of control of one s life over to a leader. Therefore, they *interactively* allow the leader to define what the member then accepts as reality. [20]

Cult mind control contains more than a quantitative difference compared to the prisoner of war being brainwashed. Brainwashing and mind control clearly contain at least one *qualitative* difference which distances mind control from classical brainwashing and while also recognizing some continuity between cult mind control and the classic

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[19] By love bombing is meant the inordinate amount of initial acceptance, attention, and personal displays of favor commonly given to new recruits of cult groups with the purpose of enlisting their commitment to the goals of the group.

[20] The writer here is not claiming the cult member lacks culpability for not having taken responsibility for himself, instead practicing a pattern of blind, irrational faith. The question of culpability is further examined later in this chapter.

brainwashing attempts. This is, therefore, not really a contradiction.

The second concern voiced by the Passantinos is an argument regarding the lack of

empirical evidence for the effectiveness of brainwashing or mind control.

> Neither brainwashing, mind control s supposed precursor, nor mind control itself
> has any *appreciable demonstrated effectiveness*. Singer and other mind control
> model proponents are not always candid about this fact: The early brainwashing
> attempts were largely unsuccessful. Even though the Koreans and Chinese used
> extreme forms of physical coercion as well as persuasive coercion, very few
> individuals subjected to their techniques changed their basic world views or
> commitments.[21]

Additionally, the Passantinos appeal to the fact that although the CIA

experimented with brainwashing, it did not use Korean or Chinese techniques of

torture, beatings, or group dynamics. The CIA did, however, experiment with drugs

including LSD, and medical therapies such as electroshock in their research on mind

control. But despite this extensive research, the CIA experiments *failed to produce even*

one potential Manchurian Candidate, according to the Passantinos.[22]

The Passantinos claim that comparatively few individuals are significantly affected

by thought reform techniques, as evidenced in the above research, and that these methods

never totally control another person. Therefore, they claim the theory of

brainwashing   what is today called mind control   is disproved.

The   appreciable demonstrated effectiveness   the Passantinos desire to see is

based on the number of people affected rather than the level of influence upon individual

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[21] Passantino and Passantino,   Overcoming The Bondage of Victimization,   34. (Emphasis
added).

[22] Ibid., 37. (Emphasis added).

people. Consider the comments of Michael Langone regarding two empirical studies:

> They [those denying the effectiveness of thought reform techniques] frequently point to a study (Barker, 1983) which found that only 10% of those who attend an introductory Unification Church workshop end up joining the group, and that after two years only about 50% of these new converts remain. They say, Where s the brainwashing?! (The sympathizers rarely cite Taylor s study of the Unification Church in which he states, Slightly more than half of the prospects chose to stay beyond the first week. Nearly all those who remain experience a gradual conversion and become members of the Family after three more weeks of indoctrination [1982, pp. 202-203].) I look at even the more conservative results of Barker and say: Imagine! The Moonies approach total strangers on the street, persuade some to come to a free lecture and get a free meal, and then within a matter of two to three weeks persuade 10% of those persons to radically alter their lives and become full-time missionaries and fund-raisers for the Unification Church! [23]

The Passantinos appropriately respond,

> He [Langone] has nowhere proved that even the low 10% recruitment rate is due to mind control practices, and not to common deceit, persuasion, emotional appeal, etc.[24]

This is a legitimate concern, but the Passantinos do not provide proof that this recruitment is not at *least in part* brought on by significantly manipulative behavior characteristic of mind control by the leadership within the Moonie organization. In this empirical portion of the argument, the Passantinos at least provide some legitimate doubt concerning the proof that mind control exists. The latter half of the Passantinos argument does not fair quite so well.

The Passantinos claim that the CIA abandoned their brainwashing

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[23] Michael D. Langone, ed.*, Recovery From Cults: Help For Victims of Psychological and Spiritual Abuse* (New York: Norton, 1995), 33.

[24] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 42.

experimentation program due to the failure to produce even one potential *Manchurian Candidate* is simply irrelevant. The Passantinos fail to show that a completely controlled brainwashed individual is a necessary proof for thought reform adherents. Because thought reform adherents would also deny any existence of a Manchurian candidate, the Passantinos argument becomes nothing more than a mere caricature of mind control. Attempting to disprove the effectiveness of all mind control by the use of an extreme example is neither scholarly nor equitable.[25]

These two concerns expressed by the Passantinos provide a very weak argument based on inconclusive empirical evidence, and supported by an unproved caricature of mind control, that involves an unproved contradiction about how mind control adherents retain their position.[26] Their argument is vitiated because they overstate their case regarding the empirical evidence for brainwashing and fail to prove that qualitative differences do not exist between brainwashing and mind control.

Victimization and an Inability to Think.

Closely related is the Passantinos claim that the mind control model has two fundamental flaws. [27] First, they say, the mind control perspective promotes an

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[25] In the next chapter Paul Martin addresses this flaw in the Passantinos argument in greater depth.

[26] The Passantinos repeatedly fail accurately to represent the prevailing position of mind control adherents. Throughout this chapter this failure will be illustrated and argued against.

[27] Bob Passantino and Gretchen Passantino, Critiquing Cult Mind-Control Model, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 1997 edn. (Minneapolis: Bethany House), 58.

improper victimization model [28] and second, cult recruits are unable to think for

themselves and are instead under some sort of mind control. [29]

The Passantinos claim the victimization model is indicative of the proliferation of

the victimization mindset that has recently permeated our culture.[30] They attempt to

document this by quoting Steven Hassan[31] as he explains his own method of counseling

ex-cult members:

> First, I demonstrate to him that *he is in a trap* a situation where he is
> psychologically disabled and can t get out. Second, I show him that *he didn t
> originally choose to enter a trap.* Third, I point out that *other people in other
> groups are in similar traps.* Fourth, I tell him that *it is possible to get out of the
> trap.* [32]

Hassan is not a professing Christian, and his world view is insufficient to address

the reality of sin. It is not surprising, therefore, that his view regarding recovery takes

such a strong behavioral approach, but his strict behavioral approach does not represent

all who subscribe to the mind control model. Those associated with Christian counter-

cult organizations such as Wellspring Retreat and Resource Center, Watchmen

Fellowship, and Personal Freedom Outreach are examples of those with solid Christian

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[28] Ibid., 61.

[29] Ibid., 58.

[30] Ibid., 60.

[31] Steven Hassan is a former member of the Unification church (the Moonies) who is a licensed mental health counselor, holding a Master s degree in counseling psychology from Cambridge College, and the author of two influential books that strongly support a secular mind control model of cult involvement and recovery.

[32] Passantino and Passantino, Critiquing Cult Mind-Control, 60, quoting from *Combating Cult Mind Control*, 121; italics in original.

presuppositions who also endorse a version of mind control.

Hassan is well respected by many adherents of mind control for his work in the field of cult recovery. By the same token, one should not dismiss the findings of a medical doctor merely because he may not always reflect consistent Christian values. One can still draw from Hassan what is helpful for understanding some of the behavioral elements of the experience of cult members. Rather than completely rejecting Hassan s statement, one should view his perspective as being drawn from general revelation and note that it could, therefore, be understood from the standpoint of a Christian view of reality.

The Passantinos claim to draw their interpretative standard on this topic from the Bible. Just what is the Bible s notion of victimization? The Passantinos acknowledge that the Bible supports the concept of victimization in the physical arena, and as effecting small children, victims of rape, robbery, and murder. They fail, however, to closely examine how the Bible addresses victimization due to spiritual deception.

Deception is described in the Bible as sometimes (note the qualification), having the quality of an almost irresistible force. This is particularly clear when one examines the Apostle Paul s thoughts on the degree of helplessness that the unbeliever experiences through deception while a slave to sin (Rom. 6:20; compare John 8:34). Unbelievers are described as being under the *control* of Satan. Consider what the Apostle Paul writes to Timothy,

> And the Lord s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth

and that they will come to their senses and escape from the *trap* of the devil, who has *taken them captive* to do his will.[33]

Even believers can be trapped and deprived of their freedom by deceivers of secondhand, empty, rationalistic philosophy based on the principles of this world instead of on Christ (Col. 2: 8, *Jerusalem Bible*).   These verses convey a level of influence that at times can be not only very significant, but also controlling.

From personal experience and listening to the recovery stories of many cult members, the writer believes that the claim that mind control always completely strips the cult member of his/her capacity to act rationally is untrue. Nevertheless, one notices a somewhat extreme approach to the question of recovery in the Passantinos comments on this issue.   Many who have come out of cultic environments know intuitively and empirically that they have been victimized at *some* level. For these ex-members, one of the questions that frequently surfaces is: Why and how was this victimization so effective?

In responding to this question, several things can be said. One can talk about the culpability of *both* the leader and the group. This is certainly biblically appropriate, as the Bible holds a higher overall behavioral standard for those in leadership (James 3:1). Frequently the ex-member needs to recognize and address a great deal of anger toward the group and the damage caused by the involvement. A behavioral description of the manipulation and control exercised by the group can assist in his evaluation. This writer has indeed seen examples of individuals and secular organizations that have over-emphasized the victimization of cult members to the exclusion of addressing genuine guilt.

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[33] II Tim. 2: 24-26. (Emphasis added).

Nevertheless, the Passantinos solution seems to depend mostly on the immediate guilt of the ex-member, to the neglect of important related factors of victimization by deceptive or otherwise undue influence.

A more biblical approach addresses the personal guilt of ex-members while understanding their victimization. This approach seems to be more existentially viable. Exposing the behavioral patterns of groups that exercise thought reform can also assist both Christians and non-believers in gaining a fuller perspective on their experience. This would enable both groups to better guard themselves against such abusive practices.

One could cite the Passantinos dogmatic depreciation of the behavioral description of cult involvement as an example of their tendency to devalue the contribution of the social sciences. They do not seem to sufficiently understand that God can speak to people through the sciences just as he does through the magnificence of a mountain range, the moral law within or the starry skies above. Nevertheless, after the Fall, general revelation must be understood in terms of special revelation.. So, the first half of their complaint, while it does provide a helpful caution about the danger of viewing cult involvement as merely a process of victimization, is not empirically sound due to its exaggeration of the other view and the neglect of other factors identified by the sciences.

The second half of their complaint is that cultists are unable to think for themselves. This is closely associated with their concern that people be held responsible for their decisions. The Passantinos believe that a principal assumption of the cult mind control model is that Cult recruits become unable to think or make decisions for

themselves. [34] This inability to think or make decisions results in a form of determinism, according to the Passantinos. They state,

> Such a determinism robs all people, cult leaders as well as cultists, of personal responsibility or morality. After all, as much as the cultist is wired to succumb to cult mind control, cult leaders are wired to practice cult mind control. One cannot remove human responsibility without also destroying human morality. [35]

The Passantinos believe that moral responsibility is opposed to the deterministic view of reality they claim flows from the mind control theory. The Passantinos assume an unambiguous connection between an libertarian or autonomous free will [36] and responsibility:[37]

> Some social scientists object to the idea that humans are free to choose. They claim that man is nothing but the result of biological, psychological, and sociological conditions, or the product of heredity and environment. Thus B.F. Skinner holds that autonomous man is a myth. All of man s so-called decisions are actually determined by previous experience. Even some Christians believe that all of men s actions are determined by God, and that they have no free choice.
>   Such a view of man must be met head-on. If free choice is a myth, so is moral obligation. C. S. Lewis notes that a deterministic view brings about the abolition of man. In an impassioned plea he argues that you cannot strip men of autonomy without denuding them of responsibility: In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful. [38]

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[34] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming The Bondage of Victimization, 38.

[35] Passantino and Passantino, Critiquing Cult Mind-Control Model, 75.

[36] By free will is meant the belief that the human will has an inherently libertarian or autonomous power to choose with equal facility between alternatives.

[37] By responsibility, is meant that a person is answerable to God as the judge of their behavior.

[38] In *The Kingdom of the Cults*, (1997 edn.) 76, favorably quoting from Em Griffin, *The Mind Changers*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1976) 29-30. The quote from C. S. Lewis is found in *The Abolition of Man*, 37. In the context of this quote C. S. Lewis is not referring to the need for autonomy

What empirical evidence can be brought to bear on this argument? Or more specifically, is there a rationally necessary connection between the idea of autonomous free will and the concept of responsibility? If the Bible provides empirical evidence, as both Martin and the Passantinos would affirm, then one should inquire as to what the Bible teaches concerning the supposed connection between free will and responsibility.

The biblical basis of moral responsibility includes four essential factors: (1) As creatures, humans are answerable to the Creator (*ontological responsibility,* Job 38:1-4; Rom. 9:21). (2) People are accountable to God as their moral reference point for right and wrong (*ethical responsibility*, Job 40:1-5, 42:1-6). (3) People are responsible to God for the amount of knowledge they have (*epistemological responsibility,* Luke 12:42-48; Rom. 2:12-16). Finally, (4) they are answerable to God for their created purpose as stewards of what God has entrusted to them to bring glory to God (*teleological responsibility,* Isa. 43:7; Col. 1:16). Contrary to the assumption that human responsibility is somehow based on autonomous free will, it is God who is the ultimate reference point for the meaning of the concept of responsibility. Accountability to God is related to a person s being, knowing, ethics, and purpose, not to a supposed autonomy of the will. Responsibility is simply *accountability* to God.

Additionally, as Gordon Clark points out, no one has ever shown that the concept of responsibility is in any way logically dependent on a prior state of free will.[39] The

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found in the Arminian form of free will providing a basis of human responsibility, but the necessity of the moral awareness of the Tao (or natural law).

[39] Gordon Clark, *Religion, Reason and Revelation*, (Jefferson, Md: Trinity Foundation, 1986), 219-233.

Passantinos are no exception. They simply assume throughout their argument that an autonomous free will is required for responsibility to be exercised. The Passantinos appeal to C. S. Lewis authority on this matter, but do not engage in rational argument from the Scriptures to establish a real relationship between free will and responsibility. Free will is merely assumed to be somehow tied to responsibility.

In Reformed theology,[40] the term free will refers to the fact that human choices are real enough but ultimately must reflect causes within the character. They are not autonomous from God s sovereignty as Creator (Pr. 21:1, Rom. 9:16-18). This human capacity to make choices is sometimes distinguished from an autonomous free will by the use of such terms as free agency and self-determination. People act in harmony with their own character after the Fall, (Matt. 7:17-20). [41]

As an ex-cultist, and as one who has worked extensively with ex-members, this writer has found viewing moral responsibility and personal guilt the way the Passantinos do to be quite counterproductive, particularly in the early stages of recovery. Typically ex-members already have an inordinately high view of their own culpability. Self-denigration is very common among those exiting. Statements such as, I can t believe I was so dumb, so naive, or so gullible, are very common among people exiting cults.

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[40] By Reformed theology is meant the Calvinistic theology emanating from the Reformation and mediated to modern evangelicalism by Calvinist near the beginning of the 20th century. By Calvinist is meant those who hold in the Augustinian tradition the beliefs of John Calvin (1509-1564), which emphasizes sovereign grace and human responsibility while denying free will.

[41] See also the Westminster *Confession of Faith*, chapter 9 Of Free Will, par. 3-4.

Resolving genuine issues of guilt are important. Also important is the fact that culpability may extend beyond ex-members to their families and churches, and there is much more than personal blame that needs to be addressed. Recognizing the culpability of the leader and the manipulative and controlling patterns of behavior of the group can provide some genuine support and assistance in empowering people to correctly evaluate their own culpability.

The Passantinos argument that the cult mind control model is disproved if people are unable to think for themselves, fails for three reasons. The argument confuses the basis of moral responsibility with a view of free will unaffected by the Fall. It provides no rational connection between the concept of responsibility and depravity of the will.

Finally, recovery for this writer, and many others with whom he is familiar, suggests that the Passantinos perspective is not existentially viable.

Reasoning is Circular and Self-Defeating.

The Passantinos accuse thought reform adherents of using circular reasoning that is self-defeating. These are both arguments involving questions of the legitimate use of reason.

In their attempts to disprove that mind control exists, they favorably quote doctor J. Thomas Ungerleider, M.D., and David K. Wellish, Ph.D., concerning the fallacious presuppositions of deprogrammers or exit counselors,[42]

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[42] The Passantinos equate deprogrammers and exit counselors as serving essentially the same purpose and, therefore, use these terms interchangeably. This writer would define exit counseling as, A voluntary, intensive, time-limited, contractual educational process that emphasizes the respectful sharing of information with members of exploitatively manipulative groups, commonly called cults. (*Exit*

If the member never does renounce the cult then he or she is regarded by the deprogrammers as an unsuccessful attempt or failed deprogramming, not as one who now has free will and has still chosen to remain with the cult.[43]

The Passantinos later add,

The net result is that the proof that the cultist has been coerced is unfalsifiable, and he cannot prove that he has freely chosen to join his group. If you leave the cult as a result of deprogramming (or exit counseling), that proves you were under mind control. If you return to the cult, that proves you are under mind control. The standard for determining mind control is not some objective evaluation of mental health or competency, but merely the assumed power of mind control the critic accords to the cult.[44]

The Passantinos argue that since there is no objective definition of mind control, one is left

with merely a semantic game of circular reasoning.

In evaluating the evidence for this claim of circular reasoning, the writer believes

the Passantinos have failed to make their case. It is true that *some* uninformed exit

counselors may be guilty of over-simplification resulting in circular reasoning, but the

Passantinos make the accusation too broad. The fact is, many exit counselors have

researched various groups quite carefully. They have provided objective documentation

regarding manipulative behavioral patterns as well as doctrinal problems that can helpfully

identify those groups which are cultic.[45]

Counseling: A Family Intervention, 35). Deprogramming should be distinguished from exit counseling because of its non-professional coercive character versus the noncoercive, more professional exit counseling.

[43] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 34, quoting from Deprogramming (Involuntary Departure), Coercion, and Cults in *Cults and New Religious Movements*, ed. Marc Galanter (Washington, DC: Psychiatric Association, 1989) 243.

[44] Ibid., 34.

[45] Stephen M. Ash, Cult Induced Psychopathology, *Cultic Studies Journal* 2, no 1 (1985): 31-90.

The Passantinos further point out that there is much disagreement among various thought reform adherents about how basic terms such as mind control, brainwashing, and cult are defined, which they claim further blurs distinctions, does damage to attempts at logical rationale, and undermines the theory of mind control as an explanation of cultic involvement. In reviewing the kaleidoscopic range of opinions found within the thought reform perspective, this writer concurs that definitions of terms and concepts *are* frequently blurred, contributing to loose and inconsistent reasoning.

Nevertheless, in spite of its vagueness, the position taken by many mind control adherents does not actually destroy the value of *some* elements of the theory of mind control. This model may still play a limited role in explaining cult involvement and recovery. In fact, there is much agreement among those holding a thought reform perspective. The Passantinos stated objections do point out the need for increased efforts to more clearly define the commonly used terms, and to define the need for further theoretical consideration of other more significant factors when addressing reasons for continued cult membership.[46]

The Passantinos further suggest that the argument for mind control is self-refuting. They believe that mind control adherents hold that those affected by thought reform practices cannot think for themselves. One of the two claims of cult mind control that the Passantinos claim to be foundational is,

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[46] Chapter four explains a family systems model that more coherently accounts for cult involvement, particularly the ability of some cults to retain members for many years.

Most cult members (who are under mind control) cannot choose to leave of their own free will, but instead must be the focus of a carefully planned and executed professional intervention (exit counseling).[47]

Furthermore, the Passantinos say that one of the primary roots of both mind control and the earlier brainwashing theory is the fundamental conviction that cultists are unable to make rational decisions. In attempting to support this claim, they draw from pioneer coercive deprogrammer Ted Patrick s description of deprogramming:

> When you deprogram people, *you force them to think.* The only thing I do is shoot them challenging questions. I hit them with things that they haven t been programmed to respond to. I know what the cults do and how they do it, so I shoot them the right question; and they get frustrated when they can t answer. *They think* they have the answer, they ve been given answers to everything. But I keep them off balance and this forces them to begin questioning, to open their minds. When the mind gets to a certain point, they can see through all the lies they ve been programmed to believe, and they realize that they ve been duped and they come out of it. Their minds start working again.[48]

The Passantinos then claim that mind control supporters defeat themselves when they promote the notion that exit counselors must use rational discourse and cognitive arguments to deprogram the cultist.

The question that must be asked is, Is this truly what the mind control advocates are saying? Patrick, in the above quotation, clearly acknowledges that cultists do have some cognitive abilities. They do respond intellectually to his efforts. Patrick s comments can be seen as a colloquial way of saying that the cultist is not *sufficiently* thinking through what he/she believes and needs to be challenged to think cogently.

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[47] Passantino and Passantino, Critiquing Cult Mind-Control Model, 69.

[48] Ibid., 53. Quoting Ted Patrick in Conway and Siegelman, 65-66. (Emphasis added).

Some of the more current well-known and respected mind control supporters do not accept the Passantinos assumption that under mind control cult members cannot think at all for themselves. In chapter eight of *Recovery From Cults*, David Clark, Carol Giambalvo, Noel Giambalvo, Kevin Garvey,[49] and Michael D. Langone concur that,

> Information, especially that related to mind control, is the key that *unlocks cultists minds*. Exit counseling as we conceive it is merely the means by which that information is made available. Exit counselors are not psychological alchemists. Nor are they spiritual wonder workers. They are simply human beings sharing what they know with other human beings. [50]

There exists a supposed contradiction between the denial of logical thought among cultists and the dependence of counselors on logical thinking to encourage cultists to analyze their own situation. However, one could instead interpret this to mean that the controlled condition of the cult member is temporary, and understanding and personal growth can take place to reverse that control. Far from the assumption that cult members are unable to think their way out of a cult, many cult members simply walk away from the cult without any exit counseling. No one holding to the mind control model (that this writer is aware of) would deny this.

Nevertheless, even those who walk away from a cult can benefit from recovery counseling, that is, from counseling intended to encourage not only exiting but full recovery. This would entail counseling that relates to the sanctification or growth in grace process for the ex-member that becomes a Christian.

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[49] Each of these four individuals, along with Langone, are very experienced exit counselors. Additionally, these four mentioned have had personal experience with cultic involvement.

[50] Langone, *Recovery From Cults*, 179. (Emphasis added).

At times everyone is capable of insufficiently thinking through questions and problems for any number of reasons. It can be said that in these circumstances that the mind is locked up, needing to be forced to start thinking again. This writer can state truthfully that completing this paper has *forced* him to think, and to think *at a different level* than he is accustomed to. This is not the same as being *incapable of thinking at all*. Context, together with a more natural reading of the mind control adherents and adopting a more generous Christian attitude toward those with whom one has a disagreement, should better inform the Passantinos on this subject. The evidence again shows that the Passantinos have misrepresented the supporters of mind control and failed to show that the thought reform model is circular or self-refuting.

The Anti-Religious Bias of Mind Control Assumptions.

The Passantinos strike hard at the generally secular history behind the mind control perspective. They emphasize the anti-Christian bias expressed by such writers as William Sargant,[51] Flo Conway, Jim Siegelman,[52] and Stephen Hassan.[53] All of these have

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[51] See William Sargant, *Battle for the Mind* (London: Pan Books, 1957), 148. Sargent argues that eighteenth-century American revivalism from the 1730s forward displayed many of the same techniques found in the eliciting of confessions as practiced behind the Iron Curtain and especially among the puritans of New England.

[52] See Frank Conway and Jim Siegelman, *Snapping: America s Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1978), 45. Conway and Siegelman make decidedly derogatory comments regarding Campus Crusade for Christ assigning it a similarity to the appeals of so many cult recruiters and lecturers, this traditional Christian doctrine [referring to the surrender of will] and the suggestion contained in it takes on new and ominous overtones.

[53] See Hassan, *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, 43. Hassan states, First of all, accepting that unethical mind control can affect anybody challenges the age-old philosophical notion (the one on which our current laws are based) that man is a rational being, responsible for and in control of his every action. Such a world view does not allow for any concept of mind control.

contributed significantly to the anti-Christian flavor of the mind control perspective. The

Passantinos favorably quote sociologists Anthony and Robbins to the effect that the mind

control model comes from Enlightenment ideals that seek to free people from religious

influence.

> [I]n a sense the project of modern social science, particularly in its Enlightenment
> origins, has been to liberate man from the domination of retrogressive forces,
> particularly religion, which has often been seen as a source of involuntariness and a
> threat to personal autonomy, from which an individual would be liberated by the
> science of freedom (Gay, 1969). This view of religion had been present in the
> cruder early models of brainwashing such as Sargant (1957), who saw Evangelical
> revivalism as a mode of brainwashing, and who commenced his studies after noting
> similarities between conversions to Methodism and Pavlovian experiments with
> dogs.[54]

The Passantinos contend that the failure of some thought reform adherents to

distinguish clearly between a legitimate religion and a cult also proves that mind control

does not exist. The fact that each of these four people, Sargant, Conway, Siegelman, and

Hassan have made decidedly derogatory comments about what they view as Christian

groups should indeed give the reader pause for thought.

The Passantinos argument, however, assumes that if the person is not a Christian,

or at least not favorably disposed toward Christianity, then at least in this context their

opinions on religion or psychology are of nominal worth.[55] No doubt some of what these

analysts have reacted to is the hyper-fundamentalist aspects of some types of Christianity.

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[54] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 38, quoting Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins, Law, Social Science and the Brainwashing Exception to the First Amendment, *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* 10, no. 1 (1992): 23.

[55] Evidence for the unsupported treatment of the social sciences can also be found in their broad brush and unsupported assertion that, We have the many Adult Children support groups where members uncover the source of *all* their problems-dysfunctional parents. (Emphasis mine) Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 39.

This writer contends that they are not wholly wrong even in this evaluation, and that at least some of the evidence for cultic behavior in our day may be clearly be found in some Bible-based cultic groups that are usually identified as Christian. These aberrant forms of Christianity should better be answered theologically.

Some secular observers however, have not been discerning in *some* of their evaluations of Christendom, yet it does not necessarily follow that *all* they hold regarding mind control should be dismissed. Without allowing for some truth in what they hold, this objection from the Passantinos could easily be construed as merely *ad hominem*.

As for not having any clear guidelines for what to include in the definition of mind control, one merely needs to read Lifton s work, or the many who have used his eight behavioral standards as conditions of mind control. While these standards may be limited in their usefulness, they can still provide a convenient behavioral yardstick. This is particularly true when speaking with the non-Christian, or with the uninformed Christian whose primary concern is the behavior and social pressures present in groups that practice thought reform techniques.

Theological Inconsistencies.

The Passantinos also claim that those holding the mind control model have theological inconsistencies. The Passantinos contend that,

> In the Garden, Satan personally appeared to orchestrate the temptation of Eve   and who could be more persuasive? Our first parents succumbed to the temptation and were cast out of the Garden, and all of humanity thereafter have been penalized by this primal sin. If our first parents could be held morally responsible when confronted by the Ultimate Tempter, how is it that we seek to excuse ourselves or our offspring when confronted by human tempters of far less power, skill, and charisma?

Moreover, we observe that both Adam and Eve were penalized alike, even though the temptation was very different for each. Eve s temptation was mediated by the direct approach of Satan; Adam s temptation occurred via his wife, and we are not told that Satan appeared to Adam as he did to Eve. Yet regardless of whether Satan s presence was immediate or remote, firsthand, or secondhand, both shared ethical culpability for their action.[56]

The Passantinos claim that what occurred with Adam and Eve after the Fall was blame shifting, and that God did not accept their rationalizations, but held them accountable. This is no doubt true, but their argument still fails on at least two counts when it is applied to those accepting a mind control perspective. A careful reading of the biblical text shows that Adam and Eve were *both* present at the temptation.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, Did God really say, You must not eat from any tree in the garden? The woman said to the serpent, *We* may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die. You will not surely die, the serpent said to the woman, For God knows God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like god, knowing good and evil. When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, *who was with her* and he ate it. The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked...[57]

Satan spoke to Eve, and she responds *on behalf of herself and her husband* who is present with her. The temptation was presented to *both at the same time.* There was no difference in how each were tempted; both were tempted by the direct approach of Satan. Both shared equal culpability because both equally fell to the temptation presented. But how does this example relate to those affected by thought reform techniques?

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[56] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 40.

[57] Genesis 3:1-7. (Emphasis added).

In order for this analogy to be applicable, there must be the same preconditions for both Adam and Eve and those effected by mind control, but this is hardly the case. The most obvious difference between Adam and Eve and the person falling for a cult is that the person falling for a cult is already a sinner with a history of sin, and his/her established patterns of sin can be manipulated more easily by cult recruiters. Adam and Eve had no such history of sin, and were carrying no baggage with them when they approached the tree of the temptation. This argument is therefore based on a false analogy.

Adam and Eve were given a crystal-clear understanding of what God wanted from them. God told them in advance, Don t eat of this tree, or you will die. Those effected by thought reform techniques have not received any such crystal-clear instructions ahead of time. They may not have any accurate understanding of the Bible, of cults, or of the nature of deception. They may already believe some false doctrine, taught by some badly mistaken church. The church, more than any other responsible party, is guilty of not warning the flock and of not equipping them about the dangers of cultic groups.

While general revelation is given to all (Rom. 1:20; 2:14-15), eventually showing the need for salvation, it does not follow that general revelation is *sufficient* for all spiritual growth and discernment. General revelation was originally given in order that an understanding of the moral law might be understood, and that God would be recognized as sovereign and as the origin of truth and moral meaning. Special revelation was still needed in order that a clear understanding of the saving and sanctifying work of Christ might be apprehended and appropriated. Without a well-informed understanding of the

Bible, everyone is (at various levels) susceptible to thought reform practices.[58]

Discernment may be lost because one willfully chooses to sin. But that is not the only

cause. A lack of discernment may also occur because of a lack of education, a lack of

warning by those responsible for the flock of God, or because of an unresolved resentment

directed against those who have previously exercised authority over a person.

In the summer of 1988 this writer spent a great deal of time visiting the Mile Hi

Church of Religious Science in Lakewood, Colorado. In testimonial meetings there, this

writer repeatedly heard not only evidence of willfulness, but also much evidence of simple

ignorance and a reaction to Protestant hyper-fundamentalism or Catholic dogmatism that

played a significant role in propelling people toward this New Age or Mind Science

church.

On a practical level, the reasons why people do not respond to God in a saving

way, and why, once saved, they do not grow in grace is multifaceted. It is not as

reductionistically simple as the Passantinos view seems to what to make it.

Summary.

In evaluating these five rudimentary complaints from the perspective of the

Conversion model, this chapter has shown the following:

The Brainwashing Connection and Lack of Empirical Support. The Passantinos have

advanced a very weak argument based on an unproved contradiction, a false caricature of

mind control, inconclusive empirical evidence concerning the non-existence of mind

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[58] This is not to say that education alone is the key to guarding oneself from the dangers of thought reform. This writer provides further explanation regarding the reasons behind cult involvement in chapter four.

control, and an unbiblical view of the depraved human will.

Victimization and the Inability to Think. These factors may offer a helpful caution when they are not stated in an extreme form. Neither of these two arguments by themselves have sufficient empirical support, rational coherence, or existential viability for the recovering ex-cult member.

Circular Reasoning and Self-Defeating. The Passantinos fail to show that either circular reasoning or self-defeating claims infect the position taken by the thought reform model as described by Paul Martin.

The Anti-Religious Bias of Mind Control Assumptions. The Passantinos correctly point out the secular historical roots of the thought reform model, but inappropriately use this to devalue the benefits of behavioral descriptions of cult activities. Behavioral descriptions might in fact identify sources of general revelation which can benefit those affected by cults if properly understood.

Theological Inconsistencies. The Passantinos use of the analogy of Adam and Eve with the ex-cultist is not valid. As a result, their case falsely portrays involvement in cults in an overly reductionist fashion. Their view of the fallen human will is unrealistic because it is unbiblical.

This chapter has explained and evaluated Bob and Gretchen Passantinos claims of disproving the theory of mind control. Their denial of any contribution of the theory of mind control in understanding cult involvement and recovery does not pass the scrutiny for the classical tests of truth. The next chapter examines and evaluates these same five concerns identified in the position of Wellspring (Paul Martin), while evaluating the

influence of mind control upon cult involvement and recovery.

Chapter Three   Paul Martin s Affirmation of Mind Control

The previous chapter explained and evaluated Bob and Gretchen Passantino s five

criticisms of the theory of mind control that they claim disprove the theory. Therefore,

they deny it any contribution to the understanding cult involvement and recovery. This

chapter explains and evaluates the response of Wellspring Treatment and Resource Center

and Paul Martin[1] to the same five criticisms of mind control theories.

Wellspring is a residential rehabilitation facility for former cult members providing

a program of counseling and instruction since 1986. Located near Albany, Ohio, it is the

only residential treatment center for ex-cult members in the United States. As a non-profit

organization accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare

Organizations, it has over 400 clients. Wellspring has been featured on the television

programs 48 Hours and NBC Nightly News along with Decision Today, a radio broadcast

produced by Billy Graham Ministries, for their work with ex-cult members.[2]

Paul Martin, Ph.D., is an evangelical, state-licensed psychologist and executive

director and co-founder (with his wife Barbara) of Wellspring Treatment and Resource

Center. In addition to his counseling training, he has studied theology at Princeton

Theological Seminary and Nazarene Theological Seminary. He was a member of The

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[1] The response to the Passantinos complaints are voiced by several at Wellspring: Paul Martin, Lawrence A. Pile, research specialist and workshop leader at Wellspring, Ron Burks, M.Div., M.A. psychology assistant at Wellspring, and Stephen D. Martin, M.Div., preventive cult education instructor and workshop leader at Wellspring. All four of these individuals are ex-members of aberrational Christian groups. Their position is found primarily in an article, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization: A Rational/Empirical Defense of Thought Reform, *Cultic Studies Journal,* 15, no. 2 (1998): 151-191.

[2] Http://wellspringretreat.org/html/about_wellspring.htm

Great Commission[3] for a period of eight years. He has provided frequent court testimony

regarding mind control, and speaks to a wide variety of interest groups, both religious and

secular, on the topic of cult recovery.

Brainwashing Contradiction and the Lack of Empirical Support.

As a brief reminder to the reader, in the first half of these charges the Passantinos

claim mind control adherents contradict themselves. They claim to distinguish mind

control from brainwashing, yet still hold to a continuity between classical brainwashing

and mind control. In support of this criticism, the Passantinos cite Langone s concern that

mind control supporters are misrepresented when critics attribute to them a robotic theory

of cult conversion based on Manchurian candidate. The Passantinos say,

> This contradictory embrace and rejection of the brainwashing connection is
> partially reconciled only by the nonsubstantive differences pointed out by mind-
> control-model supporters: (1) Brainwashing is considered primitive and often
> ineffective; (2) Mind control is claimed to be extremely powerful and compelling.[4]

The Passantinos conclude that no real differences exist between the terms, as they both

focus on the power of the cult recruiters and the inability of the recruit to think and/or

decide independently from the cult.[5] Then they state,

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[3] The Great Commission Church, otherwise known as Great Commission International (GCI), was originally called The Blitz Movement.   It was started as part of the Jesus Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It claims a unique Vision with a divinely inspired strategy based on Acts 1:8 to reach the world for Christ in this generation. It is highly authoritarian and has done much to demand the strict obedience of its members. There has been some effort of late to correct some of their deceptive and controlling teachings, but in the view of many ex-members this has been primarily token in nature. See Paul Martin, *Cult Proofing Our Kids* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1993) 38-39.

[4] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 33.

[5] Ibid., 33.

Martin here makes a sound argument. As identified in the last chapter, the Passantinos overstate their position by not allowing for a significant qualitative difference between brainwashing and mind control, including it s disarming subtlety. Additionally, the fact that much of the early brainwashing research provides evidence of little or no physical coercion, while still producing massive thought reform, is information the Passantinos fail to consider. This failure again points to the straw-man character of the Passantinos claims.

The Passantinos summarize their position by citing the comments of sociologists Bromley and Shupe,

> Finally, the brainwashing notion implied that somehow these diverse and unconnected movements had simultaneously discovered and implemented highly intrusive behavioral modification techniques. Such serendipity and coordination was implausible given the diverse backgrounds of the groups at issue. Furthermore, the inability of highly trained professionals responsible for implementing a variety of modalities for effecting individual change, ranging from therapy to incarceration, belie claims that such rapid transformation can routinely be accomplished by neophytes against an individual s will.[8]

To this Martin replies,

> This is a patently false representation of mind-control models, even some of the less sophisticated models. The transformation that cults bring about is *not* against an individual s will. He no longer sees things as he once did, he does not have adequate information to make an informed choice, and he has been manipulated emotionally to make the choice presented to him by the cult. The cult recruit is brought to the point where he either gives up his own will in order to be taught and directed by someone (the cult leader) who knows better than he, or he wills what the leader wants because the member s perceptions and judgments have been changed as a result of a series of manipulations. As former Children of God

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[8] David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, Public Reaction Against New Religious Movements, *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Report of the American Psychiatric Association*, ed. Marc Galanter (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association. 1989), 325-26. as quoted in Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 33.

member Rick Seelhoff said in Thy Will be Done (Moore, 1980). I wanted to put myself over onto someone that knew better than I did...I *willed to not will.* [9]

Martin s observation that the Passantinos are presenting a straw-man argument still fails in its underlying assumption. The weakness in Martin s response concerns the failure to address the matter of this willingness by the recruit as still being a sinful act of neglect. He also assumes like the Passantinos that for someone to be meaningfully responsible, the human will must at all times be autonomously free.[10] As pointed out in chapter two (on page 38), the human will need not be free in a libertarian[11] (or Arminian) sense in order to be held accountable or answerable to the requirements of the Creator. This response by Martin consists of an inconsistent view of the Scripture s teaching on what makes people responsible for their actions and therefore his argument empirically fails.

The second half of the Passantinos complaint involves the weak empirical evidence for the effectiveness of brainwashing techniques and the reputedly flawed studies that are used in an attempt to support the theory of mind control. The Passantinos state:

> Although some mind control model advocates bring up studies that appear to provide objective data in support of their theories, such is not the case. These studies are generally flawed in several areas: (1) The respondents are not from a wide cross-section of ex-members, but disproportionately are those who have been

[9] Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 164-165.

[10] The reader is reminded that this is discussed in some detail in chapter two of this thesis.

[11] By libertarian is meant that acts of the will are free from internal or external causation. Arminians hold to a libertarian theory of free will, meaning they believe the human will to be autonomous from previous spiritual or external causation. That is, choices of the will are self-moved, and uncaused events in the soul are effectively indistinguishable from a chance event. In Reformed or Calvinistic thinking, free will or free agency means that the will acts in harmony with the nature or character of the person willing (Matt. 7:15-20; Eph. 2:1; I Cor. 2:14). The fallen will makes fallen choices.

exit-counseled by mind-control-model advocates who tell them they were under mind control; (2) Frequently the sample group is so small its results cannot be fairly representative of cult membership in general; (3) It is almost impossible to gather data from the same individuals before cult affiliation, during cult affiliation, and after cult disaffection, so respondents are sometimes asked to answer as though they were not yet members, or as though they were still members, etc. Each of these flaws introduces unpredictability and subjectivity that make such study results unreliable.[12]

This is an argument regarding the empirical trustworthiness of the methodology exercised

in mind control research. Martin responds,

First of all invoking methodological purity is a common ploy for avoiding the real issue in psychological discussion. Psychology is not nuclear physics. It is rare to find fields in which all the relevant research uses representative samples. That is why replication of empirical studies is so important and also why clinical findings are respected, despite their limitations. These methodological problems are compounded by ethical constraints on research (one cannot study the effects of trauma, for example, by randomly assigning one group of subjects to a bus crash and another group to a pleasant bus ride) that are especially applicable to the field of cultic studies. Nevertheless, a growing body of empirical literature and *a huge amount of clinical experience supports the primary contention of mind-control advocates, namely, that cult involvement causes psychological distress to many if not most cult members* (Galanter, 1989, Langone, 1993; MacDonald, 1988; Martin et al. 1992; Yakley, 1988).

The Passantinos also say that it is almost impossible to gather data from the same individuals before cult affiliation, during cult affiliation, and after cult disaffection (p. 37). This is true, but it does not mean that psychological researchers are helpless. The same problem existed with regard to the study of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Vietnam vets. There was no way to study them before they suffered PTSD; yet some excellent studies have been done using regression analysis (Winocur, Whitney, Sorenson, Vaughn, & Foy, 1997).[13]

Proper methodological approaches could be examined, but space restrictions limit

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[12]   Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 37.

[13]   Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 174-175. (Emphasis added).

doing so.[14] What can be identified in critiquing Martin s argument is a problem in his implied conclusion. The basic contention Martin makes is that, a huge amount of clinical experience supports the primary contention of mind control advocates, namely, that cult involvement causes psychological distress to many if not most cult members. [15] The fact that ex-cult members experience psychological distress is not the same as concluding that this must be due to mind control. Alternatively, the direct cause could be prolonged forms of spiritual deception.

As this writer reflects back on his own history of cultic involvement and recovery, he can affirm two agreements with Martin. First, the difficulty in obtaining objective information concerning the self-reporting of current cult members is great. Any observer who might have attempted to interview this writer would have certainly received a less-than-candid and accurate account of his group s activities. This writer has found the same to be true when he has attempted to question the current members of his old group about the condition of the members and of the group as a whole.

Second, Martin correctly distinguishes a high level of psychological distress evident in ex-members. Janis Hutchinson, an ex-Mormon, correctly identifies many of the recovery issues that ex-members need to work through. She notes they have a loss of roots (cultural context), story (personal testimony), identity (who they are as a religious

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[14] The reader is encouraged to read *The Practice of Social Research,* 7th ed.*,* by Earl Babbie, particularly pp. 119-126, as representative of commonly held methodological research practices. A good example of sound methodological practice can be found in *Religion and Racial Identity in the Movimento Negro of the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil*, a dissertation by Alan D. Myatt. See particularly pp. 41-47.

[15] Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 174.

person), ceremony (religious ritual), financial support, social network, and familiar patterns of social interaction.[16] All of this combined can be very overwhelming and cause incredible levels of emotional angst for the member who chooses to exit a cult. These *are* the sort of things that formal studies can identify. To Martin s credit, he does correctly identify the notion that cult recovery is multifaceted and is much more than a one-dimensional process.

Martin s argument is weakened when he attributes to mind control conclusive empirical support. Stating that cult involvement brings a great deal of psychological distress falls considerably short of proving the claims of mind control as a whole. Sociological research can provide many general conclusions, but they can also be used incorrectly to prove that which they fall short of proving. While Martin draws from what this writer terms general revelation, he is still guilty of overstating the empirical evidence in his attempt to support the theory of mind control, overemphasizing the effectiveness of thought reform techniques (as the Passantinos contend) at the expense of other factors.

Victimization and the Inability to Think.

The Passantinos claim,

> Many people who join cults want to help the needy, forsake materialism, or develop personal independence from their families Not necessarily bad goals, although misguided by false cult teachings. The cult mind control model, however *attributes cult membership primarily to mind control* and thereby denigrates or discounts such positive activities and goals, misaffiliated to cults as they are.
> The mind control model also fails to give *proper weight* to the role natural

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[16] Janis Hutchinson, *Out of the Cults and into the Church, Understanding & Encouraging Ex-Cultists* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Kregel Resources, 1994).

suggestibility plays in making people vulnerable to the cults. Highly suggestible people are especially susceptible to religious salesmanship as well as many other sales pitches.

> The cult mind control model instead *focuses on victimization*, claiming that a cult member joins as a result of mind control and not as the result of personal choice. Adopting a victimization perspective actually strips the cult member of his capacity for rational activity. The cult mind control model epitomizes a victim mentality.[17]

Martin replies:

> This passage again illustrates the Passantinos failure to clearly understand what mind-control model advocates actually say. *Mind-control is not exercised in a vacuum* it needs information to work with, whether it is cult-generated doctrine or the hopes, dreams, fears, and hang-ups of the potential recruit. Thus, the goals listed by the Passantinos may be used by the cult recruiter as hooks to draw the target into the sphere of the group. We do not denigrate such goals at all. We applaud any positive aims and activities. The problem is that they can also be used as lures to attract new members, or as ploys to achieve legitimacy in the community.[18]

Martin correctly identifies the nature of cultic experience as having a social context, and in this he agrees with the Passantinos. This fits with the experience of this writer and the many ex-members he has counseled. Barbara, an ex-Mormon, has frequently communicated to this writer over the past decade that the pull to return to the Mormon church continues to be rather strong. She does not miss the doctrines or belief system, which she now believes to be false. She laughs when people attribute this to her continued longings for the church. What she misses is the role of homemaker that comes in the Mormon package.   Martin is correct in his assumption that people join cults and remain, at least in part, because of both real and felt social needs.

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[17] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming The Bondage of Victimization, 38- 39. (Emphasis added).

[18] Martin,   Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization 178-179. (Emphasis added).

Martin further comments on the role of the Passantinos claim that natural suggestibility plays a major role in cult involvement:

> This is exactly the point we have made. Suggestibility probably does make people more susceptible to mind-control. Some people are naturally more suggestible than others, others go through periods in life in which they are more suggestible than at other times (e.g., times of crisis, bereavement, or transition of some kind or another). In such a condition people may be victimized, whether by a con artist, a Lothario, or a cult recruiter. It is not adopting a *victimization* perspective that strips the cult member of his capacity for rational activity. Rather, it is the victimization itself that does this though we acknowledge that it does so to varying degrees in different people.[19]

Martin proceeds to provide examples of some of his client s comments about having good intentions when they joined: hoping to help the needy, forsake materialism, grow up, or serve the Lord. It is these goals, Martin says, that contribute to their vulnerability to the practices of mind control.

It appears that Martin has not argued this point effectively for he has not addressed the primacy of mind control. Nor has he shown that the proper weight has not been given to the role of natural suggestibility, and he has not responded fully to the focus on victimization that is at issue for the Passantinos. All that Martin has done is to restate his position, adding to it some natural social elements in an attempt to provide his position some additional credibility.

Martin rightfully reminds the reader that cult involvement does not take place in a vacuum, and that different people are affected in varying degrees. Still, this does not provide clear support that mind control exists. It might just as easily be interpreted as meaning that at their core, people are social beings with differing needs, and can,

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[19] Ibid., 179.

therefore, at times be significantly influenced because of their humanness. Both the Bible

and the Passantinos would confirm this much. The first half of this complaint   that the

theory of mind control *overly* depends on a victimization model   is not cogently

addressed by Martin.

The second half of the Passantinos complaint, as identified in chapter two,

involves the cult recruits inability to think or make decisions for themselves. One of the

principal assumptions of the cult mind control model is that:

> Cult recruits become unable to think or make decisions for themselves...[and] The
> cult mind control model is based on a fundamental conviction that the cultist
> becomes unable to make responsible and rational choices or decisions (particularly
> the choice to leave the group)...[20]

Martin responds by saying:

> This is another example of all-or-nothing thinking, which the Passantinos have
> criticized in other works. We reject the implied assertion that we and our
> colleagues in this field accept this statement as it is written. We are well aware
> that many cult members do retain the ability to think for themselves in many areas
> of life, even in matters religious. We have always recognized that there are many
> degrees of mind-control, depending on numerous factors, including, but not limited
> to (1) the type and severity of any precult spiritual or psychological problems; (2)
> the degree of divergence of the cult s teachings and practices from the cult
> member s prior religious affiliation; (3) the intensity of the cultic indoctrination; (4)
> the degree to which the cult severs the cult member from his or her previous
> connections (family, friends, activities, etc.); and (5) the kind and degree of any
> corrective or disciplinary measures exercised by the cult on members who step out
> of line.[21]

Martin first qualifies the strongly worded position attributed to him and other mind

control advocates and then continues to make yet another qualification,

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[20] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 32.

[21] Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 156-157.

Having said this, we hasten to add that during the 12 years of Wellspring s operation we have worked with many ex-cult members who did have very serious difficulty thinking for themselves and making decisions. Their problems cannot be glibly dismissed as precult problems that presumably had nothing to do with the cultic experience. One girl who came to Wellspring from a well-known shepherding movement would sit at the dinner table and wait until she received permission to eat any item on her plate before she would do so.[22]

There are at least two responses that could be offered here to Martin s contention.

Empirically, one needs to ask whether Martin s picture of mind control as outlined is

consistent with statements from those he identifies as colleagues in the mind control

model. Consider Langone s comment that:

Conversion to cults is not truly a matter of choice. Vulnerabilities do not merely lead individuals to a particular group. The group manipulates these vulnerabilities and deceives prospects in order to persuade them to join and, ultimately, renounce their old lives.[23]

Or consider Singer s observations:

In a situation removed from the reinforcing pressures of the cult, the ex-members are encouraged to think for themselves so that they are once again in charge of their own volition and their own decision-making. [24]

Or that of Hassan,

Members [of the Unification Church]...become *totally* dependent upon the group for financial and emotional support, and lose the ability to act independently of it.[25]

Each of these three: Langone, Singer, and Hassan, make clear enough statements

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[22] Ibid., 157.

[23] Langone, http://www.csj.org/studyindex/studycult/cultqa4.htm

[24] Ron Enroth quoting Margaret Singer Cult/Countercult, *Eternity* 27, no 11 (November 1977): 20.

[25] Hassan, *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, 6. (Emphasis added).

concerning mind control s capacity to control, and *not just* to limit one s cognitive abilities. Yet Martin claims that they do not believe this. His claims are inconsistent and do not fit the facts.

As a second response to Martin s argument one could ask whether he is *consistent* in applying these conditional notions of the effect of mind control upon one s ability rationally to think through his/her involvement in a cult. Consider Martin s own statement,

> [T]he process whereby he or she was drawn into the cult was a subtle but powerful force over which he or she had little or no control and therefore they need not feel either guilt or shame because of their experience.[26]

Martin responds to the Passantinos objection to this statement:

> While the Wellspring statement might be slightly overstated, the Passantinos overstate it further in their summary. By itself, the Wellspring statement could be broadly interpreted, as the Passantinos have chosen to do. However, *the original context is concerned specifically with joining a cult. It was not a blanket statement concerning anything and everything cult members may have done after they joined*...We would agree that those who join cults are guilty of not asking all the right questions, of not examining the cult s claims thoroughly enough against the records of history and Scripture, of not adequately applying the rules of logic to the group s teachings and explanations, and of not having an adequate knowledge of coercive persuasion techniques. In other words, cult recruits are guilty of allowing themselves to be deceived. But is that a sin? Should we rebuke the victim of a con artist for allowing himself to be victimized? Do we blame the battered wife for falling in love with and marrying a batterer?[27]

There are two difficulties with Martin s statement. One difficulty has to do with his own lack of consistency. Martin states that this powerful force over which he or she

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[26] Paul Martin, Wellspring s Approach to Cult Rehab, *Wellspring Messenger* 4, no 5, 1.

[27] Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Re-Victimization, 158-159. (Emphasis added).

had little or no control relates specifically to *joining* a cult, but not to *all* the behavior

exercised within the cult. Then just a page later Martin says,

> No one *drags* people into a cult. They do *join freely* most of the time. When they
> don t, it s the rare exception rather than the rule. The point here is not whether
> these people are acting as free, volitional, rational beings. The point is they don t
> join a *cult*   that is, they don t see the group *as a cult*. They don t see the fine
> print because in most cases, it is kept from them.[28]

Martin also contradicts himself in this statement. He claims that when people join,

they do so because of a force they cannot resist. Then Martin says that some are not

forced and join freely.

Second, regarding Martin s question about whether allowing oneself to be

deceived is a sin, the answer is yes. *They* joined a cult. *They* did it, and not somebody

else. When somebody does something wrong, Scripture identifies it as sinful: whether

knowingly or unknowingly they are still guilty of having done it, although ignorance may

mitigate their punishment. It appears that Martin has a confusion of categories here.

There is guilt and there is the penalty for guilt. God commands people to keep themselves

from being deceived, and God gives plenty of tools to prevent it (II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:2-

4). Even the unbeliever can take advantage of Christianity s teaching of deception and

undue influence. When a person chooses not to be proactive, but instead to be lazy or just

negligent in our search for truth, they often do fall into sin. When one sins, there is a

broad range of penalties involved that depend on a variety of conditions such as the

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[28] Ibid., 160. (Emphasis added).

amount of light and knowledge that person has.[29]

Martin is guilty of overstating the place of victimization as part of mind control when it is applied to cult involvement and recovery. He and other mind control advocates are inconsistent in their claims regarding the level of the cult members inability to think. In this complaint, Martin fails to make a consistent argument.

Reasoning is Circular and Self-Defeating.

As covered in chapter two, this complaint contains both the mind control advocates use of reason, and also an argument for mind control itself being self-contradictory. The Passantinos claim that exit counselors who invoke the explanation of mind control do not provide any clear objective proof to the cultist that thought reform is indeed being exercised in their group. The Passantinos state,

> The standard for determining mind control is not some objective evaluation of mental health or competency, but merely the assumed power of mind control the critic accords to the cult.[30]

To this Martin responds,

> The Passantinos seem to overlook the fact that exit counselors arrive on the scene literally with suitcases full of evidence. Responsible exit counselors will have documentation on the practices of the group and how those practices relate to principles of mind-control. Such documentation may take the form of personal testimonies of former members of the group, of relatives of members or former members, or of law enforcement officials or other agency personnel who have investigated the group or otherwise had dealings with it. The documentation may be from news reports on the activities of the group or the writings of mental health

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[29] Eric Pement, Mind-Control, Wellspring Responds to Cornerstone, *Cornerstone* 23, no 106 (undated): 7-8. Eric Pement makes a helpful biblical distinction between one s guilt, always evident in Scripture when sin takes place, and one s due penalty for the guilty activity.

[30] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming The Bondage of Victimization, 34.

professionals. Exit counselors will also have a history of how the cult member s personality has changed since joining the cult....Although one might challenge the persuasiveness of the exit counselor s evidence, fair-mindedness demands that their competence and diligence be respected. Exit counselors   at least the competent and ethical ones   are not the unthinking, hired guns that the Passantinos make them out to be.[31]

Martin is claiming that objective material is frequently presented to the cultist. There is

empirically verifiable information that the exit counselor offers. This appears to be a

strong argument. But the point of the Passantinos is not that there are no behavioral

standards that can be appealed to, but that within modern efforts to define mind control

there is an effort to move away from

seeing mind control as a powerful set of techniques that rob individuals of personal freedom, and toward a new, *broader definition* which sees mind control as a *synonym for means of persuasion*. However, if mind control loses its distinctive power and unique techniques, then it ceases to have any relevance as a term descriptive of special cult indoctrination processes.[32]

This is a very significant concern that the Passantinos have identified, and it is

similar to Lifton s concern about difficulties with the term brainwashing,

One may justly conclude that the term [brainwashing] has a far from precise and a questionable usefulness [sic]; one may even be tempted to forget about the whole subject and return to more constructive pursuits.[33]

This return to more constructive pursuits may be just what is needed. Interestingly,

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[31] Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 169-170.

[32] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 34. (Emphasis added).

[33] Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 4.

Martin does not directly address this definitional concern.[34] The Passantinos, according to Martin, attribute cult involvement solely to spiritual deception, faulty presuppositions, fallacious reasoning, improper religious commitments, and unwise choices. Martin asks how the Passantinos know this:

> If a person joins a cult, according to the Passantinos, he has been spiritually deceived and has made an improper religious decision. Well, how do the authors know? Have they talked to him? The Passantinos may respond, Well, yeah, we did, but he denies he s deceived. So, the Passantinos could end up in circular reasoning themselves. If the ex-cult member *admits* he was spiritually deceived, then the Passantinos are right. But if he *denies* he was spiritually deceived, he does so, according to the Passantinos, because he is spiritually deceived.[35]

While the first half of Martin s argument may be logically consistent, it is not empirically sound according to Scripture. The Bible teaches that people can, and will be deceived, irrespective of whether they agree or not (Jer. 17:9; Mark 13:22; I Cor. 3:18; II Tim. 3:13). Martin does not effectively deflect the complaint that circular reasoning is used in the defense of mind control, nor does he cogently argue that the Passantinos are guilty of circular reasoning in their position. This writer agrees with the Passantinos that people have an intellectual responsibility to resist spiritual deception and the manipulation commonly experienced when joining, as well as remaining in a cult. But what of the second half of this complaint that mind control is itself a self-refuting claim?

The Passantinos argue that the theory of mind control is self-refuting because it requires that the cult member, who cannot think sufficiently in order to exit their cult, can

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[34] Martin does not directly address this concern in his formal response, in the article Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 151-191. Martin may address this definitional concern in other writings that this writer is not aware.

[35] Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 171.

nevertheless still be counseled through rational discourse and cognitive arguments to leave

their cult. This involves what the Passantinos claim are two false principal assumptions of

mind control: Cult recruits become unable to think or make decisions for themselves and

cannot decide to leave their cult. [36] This, according to the Passantinos, involves a logical

contradiction that Martin rejects.

Martin repeats what has become something of a mantra regarding his criticism of

the Passantinos.

> In their book, *Witch Hunt*, under the heading, It s Not Always Either/Or, the
> Passantinos state: Another problem Christians often have in discerning between
> good and bad is the tendency to miss some of the options (Passantino &
> Passantino, 1991, p. 113). Remarkably, the article that concerns us relies on the
> all-or-nothing fallacy criticized by the Passantinos. They suggest, for example, that
> all who subscribe to a mind-control model believe that *every cult member is
> completely under mind-control, and totally and always unable to think for himself
> or herself.*
> No responsible researcher or practitioner subscribes to the mind-control
> model described by the Passantinos. In *Thought Reform and the Psychology of
> Totalism*, Robert J. Lifton wrote:
>
> > Beyond this web of semantic...confusion [regarding the definition of
> > thought reform] lies an image of brainwashing as an all-powerful,
> > irresistible, unfathomable, and magical method of achieving total control
> > over the human mind. It is of course none of these things, and this loose
> > usage makes the word a rallying point for fear, resentment, urges toward
> > submission, justification for failure, irresponsible accusation, and for a wide
> > gamut of emotional extremism (1961, p.4).[37]

According to Martin, this is just another example of a straw-man attack on mind

control. In order to complete the complaint, the Passantinos further claim that mind

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[36] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 32.

[37] Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 154-155.

control adherents believe that the cultist cannot decide to leave their cult. Martin

responds to this claim,

> We do not know anyone who would make such a blanket statement. It is
> manifestly contradicted by the hundreds, if not thousands, of former cult members
> who have left their cults of their own volition. What we would assert, however, is
> that many cult members find it difficult to leave the cult, even when they may want
> to. Often this is due to fear of the threatened consequences of leaving (e.g.,
> forsaking God, being condemned to hell, suffering divine wrath in the form of
> accidents or disease).[38]

Martin s response is well thought out. It is logically coherent, factually supported,

and existentially viable. It effectively shows the falsity of the Passantinos claim that mind

control is self-refuting. While this complaint was relatively easy for Martin to address, the

next one is not.

The Anti-Religious Bias of Mind Control Assumptions.

As covered in chapter two, the Passantinos identify much of the secular and non-

Christian bias of those who have contributed historically to the thought reform model. As

this writer earlier explained, the Passantinos argument was nothing more than an

argument *ad hominem*. Martin concurs:

> We [those at Wellspring] fail to see, however, what relevance the antireligious
> sentiments of some authors have to do with the modern concept of cult mind-
> control as held in particular by evangelical proponents of the model. That some
> people in the field might be biased against religion does not mean the concept itself
> is antireligious or necessarily leads to such a bias. Mind-control theories can apply
> to a religious setting, a psychotherapy setting, a political setting, a business setting.
> Are mind-control advocates, then, antipsychotherapy, antipolitics, and
> antibusiness? Are mind-control advocates antimilitary because of the concept was
> first studied under military conditions? Hardly...In this section, the Passantinos
> employ an ad hominem argument that is rather poorly thought out. If we were to
> employ this form of reasoning, we might conclude that the Passantinos are guilty

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[38] Ibid., 157-158.

of an antisecular bias. It seems that once again the Passantinos have violated their rule, Similar Does Not Prove Same (Passantino & Passantino, 1991).[39]

The Passantinos however, provide an even stronger argument within this complaint,

> In short, there is no objective, evidential way to define groups that are good (not using mind control) versus groups that are bad (using mind control). Without evidence, the accusation of mind control against any group or individual becomes a matter of personal bias. Once one points to particular doctrines, teachings, or practices as inherently bad, one has abandoned the supposedly religion-neutral position of the cult mind control model advocates and must make religious judgments. Although this is not the focus of this article, we note here that as evangelical Christians we openly admit that we make religious judgements regarding the cults, and that those religious judgments are based on the Bible, not on our own subjective opinions or some consensus of social-science professionals.[40]

Essentially, the Passantinos are claiming that the inability to draw clear-cut lines between cultic and non-cultic groups, using the supposed value-neutral position of mind control, is a proof that mind control does not exist. Martin emphatically denies this:

> A group can be evaluated according to explicit criteria. For example, is it characterized by the use of certain techniques, such as Lifton s eight criteria of thought reform? That is, does it use milieu control, mystical manipulation? Does it have sacred science?...There is a wealth of literature in the social sciences about controlling, tight organizations versus loose organizations. There are criteria in political science for determining what is and is not a totalitarian system.[41]

Martin here is appealing to a consensus of social science professionals. As long as Lifton s eight characteristics of mind control have a consistent Christian base from which to draw meaning, there may be little trouble applying these criteria. However, what Martin does not address is what happens when there is *no Christian base* from which to

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[39] Ibid.,177.

[40] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 38.

[41] Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 178.

draw answers to important philosophical questions.

It is a reasonable expectation that all people need to be able to live life free of hypocrisy, relying on normal experience of the world and living their lives free from imposed mind control techniques. While Martin expresses a desire to address his thoughts on mind control within a Christian world view, many non-Christian mind control advocates profess something quite different. A secular and morally autonomous perspective that seeks to define bad merely by social custom rather than by the Bible as the Word of God is not what a Christian should be promoting.

Theological Inconsistencies.

As the reader will recall from chapter two, the Passantinos draw from the story of Adam and Eve in their attempt to highlight the importance of cult and ex-cult members taking responsibility for their sin, rather than merely shifting blame, which they claim is unavoidable in the mind control model. The Passantinos summarize their criticism in the form of a question,

> Our first parents succumbed to the temptation and were cast out of the Garden, and all of humanity thereafter has been penalized by this primal sin. If our first parents could be held morally responsible when confronted by the ultimate tempter, how is it that we seek to excuse ourselves or our offspring when confronted by human tempters of far less power, skill, and charisma?[42]

Martin responds to this,

> The simple answer to their question is that the analogy between the serpent s beguilement of Eve in the Garden of Eden and what happens in cult recruitment is like comparing apples with chimpanzees. God had explicitly told Adam and Eve in advance, Don t eat of this tree. The tree was identified, the tree was located.

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[42] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 40.

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They knew what it was, they knew where it was, they knew all about it. God had given them complete and adequate information. Most people we know who have joined cults did not have anyone (and certainly not anyone with the authoritative voice of God) saying, Don t join this group, it is evil, and here is the evidence. But that is basically what God did with Adam and Eve. The comparison of the Garden with the cult situation would be more appropriate if God put Adam and Eve into the Garden with no forewarning. They see the fruit on the tree. It looks so good. The serpent is dangling from a branch and says, This is good fruit, eat it. They eat it and then God comes along and says, Hey, you two! You just sinned! They say, What? We sinned? How did we sin? You should have known better than to eat that fruit. Why should have we known better? You were spiritually deceived. Well, you never told us not to eat that fruit! But if you were more spiritual you would have known. [43]

As addressed in chapter two, the Passantinos make a misinformed comparison between the temptation of Adam and Eve and the temptation of the perspective cult member.[44] Likewise, Martin fails in his attempt to draw a hypothetical parallel. Adam and Eve, unlike the potential cult recruit, did not bring any past individual or familial sin to the temptation. Unlike the potential cultist, Adam and Eve did not have a sin nature to contend with while they were being tempted. Therefore, Martin s more appropriate scenario still fails to be an adequate illustration. The empirical facts concerning the significance of the sin nature and the effect of humanity s history of sin are not seriously considered in Martin s scenario, therefore reflecting a position inconsistent with the Bible s account of the Fall.

What the story of Adam and Eve does suggest about cultic involvement is that

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[43] Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 183.

[44] The same preconditions for both Adam and Eve and those effected by mind control were not present. The difference between Adam and Eve and the person falling for a cult is that the person falling for a cult is already a sinner with a history of sin, and so with patterns of sin which can be manipulated more easily. Adam and Eve had no such history of sin. They were carrying no baggage with them when they approached the tree of the temptation.

sinful choices always include a social context that involve relationships with others and with God. In chapter four this social factor is elaborated further.

Continuing his challenge to the Passantinos objection concerning the nature of responsibility, Martin provides a reductionistic account of spiritual deception:

> If cult joining is *simply* a problem of spiritual deception, then the sword cuts both ways. If cult members are responsible because they lack discernment, why is not the Church also responsible for lack of discernment? Why hasn t the church been able to recognize the wolves and warn the flock? Where was the church when Mao Tse-tung came along? Where was the church when Hitler came along? Where was the church when Jeffrey Lundgren came along? Who was warning the people who followed these leaders?[45]

There are several problems with Martin s comments about spiritual deception. First, the context of Martin s comment suggests that he has a simplistic opinion of the Passantinos account of cultic involvement. Second, he appears to have a minimalist view of the churches own accountability for the lack of spiritual discernment among their people.

The Passantinos do not convey so reductionistic an approach as to identify the cause behind cult involvement simply as spiritual deception. They acknowledge emotional and social needs, lack of critical thinking skills, and the desire for fulfillment and significance as contributing factors.[46] Nevertheless, Martin correctly states that the Passantinos have in some respects misrepresented the position of the mind control advocates, but he also voices an overly dichotomous and unproven set of assumptions in

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[45] Martin, Overcoming the Problem of Revictimization, 183. (Emphasis added).

[46] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Problem of Victimization, 40.

defending his own position that misrepresents the Passantinos.

Martin seems to think that his Socratic questions concerning the church will automatically elicit evidence to support his position. The conclusion he evidently intends for the reader to draw is that it is silly to think that spiritual deception plays such a dominant role in cult involvement, and that it is equally silly to think the reason the church has not responded differently to historic wolves, evil dictators, or cult leaders is due to its own spiritual deception. But is there any evidence for its *not* having been deceived? It would appear to the average counter-cult worker that the leaders of evangelical churches have indeed been widely deceived about how to respond to cults. In fact, very few churches or pastors have any concern for counter-cult education and very few churches support counter-cult or other apologetic ministries. Many have little or no understanding of the dynamics of mind control.

Furthermore, Martin does not consider the Reformed differentiation between the visible and the invisible church. The Catholic and Protestant churches have always held that the church is indefectible. [47] By this term is meant that the true body of Christ (that is, the invisible church) is protected by the Holy Spirit from serious heresy or final apostasy and that the visible church will continue identifiable through all time until Christ s return. This does not mean, however, that a particular local church or hierarchical leadership is guaranteed such protection. Leaders and their churches may and do apostatize, as history shows. It must be acknowledged that evangelical churches as a

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[47] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reform Publishing Co., 1997), 41.

whole, for instance, have failed to respond adequately to the challenge of the cults. Martin

is correct to complain that the churches are not effectively committed to supporting

counter-cult ministries such as his. Despite this, the Holy Spirit has made promises in

Scripture that the elect will not be finally deceived, and he has had a continuing teaching

ministry among believers as the body of Christ since the age of the apostles (Matt. 24: 24;

John 17:12, 17, 24). In fact, it could be easily argued that the existence of para-church

counter-cult ministries is itself part of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit to the body

of Christ as a whole. Martin says with mild sarcasm,

> There [has been] great silence in the church. There is still great silence in the
> church. So, if it is *only* a deception issue, then we re all wrong, we re all deceived.
> To say that one group is more deceived than the other when the church has
> consistently sat on its hands in the face of this cult problem and has provided
> virtually no resources for cult victims is to engage in self-righteous blame-
> shifting.[48]

This writer concurs with Martin about the historic and current silence about cult

apologetics in the organizational church. Very few, if any, serious workers in the

apologetic or recovery arenas who work with current or ex-cult members would disagree

with him. Martin s criticism of the Passantinos in their identifying only deception as the

cause of cult involvement is merely his own version of a straw-man argument and a denial

of the need to more comprehensively address the role of spiritual deception. Additionally,

while the organized church has indeed been nearly silent, there remain para-church

organizations that are part of the corporate body of Christ that have not been silent. CRI,

while not adequately addressing the subject, has itself been very vocal and influential in

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[48] Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 183. (Emphasis added).

exposing the dangers inherent in the cults. The argument that Martin presents contains a false dichotomy and is not empirically cogent.

The question remaining is, Why has the church not more adequately addressed concerns about cults and those recovering from cults? Martin himself laments this at some length:

> We are not saying that cult joining is a sin problem that must be dealt with evangelistically. Rather, we are saying that the cult problem for the church and the cult victim alike is akin to the problem of physical disease. Illness, as well as death, is a direct result of the Fall. But the cure for disease is not evangelization leading to spiritual redemption. The cure for disease consists of medicine and education. Through much of history, the church has been largely responsible for the advancement of medical science in the world. Likewise, the church needs to see the problem of cults fundamentally as a problem of evil whose solution is, to be sure, bathed in the prayers of believers, but realized via science and education as well as theology.[49]

Martin proposes here something similar to a medical model to explain cult involvement and recovery. But can the use of such medical adjectives be shown to be sufficiently comprehensive for understanding cult involvement and recovery? This writer does not believe so. The nature of being involved in any social context, such as a cult, requires an interactive process to take place between people. Catching a virus involves a one-way relationship with the virus: there is no interactive, personal interdependent relationship as is the case with cult membership. This shows that the model is not existentially viable, as it does not account consistently for one s social needs. The attempt to use this sort of model simply communicates a somewhat mechanistic perception, not only of cult involvement, but also of human relationships which is not present in Scripture

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[49] Ibid., 185.

as something to be accepted or promoted.[50] That is, the effectiveness of the argument is

weakened by false analogy.   Martin s use of a medical paradigm to explain cult

involvement by using the thought reform model, is neither empirically sound, logically

consistent with Scripture, nor is it existentially viable.

Martin further criticizes the Passantinos:

> The Passantinos conclusion is a call for evangelization of cult members. But their
> vision in this regard is a truncated view of Judeo-Christian ethics and theology.
> Christians and others have traditionally had an interest in opposing sinful systems
> as well as providing spiritual comfort for those caught in them. The desire for the
> salvation of the souls of those bound in the literal chains of slavery was admirable,
> but without the courage of Christian statesmen such as William Wilberforce,
> strongly supported by John Wesley and other Christian leaders, we might still have
> slavery in Britain and America. Evangelizing those who have very real spiritual,
> emotional, and social needs and who are looking for fulfillment and significance
> for their lives (p. 40) without working against the oppression that enslaves them
> is hypocrisy. We believe God loves cult members and wants us to work for their
> freedom, whether or not they choose to follow him.[51]

As stated in chapter two, the Passantinos model of cultic involvement is

problematic, but so is Martin s. Martin is correct in his criticism of the Passantinos over-

emphasis on evangelization to the exclusion, or near exclusion, of addressing the cultists

victimization, thus setting up a false dichotomy. Martin proposes the opposite extreme in

addressing victimization and nearly excludes the issue of culpability, thus making his

inconsistency all the more evident. He does not seem to notice that in saying the cure for

disease consists of medicine *and education* (emphasis added), that education for the

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[50]   The reader is encouraged to consider the argument in chapter four concerning the nature of
being human according to the Bible and highly encourages the reading of *Being Human: The Nature of
Spiritual Experience* by Ranald Macaulay & Jerram Barrs for more empirical support.

[51]   Martin, Overcoming the Bondage of Revictimization, 185-186.

Christian includes evangelism and apologetics designed to protect believers theologically against cultic involvement. In other words he tacitly admits that one s response to cultic involvement should necessarily include theological education as the Passantinos have been claiming.[52]

Summary.

In comparing these five rudimentary criticisms from the perspective of Martin, several points become evident.

The Brainwashing Contradiction and Lack of Empirical Support. Martin makes the cogent argument that there is no contradiction evident in the general way in which mind control advocates treat early forms of brainwashing and more recent mind control formulations. Martin correctly identifies the high levels of psychological distress evident in ex-members, but fails to provide empirical support for the mind control theory as a sufficient account of the matter.

Victimization and the Inability to Think. Martin rightfully reminds the reader that cult involvement does not take place in a social vacuum. At the same time, he depends too heavily upon the victimization of the cult member to the neglect of acknowledging the culpability of the cultist. Martin contradicts himself regarding the cognitive abilities of the cultist and confuses the categories of guilt and punishment while denying the reality of sinful culpability for having joined a cult despite the warning signals.

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[52] Martin should be given credit for including theological discussion in his model, as many mind control advocates give this much less thoughtful attention. The concern of this writer is that perhaps Martin has not sufficiently and consistently considered the theological ramifications of his current model of recovery. See Wellspring s Approach to Cult Rehab, *Wellspring Messenger* (November/December 1993): 1.

Reasoning is Circular and Self-Defeating. In his defense of mind control, Martin fails to properly to consider Scriptural support for treating deception as sin. He thus fails to effectively deflect the charge that he commits the logical fallacy of circular reasoning. Martin correctly identifies the Passantinos straw-man characterization of mind control, thus refuting their claim that his argument is self-defeating.

The Anti-Religious Bias of Mind Control Assumptions. Martin fails in his attempt to refute the criticism that mind control has a throughly secular history and is therefore suspect. This objection is irrelevant because the facts drawn from scientific investigation are a sub-category of general revelation. He does not sufficiently acknowledge the special revelation found in the Bible, which would challenge the moral autonomy inherent in the secular constructs of much of the mind control theory.

Theological Inconsistencies. Martin, like the Passantinos, has a biblically insufficient understanding of the Fall and its implications with respect to cult involvement and recovery. Martin posits a biblically and historically inaccurate account of the nature of spiritual deception generally and specifically as it relates to the function of the church. He does not sufficiently account for the indefectible character of the church, as evidenced in the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit during the development of systematic theology and apologetics in church history. In this regard, he then makes a false antithesis, attempting to defend mind control by incorrectly assuming that the church can not be deceived in the same way the cult member might be.

This chapter has explained and evaluated Paul Martin s response to Bob and Gretchen Passantinos five charges which they claim disprove the theory of mind control.

This writer concludes that neither Martin nor the Passantinos have given adequate account of this matter. Both have reductionist elements that weaken their critiques. The next chapter presents and defends a family systems model that better explains the context and role of mind control in the process of cult recovery.

Chapter 4   Mind Control in the Context of the Family System

The last two chapters have examined and evaluated the positions of Bob and Gretchen Passantino/CRI (the conversion model) and Wellspring/Paul Martin (the thought reform model). This chapter presents and defends a family systems model drawn from the Family Systems Theory that better explains the role of mind control in the process of cult recovery.

By Family Systems Theory is meant the sociological theory that holds that the most important factor affecting behavior can be found in the patterns of relationships derived from the family. The family systems model that this paper specifically supports consist of two basic components. The first component is theological in character, found most consistently in a Reformed or Calvinistic understanding of the Bible. The second is a descriptive psychological/sociological component rooted in the Family Systems Theory that views cultic involvement primarily as an outgrowth of an unhealthy family relationship.

Those identified in the recent formulations of both the conversion model and the thought reform model agree that one of the most persistent and extraordinarily difficult hurdles ex-cultists must overcome is the reconstruction of their spiritual lives. It is precisely because of this that an informed, well defined, and theologically coherent understanding of God, human nature, and the nature of spirituality must undergird sufficiently comprehensive understanding of cult recovery.

The Theological Component.

God. Having a consistent biblical notion of what God is like is vitally important to

our subject of cultic influence and recovery. Unlike purely secular formulations of mind control, the position of this writer is that recovery from cultic influence can not be complete without a consistently biblical view of God, with whom the believer develops a deepening personal relationship.

By God, is meant the kind of God portrayed in the Westminster *Confession of Faith* and as found in the pages of Scripture. This biblically consistent understanding of God will include at least three primary, but very different, concepts. The triune personal God must be understood as Creator, loving Parent,[1] Savior, and transcendent Lord over all creation.

As an active personal Spirit, he is involved in people s lives in a *providentially* positive way, desiring to lead them into all truth, and meeting their real spiritual needs (John 16:13). To be a loving creator and parent means that God genuinely has the very best intentions for his people, that he is rationally reliable, making only trustworthy promises (II Pet.1:2-4). Additionally, because he has created humankind, he knows each person better than they know themselves. As Savior he has satisfied the divine justice his people s behalf through the substitutionary death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ, thus fulfilling God s requirement, securing his children s relationship with their heavenly Father.

As Lord, he is capable of always providing means both sufficient and commensurable to achieve the intended ends (Eph. 1:3,11; Rom. 8:28). With God being a

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[1] A distinction needs to be made here between God s creative fatherhood of all, with the resultant brotherhood of all humankind and the spiritual or redemptive fatherhood of all believers resulting from God s regeneration of his people.

loving parent, Creator, Savior, relationally personal, perfect communicator, all knowing, and totally capable of exercising his will at all times, it is not difficult to understand that he must have moral standards that his creation is responsible to keep.

Since the Reformation, Reformed theology has consistently held that God is sovereign in the salvation of the individual. He *calls* people externally by the gospel and internally by his Spirit, *regenerates* them by the power of his Word, thus *enabling* them to respond through the *gift of faith* to the gospel. Human responsibility in this matter is partly conditioned by the light at the time of conversion, which varies greatly from person to person. Some people therefore who enter cults do so as believers, but with inadequate theological understanding. The truth they take into the cult from their past experience may eventually overcome their willingness to submit to false doctrine and practice. This was the experience of the writer.[2] Others enter cults as unbelievers and need to be converted as part of their exiting experience. This requires the ex-cultist to understand what it means to be a part of a sovereign Lord s creation, and specifically what it means to be human.

Being Human. In the book *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience,* the authors identify being human as:

> An organizing principle   a principle or law which is so basic to the subject concerned that it controls any future inquiry within it. Starting with such a

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[2] It is helpful for the reader to understand that the writer was converted to the gospel a year prior to his personal involvement in the cultic group. This conversion did not protect him from cultic involvement, but it did provide, upon exiting the group fifteen years later, a regenerate basis on which recovery could more effectively take place. The writer s pre-cultic experience in the evangelical community (both church and Christian college) did not provide a sufficient counterbalance to the harmful effects of his birth- family dynamics. It is explained later in this chapter that birth-family dynamics can predispose a person toward cultic involvement.

control principle, one is able to explore reality and make new discoveries because of it; yet at the same time one is prevented from adding anything which contradicts it. Has God provided us with such a principle for the Christian life? The question is not whether there is an individual clever enough to formulate such a statement, but rather whether the Bible itself gives us such a key. We feel it does and that it derives, as one would expect, from God s statement concerning man s origin: Let us make man in our image (Gen. 1:26)[3]

The authors further state that this created image involves being something like God, in

that the created beings are persons. Adam and Eve had all the faculties of personality:

They were creative and aesthetic, so are we; they loved and reasoned, so do we; they

were moral and we are moral; they had choice and we have choice. [4] Further, Barrs and

Macaulay write,

Like God, we relate to everything personally he is creative and so are we; we are given dominion over the earth a dominion intended originally to be benign and so to reflect God s own dominion. We are made also for personal relationships man with woman, woman with woman, man with man and both with God.[5]

People were created for the purpose of having *relationships*! Gen.1:27-28 provides a

basis for the Christian understanding of marriage. Gen. 2:24 states that For this reason a

man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one

flesh, emphasizing the importance of a new family unit. Barrs and Macaulay again say

that the purpose for being comes from the nature and purpose of the Creator:

Genesis 1 also indicates that *the family was designed to be the clearest demonstration of what is meant by the expression the image of God.* Here we

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[3] Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs, *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1997), 13-16.

[4] Ibid., 14.

[5] Ibid.

need to be careful. Each individual man and woman is the image of God in that each is a person. But God s personality cannot be considered apart from his diversity; three persons constitute the one true God....Similarly in the personness of humans is fulfilled within a social experience...a human is fulfilled not primarily as an individual alone, but rather in relationship with others.[6]

This relational emphasis by God s design can lead one to easily see the centrality of the influence of families upon an individual when it comes to religious choices. Since humans are made as social beings, the ultimate purpose in life is fulfilled positively as one seeks out godly relationships. Conversely, as a person commits sin (Rom. 14:23, Col. 3:5, 8) in the course of contributing to unhealthy relationships, they fight against God and his revealed design for them.

Many recovering cultists lack a clear understanding of what it means for them to have been made in the image of God. They have *interactively contributed* to this defective understanding in their families, and need to accept their part in this activity and seek to correct their relationships with others as well as with God.

It is particularly relevant to the family systems model to consider the importance placed upon relationships reflected in what it means to be created in the image of God. Consider the following from Barrs and Macaulay:

> What we are suggesting, however, is that the relationship of marriage which is in fact the norm in human society was designed by God to be the clearest demonstration and reflection of the unity and diversity experienced within the Trinity. Hence, the expression they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24) means not just a physical union, though obviously it includes this. Rather, it highlights an experience of unity which is possible uniquely in the exclusive and total commitment of marriage. This makes it unlike any other relationship. Becoming one flesh comprises a commitment to love within the sphere of all that makes us

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[6] Ibid., 171. (Emphasis added).

human, to share the whole of one s life. It includes physical union in intercourse and the amazing possibility of creating other persons with whom to share the relationship of oneness. These children are also bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh to each of the parents. *In other words, the family is uniquely the image of God.* [7]

The family therefore plays a significant and unique role in expressing who a person is according to the Bible s definition of what it means to be human. If this notion is indeed a valid one, then ignoring the centrality of the influence of the family upon cult involvement seems to involve a denial of what the Bible teaches about being made in the image of God. It also weakens the fullness of humanness.

Since the Fall, humanity s sinful nature has corrupted its humanness. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they chose to deny God s right as Creator to be their standard of right and wrong (Gen. 3). The image of God still remained within them, but in a diseased state. They no longer reflected God s perfect moral character, and neither do people today. People s faculties also are impaired and flawed, yet they are still human (Gen 9:6; James 3:9). However, humans have become sinful creatures (Mk. 7:21-23), and in this respect not like God. This is a particularly important notion for ex-cultists to understand, as spiritual recovery involves catching a clear vision of what it means to move from fallenness to restoration.[8] The unbeliever (who exited from a cult) as well as the counselor needs to understand that the results of the Fall severely hamper the spiritual advancement

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[7] Ibid., 171-172. (Emphasis added).

[8] It is acknowledged here that many ex-members of Bible-based (TACO s) have already become Christians as defined by Scripture. That is they have already heard and believed the gospel, repented of their sins, trusted the person of Christ for acceptance with God and have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. With these ex-members the focus of recovery must be more appropriately given to their sanctification and a clearer understanding of what is included in spiritual deception and authentic spirituality.

of the ex-cult member. From such passages as Rom.8:5-8; Eph. 2:1; II Tim. 2:24-26; and

I Cor. 2:14-16 it is quite apparent that fallen human beings are radically affected in their

intellectual and volitional capacities.

Regeneration provides them an answer, as it involves the Holy Spirit s renewal of

mental, emotional, and volitional capacities to increasingly manifest the divine nature

(Rom. 12:1-2; II Pet. 1:2-9). Conversion involves both God s sovereign act in the soul

and personal response to the Spirit s prompting. Faith and repentance can be understood

in terms of I Thess. 1:9. This verse observes that the Thessalonians turned *to* God *from*

idols, *to serve* the living and true God.   Here repentance (from idols) and faith (to God)

are effectively the same act of the soul. The next phrase *to serve* shows that faith-

repentance is followed by a new life of obedience. Because he has now trusted Christ

alone for salvation he is justified (declared righteous) from moral guilt and condemnation

(Rom. 5:1-2). This is an objective forensic change of relationship between the sinner and

God. God s saving act solves three problems of the exiting cultist. Their moral guilt is

met by *justification*, their relational alienation from God and others is met by the invitation

to *reconciliation* and fellowship implied in the gospel, and their experiential bondage to

the slave market of sin and temptation has been meet by the *redemption* of the cross.

After regeneration and conversion, recovery from cults requires the process of

sanctification. Sanctification involves separation from the sin and corruption of the world

expressed progressively in growth in obedience. Peter admonishes Christians, while

combating the cultic teachings of his day, to grow in the grace and knowledge of our

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Pet. 3:18). Relational alienation and the old nature s

power need to be addressed in a fashion that provides substantial answers to satisfy people s existential needs while meeting the requirements of the Creator. It is the promise of the gospel that offers real answers to that need, as Peter indicates in II Pet. 1: 2-11. Peter s abundant entrance (v.11) is the fruit of a sanctified life. One of the most urgent questions within our culture, and particularly for the ex-cultist is, therefore, What is authentic spirituality?

Authentic Spirituality. Having drawn from Scripture that God is Creator, Parent, Savior, definer of reality, universally sovereign, all-powerful, all-knowing, and the lover of our souls, and acknowledging that all are fallen creatures made in the image of God, made for meaningful relationships that give him glory, one can now begin to venture some thoughts on how restoration might be achieved. Speaking as a former cultist, redefining authentic spirituality is one of the ex-cultist s most difficult recovery issues.

Barrs and Macaulay outline eight important considerations in this venture of becoming rightly related to the God of the universe. They speak to the importance of understanding and accepting the centrality of Christ; of active obedience and understanding the Holy Spirit s role and the nature of responsibility; and of affirming the self and denying the self. They speak of the role of the human mind in the growth in grace. They also discuss the nature of God s guidance, and emphasize the importance of having a biblical view of the family and the nature of biblical authority. Finally they identify the evidence of genuine faith.

All of these topics are of vital importance in achieving authentic spirituality, not only for the recovering ex-cultist, but for everyone. The basics of authentic spirituality is

necessarily discovered through both general and special revelation. General revelation is:

> The disclosure of God in nature, in providential history, and in the moral law within the heart, whereby all persons at all times and places gain a rudimentary understanding of the Creator and his moral demands.[9]

In Rom. 1-2, God s existence is perspicuous   that is, all Jews and Gentiles clearly see God s eternity, his power, and his personal divinity (Godhead).   Furthermore, all fallen persons are   without excuse (Rom. 2:1). Because God is Creator, all truth about creation must ultimately become intelligible in terms of God s prior interpretation of it, and all truth must be God s truth. To   live by every word coming from God (Matt.4:4) must include the cultural mandate of Gen. 1 and 2, to serve God through the stewardship of his creation. This necessarily includes all the sciences. Natural men do by nature the things contained in the law because they are a law for themselves (Rom. 2: 14). This inner law is described as being written on their hearts, (Rom. 2:15) and is usually called the conscience.   To the recovering ex-cultist and his/her counselor this means that *some* non-redemptive assistance in recovery can be found in the social sciences of psychology and sociology. Both need not depend *only* upon that which is found in special revelation. Special revelation is:

> God s self-disclosure through signs and miracles, the utterances of prophets and apostles, and the deeds and words of Jesus Christ, whereby specific people at particular times and places gain further understanding of God s character and a knowledge of his saving purposes in his Son.[10]

Since the apostolic age and the passing of the unique features of the apostolic

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[9] Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1987), 61.

[10] Ibid.

ministry, special revelation is normally preserved and defined by the content of the written Word of God (II Tim. 3:16-17). To the recovering ex-cultist, this means recovery assistance will be primarily found in God s self-disclosure through Holy Spirit-illuminated propositional revelation found in the Bible, and in legitimate manifestations of signs and miracles. A true view of God, of what it means to be a human being, and what authentic spirituality consists of, can be identified using sound principles of hermeneutics and criteria of truth when exegeting the text of the Bible. These theological formulations should influence both how one conducts himself/herself and what is taught about the nature of reality in the course of helping those affected by cults.

However, it is not enough for ex-cultists and those working with them in their recovery to have the gospel and other theological ground clearly defined and biblically supported. There must also be a specific course of action regarding how recovery might be encouraged to take place. General revelation in the form of sociological theory can assist us as found in a family systems model of recovery insofar as it is consistent with special revelation.

The Component of the Family.

One of the most helpful sources of general revelation that this writer has come upon in his own sixteen-year recovery adventure is found in the sociological school of thought known as the Family Systems Theory. Individuals coming from both secular and religious backgrounds have significantly contributed to this writer s understanding of cultic involvement as explained by the Family Systems Theory.

Salvador Minuchin is currently considered one of the founding fathers of Family

Systems Theory. He sees the family as a system with a structure which tends to be self-maintaining under changing internal and external conditions. According to Minuchin, some family systems are dysfunctional in that they produce and perpetuate suffering among some members of the family. His contributions have provided support for many current perspectives on the place of family systems in addressing personal and family problems. His research provides a fuller understanding of the important role the family plays in helping to define people as individuals.[11]

Edwin H. Friedman is an ordained rabbi and has been a practicing family therapist for over forty years. He adds to Minuchin s work on family systems, the notion that churches provide models of group systems that can be identified in the behavior and influence of the family. He contends and demonstrates in *Generation to Generation* that, religious institutions not only function like families, but also both types of family systems (individual and church) plug into one another. [12] His book, *Generation to Generation*, has become a handbook for many in understanding the connection between emotional processes at home as well as in work, religious, educational, therapeutic, and business contexts. This text is required reading in many seminaries throughout the country.

David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, coauthored a very helpful book, *The Subtle*

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[11] Salvador Minuchin for nearly fifty years he has been active in teaching families and therapists that work with families the nature of family influence. For the period of 1965-1975 he was the director of the Family Therapy Training Center in Philadelphia that became The Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic (1975), the world s leading center for family therapy and training. He is the author of many very influential books in the field of family therapy. Among his most noteworthy books are: *Families and Family Therapy* (1974) and *Family Kaleidoscope* (1986).

[12] Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation* (New York: The Guilford, 1985), 195.

Power of Spiritual Abuse,[13] which identifies abusive systemic dynamics found in religious organizations, accurately tagging these ingrained behavioral dynamics as sin. They both write from an evangelical perspective on the existence of abusive spiritual dynamics within churches   how people are affected by them and how they can find recovery from them. David Johnson has been the senior pastor for over twenty years at the Church of the Open Door in Crystal, Minnesota and is a graduate of Bethel College, Bethel Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Jeff VanVonderen is the Pastor of Counseling at the Church of the Open Door*,* directs Damascus, Inc., a family-focused recovery ministry, and is an instructor at Bethel College.

Alan Myatt is a graduate (M.Div.) from Denver Seminary and received his Ph.D. from Illiff School of Theology in Sociology of Religion.[14] It was primarily under Dr. Myatt s influence that this writer was first introduced to the connection between Family Systems Theory and cultic involvement and recovery. It is his contention that adults from dysfunctional families are vulnerable to the development of personal addictions. He goes so far as to say that for some of these individuals [from dysfunctional families] cults arrive on the scene bearing all the characteristics needed for a successful addiction. They

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[13] David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1991).

[14] For many years Alan Myatt was the director of Shield of Faith, a counter-cult ministry of Denver s Bear Valley Baptist Church and the program manager of Cross Purposes, a drug and alcohol treatment facility specializing in cult/occult addiction and intervention services. He has for the past five years been a professor of systematic theology and apologetics at South Brazil Baptist Theological Seminary (Southern Baptist) in Rio de Janeiro.

create a mood-altering experience that results in life-damaging enslavement. [15]

Sharon Hilderbrant is a graduate of Denver University (Psy.D) who has been a therapist in clinical practice for over eighteen years. She has worked with ex-members of cultic groups for the past twelve years, both in individual therapy and in directing/coordinating support and recovery groups for those affected by cultic influence. She has used a family systems approach in treatment.

Her influence and example has transformed theory into practical reality for this writer through her explanation of how group and individual therapy from a family systems perspective might be applied to recovery from cults. From 1990-1994, Dr. Hilderbrant and this writer facilitated several support and recovery groups for ex-cultists, primarily from Totalist Aberrant Christian Organizations (TACOs). It was during that time that this writer gained a clearer understanding of the relevance and structure of Family Systems Theory for understanding cultic involvement.

Family Systems Theory.

Family Systems Theory is a sociological construction basically consisting of three elements that when combined together create a formidable influence that can act in such a way as to increase the vulnerability of seekers to cults. These three basic elements are the rules of the family, the roles of the family, and the family s boundaries or lack thereof.

Rules. The rules of a family can reinforce the sinful patterns of relationships within the family. Some of these rules can be identified as:

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[15] Alan Myatt, Religion can Become an Addiction, *Denver Christian News* 1, no. 6 (January 1990): 8.

1) *Be perfect, be right*. This includes such things as behaviors and attitudes that convey an intolerance of error. Mistakes are nearly always seen as bad. Compliance to family authority figures is unconditionally required of all members.

2) *Don t claim to know* what is going on in the family. Don t question the family s values or the way in which it expresses itself. Only designated persons are capable of thinking, reasoning, or knowing what is true for this family and they will do the thinking all members.

3) *Don t feel* but a limited range of emotions and then only at designated times. Doing otherwise may destroy the family.

4) *Don t trust* people, particularly those outside the family. This rule serves to convey the positive value of isolationism.

5) *Don t talk* about things that are wrong in the family. Deny any conflict. Speaking the truth will cause a family member to be invalidated or become a scapegoat. Family secrets are to be protected at all cost. Loyalty to the family is absolutely required and silence expresses this loyalty.

As the capstone to these family rules comes the message, Just pretend. Just pretend that everything within the family is okay. Conveying a positive image of oneself and the family requires that family members become accustomed to pretending.[16]

These rules are practiced by unhealthy families in varying degrees, sometimes unconsciously and at other times very consciously. The goal of these rules is the

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[16] This concept of family rules has been adapted by many different authors. As a good resource on this subject, see Sharon Wegscheider, *Another Chance Hope & Health for the Alcoholic F amily* (Alto, Calif.: Science and Behavior Books, 1981).

homeostasis and longevity of the family. They are exercised by the members of the family in the context of expressing particular roles.

Roles. Within a family, naturally occurring patterns of behavior come to be expected from individual members based on disposition, personality, and particular occasions and circumstances. The exponents of Family Systems Theory concur in identifying these behavior patterns. For the purpose of illustration and brevity, only the four most common roles are addressed here.[17]

In a dysfunctional family there exist two basic roles, the addict (the leader) and the enabler (major supporter of the leader and primary co-dependant), along with other possible contributors such as the hero and the scapegoat (the secondary co-dependants). By dysfunctional family is meant a family that exhibits significant, and highly consistent patterns of sinful belief and corresponding behavior that interfere with healthy interpersonal relationships and with one s relationship to the discovery of truth as found in the Bible.[18] By addict is meant the individual whose personal goals and pathology significantly encourage the other family members to follow him or her to adjust their own priorities or values for the sake of keeping the family system intact. The Enabler is the primary person keeping the addict, or leader in power. By co-dependant is meant the participating individual within a dysfunctional family. The Hero is the

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[17] Many books addressing drug and alcohol abuse might be sighted as sources of additional information on this subject of roles. As a good resource on this subject, the writer suggests Claudia Black, *It Could Never Happen to Me* (Denver: Mac Publishing, 1975).

[18] These sinful beliefs and behaviors need to be addressed through confession and repentance (1 John 1: 8, 9). Sociological theory alone in identifying dysfunctional patterns of behavior is not sufficient for the ex-cultist to find full recovery.

family member who is placed on a pedestal, with high expectations of rescuing the family from various forms of malaise and holding the family together. The Scapegoat is the family member who serves to divert attention from other ills of the family and assists in keeping the system energized.[19] These family members, the addict, the enabler, the hero, and the scapegoat, operate within a set of boundaries that again serve to maintain the family system.

Boundaries. By boundaries is meant the systems of behavior and/or beliefs that define who a person is and when not exercised, invite others to determine who that person is or will become. Boundaries, or the lack of them, impact a person s entire life. People who are significantly influenced by cults have at least four insufficient personal boundaries that make them particularly vulnerable. These boundaries pertain to *the physical*, which help determine who will be allowed to touch a person and under what circumstances; *the mental*, one the freedom to have his/her own thoughts and opinions; *the emotional*, helping one deal with emotions and empowering his/her ability to disengage from the harmful manipulative emotions of others; and *the spiritual*, helping one to distinguish God s will as distinct from his/her own will or that of others, and providing a restored appreciation of the Creator.[20]

When the rules, roles, and boundaries are functioning as expected within a family, the family identity is kept intact and it is protected from dysfunctionality. When the rules,

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[19] In the healthy functional family these roles can more easily change over time between family members to allow for the changing family needs. It is in the more dysfunctional (or sinful) family that these roles are more rigid and incapable of adjustment.

[20] Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries,* inside flap cover.

roles and boundaries become fragmented, or attempts to change are made by any member, then either the family is forced to redefine itself as to its values and purpose, or the non-compliant member is forced (or at least encouraged) to leave, in order that the family s particular identity be preserved.

Just as these elements (rules, roles, and boundaries), are found working together to preserve the family s identity, similar patterns of influence and control can be found in the structure of cultic groups. A close examination of a recovering ex-cultist may serve to bring some clarity and relevance to this theory.

An Applied Case Study.

This writer was raised in a highly dysfunctional birth family. Each member of the family consistently exercised particular rules and roles along with subscribing to a set of unhealthy boundaries or lack thereof. Some of the rules in the writer s family consisted of:

1) *Be perfect, be right.* This rule expressed itself in the particularly high behavioral standards set by the mother. Personal mistakes were seldom seen as serving any benefit, and obedience by the family members to the father was unconditional. The father was nearly always held up as being correct in all his judgements. This writer can not recall his father ever having acknowledged any wrong-doing. When the mother of the family divorced the father after twenty-five years of marriage because of infidelity, there was still no acknowledgment of wrong-doing by the father, even after another thirty years had passed. This divorce took place only after the father denied for several years a string of infidelities that the mother was aware of. Denial of such issues was commonplace

among other family members as well.

2) *Don t claim to know* what is going on in the family. Don t question the family s values or the way in which it expresses itself. Independent and creative thinking was not encouraged. There existed a strong hierarchy in the decision-making process that affected the entire family. When important decisions were to be made, it was nearly always the father who was regarded as the only one capable of rising to the challenge   despite the fact that the mother had as much or more natural ability. When the time came for this writer to decide on an area of study to focus on as a career, the father made the dogmatic decision that it would be accounting, despite the fact that his son had no natural interest in working with numbers and math.

3) *Don t feel* but a limited range of emotions, and then only at designated times. When the divorce took place there was a lot of emotion and pain, but very little was allowed to be expressed, particularly by this writer and his brother on the account that it might destroy the family.

4) *Don t trust* people, particularly those outside the family. This rule served to enforce the value of isolationism. This rule was inflexibly maintained in the family. There was very little social life outside the immediate family. Even extended family members seemed to be constantly at odds with this writer s parents. There were no joint friends outside the immediate family, and there was little social contact with those on the outside.

5) *Don t talk* about things that are wrong in the family. Deny any conflict. Speaking the truth will invalidate a family member or make them a scapegoat. While the

father was an serious alcoholic for many years, the two sons and mother never spoke about it, despite the fact it affected all the family members in significant ways. If the subject was ever broached by one of the two sons, it was quickly dismissed as being silly or an unkind thing to voice.

The overriding message to this writer and his brother, as well as to the two parents, was that it is best to pretend nothing in the family s life was bad. When the youngest son moved out of the home, dropping out of school at fifteen years of age, entering the drug scene of the 1960s, and living with a lady twice his age, family members encouraged one another to pretend that it really did not matter. These rules were reenforced by roles each member of the family accepted as a matter of course.

Each family member played a role that they were quite accustomed to. The father was an alcoholic, functioning as the addict. He was not only addicted to alcohol, however, but to his work as well.

The mother supported the father in his drinking and in his work obsession. She frequently made excuses for him, and generally made every effort to cover for the father when an appropriate occasion presented itself. She was the enabler.

This writer spent much of his time and energy attempting to make the family look good. He was the family hero, becoming the high school star tennis player, the first in his family to go to college, and the one who was always very popular with the girls and owned one of the hottest cars in school. Keeping up a favorable appearance was incredibly important to him and it was valued by the family, as it was seen to reflect favorably on the family.

The younger brother was the family scapegoat. Looking back, the writer recalls how he took the role of diverting attention from the father by leaving home, joining the drug culture, and generally becoming a hippie. He spent much of his life at this time being depressed and causing concern for the family with the fear that he might take his life.

In addition to these rules and roles, there were significant problematic boundary issues that also dominated the family. Regarding physical boundaries, there were sexual violations by the father in his affairs that were denied for many years. This writer recalls the way in which he would frequently wear immodest clothing. Additionally, the bathroom door in this writer s birth family did not secure or lock, causing many embarrassing moments for all concerned.

There were violations of mental boundaries. The writer, his brother, and his mother were seldom acknowledged as being capable of having anything of intellectual worth to contribute to the family. Even after the writer completed college and spent several additional years attending graduate school, this garnered little worth or respect from most of the family members.

Emotional boundaries were also violated by frequent shaming directed at the relationship between the two brothers. They were often pitted against one another, despite a three-year difference in age and considerable difference in natural abilities. When the younger could not perform some task as well as his older brother there would frequently be the message, You *should* be more like your brother. This sort of shaming message was frequently exercised as a way to control family members.

Once, a prized tennis ball can collection owned by the writer was unretrievably

discarded by a parent. When he objected, the response from the parent was cold and without understanding. The can collection had represented who the writer was, a highly respected tennis player in high school.

Spiritual boundaries did not exist in the family because there was no spiritual instruction. Seldom did the writer s family attend church, except for the benefit of the father s business interests. There was never even any encouragement to read books that might instruct one in knowing God. The example set before the two brothers communicated that spirituality was neither relevant nor important.

Cultic Involvement.

It was with this predisposition and history that the writer came into contact with a TACO called Bethel Christian Fellowship. This church initially appeared attractive, and within a very short period of time only two weeks the writer was a fully committed member for the next fourteen years.

Looking back, this writer can attribute much of the initial attraction to this group to the strong charismatic appeal of the leader. He presented himself as a father figure, who was particularly available to his children (disciples). This writer s alcoholic father had been rarely unavailable, with little time or interest in fulfilling the normally expected role of a father because of obsessiveness with his work.

There were also familial relational needs that had not been met in this writer s birth family due to the marital conflict of the parents and their divorce when the writer was seventeen years old. The clear conception of the writer, although primarily subconscious at the time, was that involvement in this group could meet formerly unmet psycho-social

needs. Issues of theological concern were not considered to be the result of rational understanding, or of being convinced of a position by studying the theology. Rather, the group met his emotional needs. Accepting the theology merely served as justification for the dysfunctional relationships within the group he had chosen to join.

Once firmly committed to the group, maintenance was easily retained through a system of familiar rules, roles, and manipulative and controlling boundaries or boundary violations. The rules of the group were not new to the writer. While he did not consciously recognize the resemblance at the time, it has not been difficult to see the definite similarities since leaving Bethel.

Unhealthy rules frequently found in families can easily be identified in cultic systems in the following ways:

1) *Be perfect, be right*. Within the cultic context this was frequently expressed in a variety of ways, both verbal and non-verbal. High levels of achievement, particularly when it brought more money to the leader, was highly valued. Dogmatism was very prevalent in the group regarding behavior and belief. There was little allowance for error when it came to pleasing the leader. Rustam, the leader, was always right about the things he spoke of, or the behavior he practiced. There was no tolerance for criticism of him by the members of the group. Conformity was the standard.

2) *Don t claim to know* what is going on. Rustam was favorably, yet jokingly referred to as the Grand Baba (altered slightly to the Grand Pubba) of the church. It must be remembered that Rustam was from an Indian Hindu culture in which the Baba or father is the infallible dictator of his family. In effect, he represents God to his family.

For example, in Hindu culture, the wife exists primarily to serve her husband as her god, and this is how she generates good Karma for her next reincarnation. Rustam transferred this ideal to his Christian group. Accordingly, he was endowed by the members of the group with having all the knowledge necessary for any important decisions that were to be made in the lives of the members. He did the thinking for the members, and was viewed as the only one wise enough to answer the important questions of life. All loyalty was to be rendered to him. He was clearly to be viewed as the intellectual of the group and he frequently dissuaded others from attending any advanced educational programs, perhaps out of fear of losing his intellectual grip on the members of the group.

3) The *Don t feel* rule was responsible for much of the lack of growth and development of the group. At one time, Bethel had boasted 100+ people, but over time it dwindled down to only a handful. Everybody in the group was depressed about this, but expressing this was not spiritual and was evidence of not having faith. All of the young couples had problems in their marriages, but these problems could only be discussed with the leader, and members were encouraged to just put on the happy face as though there were no negative feelings.

This group was seen by its members to be God s band of devoted servants, and it would simply not have been acceptable to express feelings that might bring this into question. Expressed feelings needed to be carefully controlled, lest the credibility of the group, and particularly of the leader, might come into question. Just like in a dysfunctional family, the integrity of the leader and of the group was to be protected at all costs.

4) *Don t trust* people, particularly those outside the family. This rule was one of the most highly valued within Bethel. Outsiders, even other earnest Christians, were not to be associated with, except for the possibility of proselytization. The integrity of the group was always at risk. The group members were too holy to associate with those who were infants in their understanding of Scripture, and only those in the group understood the secret things of God.

5) *Don t talk* about things that are wrong in the family. Over the fourteen years that this writer was associated with Bethel there was much behavior and belief which should have been questioned and was not. When the leader chose to divorce his current wife and marry another member s wife there was to be no reasoned discussion of this matter. When some people left the group after many years of membership, there was no discussion about why this had taken place, and people were discouraged from speaking with them afterwards.

As with the dysfunctional family this writer grew up in, the central message that was required of all the members was pretend. Pretend it did not matter that members were encouraged (and in many cases expressly told) to sever all contact with their parents; pretend that the members were doing well spiritually when all the evidence pointed in another direction; pretend they had a wonderful relationship with God when all they had was fearful, tentative, and unsatisfying relationships with a small group of spiritually and emotionally immature people who would completely shun other members at the mere whim of the leader.

As with the rule, unhealthy, sinful roles within the group were also significant.

Rustam was fixated on exercising his control. He had sexual addictions that became evident over time. He was clearly the power-broker within the group, and the one in control of people s lives. He was fond of stating, I am like the hub of the wheel and you are like the spokes. His congregation could not grow spiritually without being under his authority.

Larry, the second in command, was the leader s strongest supporter. It was Larry s money and undaunted commitment that allowed Rustam to retain his power and what little credibility he had. Later, after Rustam s death, Larry became the new leader and remains so to this day.

All of the group members at various times played various roles fitting the family distortions previously listed. This writer would frequently play the role of hero when he supported the leader against the overwhelming odds of opposition that the leader experienced over the years. At one point the leader was on the verge of bankruptcy and this writer gave him a car that he then sold, preventing bankruptcy. Many times this writer provided him with unearned financial and other support. When from time to time members left the group they became the scapegoats, to whom all the problems of the group would be attributed. This was a very familiar social system to the writer.

It certainly was not healthy or normal. Furthermore, it was also a very sinful system, filled with sinful and controlling people. For the members it clearly had an interactive quality. There were elements of being victimized but also, at times, there were elements contributing to the victimization of others. It was certainly a sick and sinful family in which everyone had their own as well as shared culpability. But this was not

the end of the similarities to a dysfunctional family. There were also boundary violations.

Similar to each of the boundary problems previously identified in this writer s birth family, there were violations found in Rustam s group. The leader had sexual problems that caused physical boundaries to be breached (some through his counseling). The group collectively endorsed intrusion upon one s ability to think, with statements such as the reason you don t agree with Rustam is that you re not spiritual enough.   The message communicated was that only the leader had mental capacities of real value. The imposed requirement to always agree with the leadership of the group frequently caused emotional boundaries to be broken down. All night group counseling sessions for members actually consisted of them being beaten up emotionally. This served the purpose of keeping the members vulnerable and under the control of the leader. As for spiritual boundaries, the leader had *all* the spiritual answers, while the members had none. He was the only one with a direct line to God, so members were required to go through Rustam to know God s will for almost any area of their lives.

Having these aberrant rules, roles, and boundary firmly in place made it difficult for the writer to leave the familiar environment of the group. Exiting the group came only when indisputable information was provided concerning the well-hidden secrets of the family addict. The immoral behavior of the leader, under the cover of some counseling he did, came to the attention of this writer. This now-exposed secret had the potential of affecting this writer s family in an unavoidable way which forced a confrontation with the leader. This resulted in a quick and relatively clean, but far from easy, break from the group.

This writer s relational and emotional needs that had been partially met by the leader and other group members were suddenly no longer available. Furthermore, there were many economic and spiritual needs remaining. The decision to exit the group was not an easy one, as old habits and familiar patterns of sinful behavior were hard to give up. It was fortunate this writer did not fully understand how difficult recovery would be, for he might not have made so great a leap. While exiting was hard, recovery was harder yet.

Cult Recovery.

What this writer has found over the past seventeen years since exiting is that recovery from cultic involvement should involve several spheres of renewal in order to meet the wide variety of needs one has coming out of an unhealthy religious environment. In the course of working through his own recovery and assisting many others in theirs, this writer has identified four spheres of renewal that have been of great assistance.[21]

1) *The cognitive sphere* entailed wrestling with the rule Don t think , thus allowing others to do his thinking for him. Several outstanding books were suggested to the writer that were very helpful in combating this don t think rule. Books such as *Being Human*, *Sheep and Shepherds*, together with articles by Ron Enroth concerning the nature of spiritual authority were very helpful. Eventually, attending Denver Seminary reinforced the notion that this writer, by God s grace, was in fact capable of independent and productive thinking. Additionally, writing down what he had been through allowed him a safe emotional distance from which to work on the issues of false doctrine.

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[21] For more information on these spheres of influence the reader can review this writer s article, Nothing Need Go to Waste, in *Cultic Studies Journal* 15, no. 2, (1998): 120-129.

Listening to many tapes about the various cults and receiving some academic tutorial assistance was also very helpful. Books such as Gordon Lewis *Decide for Yourself: A Theological Workbook*, can assist some ex-cult members in a structured manner to negotiate the theological aberrance they frequently need to contend with.

2) *The emotive sphere* was in some respects harder to work with. It involved escape from the rule of Don t feel. This entailed professional, individual, and marital counseling, and involvement in various support and recovery groups. Much of this required giving oneself permission to express feelings in the safe environment of the counselor s office. There was a great deal of emotionally helpful information acquired in these counseling sessions, including some of what has been shared in this thesis regarding Family Systems Theory.

Additionally, some forms of music assisted this writer in overcoming both the don t feel and don t talk rules. Music, Congreve tells us, can sooth a savage breast.[22] In coming out of a cult, one feels sometimes like just such a savage. There is uncontrollable anger on some occasions and not enough anger at other times. Music of various descriptions helps to balance and order emotions. Some music spoke of abusive practices in the name of God, and assisted the writer in talking about what happened and about what might be left undone in the recovery process.

3) *The relational or social sphere* which involved the development of safe and healthy interpersonal relationships, addressed the Don t trust rule. This sphere has a

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[22] William Congreve, 1697, *The Mourning Bride*, act 1, scene 1.

two-sided character. There needed to be eventual forgiveness extended to those who contributed to this writer s being abused and (where and when appropriate), acknowledgment and restitution provided to those whom he had harmed.[23] This can assist the ex-member to more easily attend to the positive side of the relational sphere, building healthy forms of personal trust.

Second, there were many people, both old and new acquaintances whom this writer was privileged to become acquainted and reacquainted with. Some of these individuals modeled authentic spirituality or at least, in the case of unbelievers, significant levels of personal maturity. Several of these people became mentors for this writer, meeting the personal need for healthy parental figures as well as providing for the development of other forms of familial relationships. Within this newly developed social setting was found practical examples of how to set good boundaries and encouragement, so that this writer could begin setting his own boundaries in well thought-out and God honoring productive ways.

4) *The creative or adaptational sphere* often involves consolidating and confirming the many individual elements of recovery. For the writer, this took the form of becoming an active participant in a teaching ministry. Sometimes people are told that if they want to learn, one of the best means is to teach, and this writer can certainly affirm this insight. From 1984-1994, this writer was directly involved in working with various

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[23] For the writer, this involved contacting both ex-members of Bethel and his birth family whom he had variously sinned against. He needed to acknowledge his sin and ask for forgiveness and make an effort to restore broken and damaged relationships. This also entailed his forgiving them for behavior that they had inflicted upon him in the form of sinful roles, rules and lack of adequate boundaries.

elements of counter-cult ministry. This allowed him to work constantly with the rule of be perfect, be right. In working with cultic issues it was easy to become addicted and over-committed to fixing other peoples lives. The negative elements of playing the hero role needed to be guarded against in such situations.

While this writer found significant growth through a ministry that included using his gift of administration, other Christians, because of their personalities and gifts, may be involved in a choir, works of service, or in giving financially to others in need. Irrespective of how this sphere is exercised in the individual, the effect produces unexpected personal growth as well as providing a form of productive ministry to others.

This conceptual model of spheres has served to empower this writer to grasp and work with what seemed at times, innumerable pieces of recovery. The spheres nearly always overlapped one another in various degrees and times, fulfilling the function of addressing the unhealthy rules, roles, and inadequate or non-existent boundaries that this writer both grew up with and carried with him into his cultic experience.

A family systems model of cult involvement, as illustrated here, has the potential of providing a helpful understanding of why some people are more vulnerable than others to the manipulation found in various groups exercising mind control. A family systems model, when understood from within a consistently biblical world view, can provide a grasp of the relational and sociological elements of cultic involvement that integrates both special and general revelation, and that produces a more comprehensive picture of cultic involvement. Included in this model are the consistent biblical beliefs concerning: the centrality of Christ s atonement and the Holy Spirit s regeneration; the Holy Spirit s role

and the nature of sanctification; appropriately affirming the self and denying the self; the

role of the human mind; the nature of God s guidance; a biblical view of the family and the

nature of biblical authority; and finally, the identification of the evidence of genuine faith.[24]

The alternatives, as outlined in this thesis, are viewing cult involvement either

simplistically and mechanically as the result of poor choices based on bad information

primarily brought about by a manipulative system (the thought reform model); or as a

reductionist notion that cultic involvement is *basically* the result of sinful decisions,

spiritual deception, and the rejection of the God of the Bible (the conversion model). But,

lest the writer be accused of his own form of false dichotomy, in comparing his own view

with those of the Passantinos and Martin, consideration must also be given to what

common ground might be cited between these views.

Common Ground.

   The Passantinos, Martin, and this writer are all professing evangelical Christians

who desire to honor both the Bible and the God whom it reveals. Each has an earnest

passion to positively affect those who have been negatively influenced by the cults. This

passion is much more than a passing interest, as reflected in the fact that combined, the

Passantinos, Martin, and this writer have over twenty-five years of direct involvement in

the cultic arena. As a result, each person has developed his/her own theory of cult

involvement and recovery.

   While the theories differ in several respects, there is common ground in the family

systems model with both the conversion and thought reform models. These common

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   [24] Macaulay and Barrs, *Being Human the Nature of Spiritual Experience.*

elements should encourage productive and God-honoring dialogue. First, this writer will compare the conversion model with the family systems model.

The conversion model is interested in addressing the biblical notion of spiritual deception, sin, and in acknowledging the culpability of the cult member, as is the family systems model. Likewise, both models have an interest in evangelizing cult members, and at the same time acknowledging that converts are not mere notches on the belt, but human beings with ongoing spiritual, emotional, and social needs. Theological instruction is important in both models, and without it recovery is recognized as being incomplete.

The thought reform model also has commonalities found in the family systems model. Both models acknowledge the existence of mind control and the importance of addressing the behavior of both members and leaders of cults. Both have a very strong desire to have the ex-cult member s victimization addressed. Both models see cult recovery as multi-dimensional, with education being a primary source of assistance to the ex-member. As evidenced by the continued dialogue and support of this writer s research project from Wellspring, their model of recovery is flexible enough to support those who may not see cult involvement in exactly the same perspective.

Like the family systems model, the thought reform model (at least as practiced by Martin) takes seriously the importance of doctrine for the ex-cultist, yet it does not necessarily make biblical conversion to Christianity and a theological understanding a *necessary* requirement in the *early* stages of recovery. This is because many coming from Bible-based groups have already become believers or may have a very strong revulsion to reference to Scripture because of its previously twisted use, thus making constructive

theological discussion impossible. This requires that early dialogue with these individuals take the form of pre-evangelistic education and expressed concern for their well-being with the gospel message and/or theological understanding being introduced at a later time in the recovery process. This will vary from individual to individual depending on their overall cultic and personal background.

While there are some common-ground elements in each of these models that should serve to promote reasoned dialogue and cooperation between them, the family systems model can better serve as an effective corrective to the insufficiencies of both the thought reform and conversion models, as outlined in chapters two and three. It will now be shown how the family systems model better accounts for the relevant empirical data, being internally more consistent and theologically and existentially superior.

Applying the Tests for Truth.

The essential claim of the family systems model is that it better explains the level of influence and the role of mind control than either the thought reform or conversion models described in chapters two and three.

Sociological research regarding the role of the family in cult involvement is in its infancy. There has been considerable research in the general field of understanding religious organizations in terms of expressing familial dynamics, but little has been rigorously proven either for or against Family Systems Theory with respect to vulnerability to cult involvement.[25] Two specific formal studies this writer has explored

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[25] Cartwright, Robert H. and Stephen A. Kent. Social Control in Alternative Religions: A Familial Perspective, *Sociological Analysis* 53, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 345-362. This article provides a

provided mixed and not very helpful conclusions, being overly general in character.[26]

Perhaps one of the more important contributions to this research, lending support

for the Family Systems model is the research and work of Salvador Minuchin. In

Psychosomatic Families Anorexia Nervosa in Context, he documents in case studies of

anorexia how the responses of his patients are predictable in terms of their family system.[27]

Conclusions regarding the role of the family in the treatment of anorexia patients include

evidence of the importance of context:

> Both the patient and her [or his] family form a tightly knit whole, and we obtain a
> false picture of the disease if we limit our observations to the patient alone.[28]

> Today, many investigators are beginning to include in their formulations the
> interdependence of parts in a social context...In the systems paradigm, every part
> of a system is seen as organizing and being organized by other parts. An
> individual s behavior is simultaneously both caused and causative.[29]

Minuchin s evidence also indicates the importance of the family:

> Instead of focusing on the child s psychological or physiological vulnerability
> alone, we looked at the child in the family context. When we did so, new data
> emerged whose import was dramatic for theory and hardly less significant for

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 familial perspective to the study of cult membership and a large list of like studies and proposals showing behavioral similarities between family dynamics and cult dynamics.

[26] Mark I. Sirkin and Bruce A. Grellong. Cult vs. Non-Cult Jewish Families: Factors Influencing Conversion. *Cultic Studies Journal* 5. no. 1 (1998): 2-43, and Neil Maron and Joel Braverman, Family Environment as a Factor in Vulnerability to Cult Involvement, *Cultic Studies Journal* 5, no. 1 (1998): 23-43.

[27] Salvador Minuchin, Bernice L. Rosman, and Lester Baker. *Psychosomatic Families Anorexia Nervosa in Context* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 1978).

[28] Ibid., 12.

[29] Ibid., 20.

treatment.[30]

> One of the most important reference groups is the family, or a family substitute...The way that the family functions, therefore, has enormous implications for individual development.[31]

> But well into adolescence, the family system is the primary workshop of growth. The way it functions affects and even defines the progress of the child.[32]

This empirical data indicates that family dynamics play a very significant role in the treatment of those with such problems as anorexia. Minuchin s Family Systems Theory acts as the foundation upon which addictions theorists such as Wegscheider and Black (see footnote, p. 12) build their counseling theories for treating various forms of addiction. This writer would suggest that the concepts of Family Systems Theory and addictions theory can contribute greatly to the understanding of cult involvement and recovery.

Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton in their book, *Toxic Faith: Understanding and Overcoming Religious Addiction,*[33] also provide some insight for seeing some forms of religion as potentially addictive processes. They outline the basic behavioral characteristics of an addict (foregoing all for the high, forsaking family and friends for the fix, self-obsession, extreme intolerance, and looking for the quick fix to life s ills, resulting in behavior destructive to themselves and to those around them), pointing out

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[30] Ibid., 49.

[31] Ibid., 52.

[32] Ibid., 54.

[33] Stephen Arterburn & Jack Felton, *Toxic Faith: Understanding and Overcoming Religious Addiction* (Nashville, Tn: Oliver Nelson, 1991), 31-46.

that this is very similar to the behavior of one involved in a cultic environment.

One would reasonably expect that a person s family system to play a similarly significant role in confirming the addictive element in cult involvement.

Myatt states that:

> After several years of counseling former cult members, I discovered that almost all of them I had worked with were adult children of alcoholics. It became apparent that many of them had chosen to join their groups because the group appealed to their co-dependent needs.[34]

Additionally, while agreeing with Arterburn and Felton, Myatt also sees some clear patterns of similar behavior in both the cult member and the addict who functions by repressing feelings, denying reality, and enabling and assuming rigid roles in the system in order to survive. Myatt, like Arterburn and Felton, identifies active participation in such addictive systems as involving the avoidance of an authentic relationship with God, thus being a form of *idolatry*.[35]

The empirical and existential observations of these professional counselors provide strong evidence for the connection between the addictive process, the family system and finally cult involvement. There appears to be a clear behavioral link between each of these schools of thought, thus confirming the importance of the family systems model.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the family systems model rests upon a strong theological foundation rooted in the teachings of the Bible. Each of the representatives of the these models, the Passantinos, Martin, and this writer, are professing evangelicals who

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[34] Myatt, Religion can become an addiction, 1, 8.

[35] Ibid., 8. Also consult Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton, *Toxic Faith: Understanding and Overcoming Religious Addiction* (Nashville, Tenn: Oliver Nelson), 113-114.

wish to take the Bible seriously. Consequently, they all would agree that determining which model best accounts for the role of mind control in the process of cult recovery must be compatible with the empirical evidence found in Scripture.

The inconsistencies of the thought reform and conversion models have already been covered in chapters two and three. The question remaining is, What is the level of theological consistency found in the family systems model and how is it existentially important to the ex-cultist?

As identified earlier, the family systems model integrates more consistently with the Bible s teaching on the image of God, the human will and the nature of responsibility, and on the reality of spiritual deception. Accordingly, it allows a more comprehensive view of the contributions of both special and general revelation. Additionally, the role and function of the family must be included in any realistic assessment of cultic involvement. Consider the *importance* of the family as prescribed by the Bible.

> In Scripture, family life has its roots in the work of creation. It was God who saw that Adam needed a partner. It was God who created Eve and brought her to the man. It was God, as Jesus pointed out in Matthew 19:4, who ordained the physical relationship which was to be consummated only within the marriage covenant. It was God who gave the ten commandments to Moses and insisted there, in no uncertain way, on the responsibility of children to honor their parents. Consistently throughout the Bible the relationships of husband and wife, and of parents and children, are presented as divinely ordained and *therefore must not be set aside by men.*[36]

God works with both families and individuals, largely if not exclusively through covenantal relationships established by God himself. Consider the prominent biblical examples of how

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[36] Herbert Carson, Reformation for the Family, *Reformation for the Family*, ed. Erroll Hulse, (Foxton, Great Britain: Burlington Press, 1974), 13. (Emphasis added).

God has chosen positively to work *through* the social unit of the family:

> God saved not only Noah but his family; God not only called Abraham but blessed through Isaac. The New Testament opens with two families being the source of blessing, Zechariah and Elizabeth on the one hand, and Mary and Joseph on the other. Timothy is only one of very many who can thank God for a godly parent, or as in his case for a godly grandparent. The promise of Acts 16:31 does not end with the jailer, it goes on to speak of his household.[37]

Conversely, consider the importance God places on addressing the sinful dysfunctional patterns of *family behavior.* The family of Eli and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas, are a good example (I Sam. 2:12-4:18). There had been significant *habitual patterns* of sinful behavior in the relationships within this family. We are told Eli was concerned about his sons sin in I Sam. 2:23-25, but it evidently was due more to the bad image it created of the family, than his concern that the values and resulting behavior itself were wrong (I Sam. 2:24). *As a pattern*, Eli did not sufficiently address the sins of Hophni and Phinehas, and consequently this whole family experienced the effect of God s judgment (I Sam. 3:13-14).

These examples illustrate the importance God places upon the family in his plan of redemption. Both the conversion and thought reform models would agree that the family can play a role in cult recovery, but neither acknowledge the *centrality* of the family s significance in the recovery process. The family systems model treats the family s influence as foundational and is more consistent with the Bible s own emphasis. The family systems model is therefore more comprehensive in this regard. Additionally, it is empirically more consistent with the Bible than either the thought reform or conversion

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[37] Ibid., 14.

models considered by themselves.

In addition to empirical evidence and logical consistency, there are practical existential considerations. The family systems model is better equipped to address the needs of the ex-cult member. The conversion model suggests that most of what is involved in the recovery process for the ex-cult member consists of being better biblically informed, belonging to a biblical, supportive, and mature church[38] and most importantly, accepting the message and power of the gospel.[39] These are all certainly important elements in recovery. Yet, if this is all, or nearly all, that the conversion model offers, it seems to fall short in its practical application by lacking comprehensiveness.

What happens within the conversion perspective, when an ex-cultist is a not a Christian, nor willing to discuss anything of a religious character, nor willing to attend a church? It seems here that the conversion model is not sufficiently comprehensive. It appears that little or no discussion is possible with the ex-cultist who falls into this category because there is not enough common ground. Conversely, the family systems model, in its more liberal use of provisions allowed through general revelation, provides a more comprehensive approach, without theological contradiction. This was covered in chapter two.

This writer has encountered many ex-cult members who have had little or no initial interest in being a part of a Christian community. This is particularly the case for many coming out of TACOs. Being able to discuss with them the roles, rules, and boundaries of

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[38] Passantino and Passantino, Critiquing Cult Mind-Control Model, 78.

[39] Passantino and Passantino, Overcoming the Bondage of Victimization, 40.

the family systems model has provided significant assistance to them in understanding their recovery needs. Additionally, this model can encourage relationships to develop over time, which later provide a basis for people to be encouraged to read more biblically coherent materials and to join a supportive and mature church. In some cases it may also lead to acceptance of the message and power of the gospel.

In addition to excluding the likelihood of working with some of these ex-cult members, or only minimally working with them (due to unwillingness to take advantage of general revelation sources through the sciences) there is the strong possibility of excluding some ex-cult members due to the conversion model s tendency to turn a blind eye to victimization. As this writer reflects on his own early recovery process, there was a strong sense that he had been seriously emotionally damaged. He needed to tell his victimization story, and to have people listen and take him seriously. The telling of his story allowed him the opportunity to begin to heal emotionally.

As healing took place in the *emotive sphere*, it helped to empower him to trust those working with him in the *relational sphere* of his recovery process, and so to proceed to recovery in the *cognitive sphere*, addressing more directly his own culpability and Bethel s false belief system, which took time to dismantle and replace. Like most ex-cult members, there was an urgent need to break the Don t talk rule of his birth family, and then of the cult family. There were certainly times that he, like nearly all ex-members, got stuck in doing nothing but complaining about his victimization. But supportive people active in the *relational sphere* acted as a counterbalance in this regard, modeling authentic spirituality as consistently found in Scripture. The writer found, as the Passantinos do not

seem to acknowledge, that recovery is quite multifaceted, involving the ex-member s current problems, their past family problems, and difficulties in restructuring their future, while redefining what is true in terms of the Bible s interpretation of Christian responsibility.

While there is a large existential gap between the application of the family systems and conversion models, the gap between the thought reform and family systems models is less, but still significant. The main concern this writer has with the thought reform model, which is not evident in the family systems model, is its failure to adequately address the culpability of the ex-cult member for being spiritually deceived, and to explain the role of spiritual deception as distinct from mere manipulation.

Conclusion.

An examination and evaluation of the three models presented in this thesis has shown that the family systems model is more internally consistent, and better accounts for the relevant empirical data, including theological material from the Reform perspective. It also and contains a higher degree of existential viability in practice. The family systems model exhibits a more comprehensive and cogent explanation of the role of mind control in cult recovery, because it avoids the reductionism of the other two models.

Existentially, the conversion model, as explained in chapter two, claims to flow from a consistently Christian world view, but actually encourages a reductionist perspective which limits the exit experience to conversion and applies this to all people affected by cults while ignoring the influence of thought reform. Compared with the approach taken by the primarily secular versions of thought reform, it appears the family

systems model is also more existentially viable. There is a great deal of passion and energy expressed in the writings of the authors who subscribe to the thought reform model, but the clear theological and spiritual support needed for one affected by cults is essentially absent. As found in Lifton, this model is an essentially secular account of things. The exception is those who subscribe to Paul Martin s more Christian model, which lends itself to at least allowing theological concerns a role in recovery.

To their credit, some of those holding to the thought reform model acknowledge in clear statements that the effects of cultic involvement may require a broader approach to treatment. They recognize this because of the kaleidoscope of issues that need to be addressed in cult recovery. As pointed out in chapters two and three, while the mixed and conflicting research data suggest that mind control does exist, it is neither a conclusive nor *sufficient* explanation, even when combined with psychological neediness, to account for the cultic vulnerability of both believers and unbelievers.

The conversion model appears to have a more simplistic approach that fails to treat people as fully human. The Passantinos in particular make many rather unfairly dogmatic assertions regarding those supporting thought reform. This appears to be somewhat ungenerous, coming as it does from apologists professing to follow the teachings of the Bible. Their somewhat narrow approach to cultic involvement and recovery would benefit from a more theologically comprehensive approach taken from Reformed theology. This would place a greater value on the sovereignty of God, his character, what it means to be made in the image of God.

Because of the serious effects of the Fall, the whole of human nature, including the

mind, affections, and will are depraved and distorted by sin and its motivations. Fallen people make fallen choices. This total depravity must be taken into account when developing a biblical view of authentic spirituality. Bible-believing Christians will also benefit from a greater willingness to draw from both special *and* general revelation, and to avoid the problems with an autonomous free will theory. Both the Bible and psychological studies of conversion make it clear that this process is highly relational and a significant personal relationship is almost always involved. Few people are converted by simply accepting new doctrine without this personal relational factor being involved.

Mind Control.

As identified in chapters two and three, the conversion model of cult involvement denies that mind control exists while the thought reform model treats mind control as a foundational contributor to cult involvement. The family systems model views mind control as a contributing factor among many within a larger system of belief and practice that is founded on an understanding of the influence and role of the family as defined by Scripture and identified in sources of general revelation such as the study of sociology.

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the writer identifies mind control as a set of techniques used *manipulatively* to *unethically* influence how a person thinks, feels, and acts, with the *purpose of creating a detrimental dependancy* upon another. The behavioral techniques typically identified by Lifton and others subscribing to the thought reform model of cult involvement can be viewed as similar to the examples of dysfunctional (or sinful) behavior found in unhealthy family relationships. The behavioral descriptions of mind control techniques could be helpful in identifying a larger system of

influence found within one s birth family and best understood within a consistent biblical world view.

In significantly dysfunctional families, forms of behavior consistent with mind control can be identified. The primary qualities common to normal healthy social influences in healthy families include: respect and value placed on healthy boundaries (thus preventing manipulation); telling the truth and not pretending (hence ensuring a higher level of ethics); and treating people with respect while encouraging authentic spiritual growth (promoting personal growth within a biblically defined sense a healthy community). This need for community can be met, if not in the birth family, most certainly within the Christian community. What is counterfeited within cults, and amounts to the unfulfilled promise of social needs being met fully, can be realistically fulfilled within a biblically consistent church. The sinful roles, rules, and disregard for healthy boundaries that ex-cultists build into their lifestyle can be overcome through responsible relationships found within the body of Christ. The efforts of mind control can be combated by understanding how it is that God has provided his children a means by which to resist those that promote deception. Families that practice biblically consistent rules, roles, and boundaries, whether within our birth families or as exemplified by the relationships within a healthy church, can provide us with more than ample tools for discernment to resist the sinful effects of mind control.

This writer recalls from his own cultic history that while he was a believer in Christ, his own birth family had many sinful dysfunctional qualities. He can also identify both sinful neglect and dysfunctional elements in the Christian community of which he was

an active member before becoming involved in Bethel. He joined Bethel while attending a Christian liberal arts college, having received few tools for spiritual discernment from his education there. Dysfunctional social patterns within his family predisposed him toward accepting the undue influences of mind control.

The experience of cultic involvement can lead one to conclude that various levels of mind control may be found in almost any social context. Conversely, levels of undue influence (thought reform, mind control) can be greatly diminished or almost non-existent within the biblically consistent Christian community or family. This is because biblical ethics encourages the Christian to depend on Scripture rather than *arbitrary* human authority.

Exit counseling of believers can certainly benefit from the teaching ministry of the indwelling Spirit. Thus, the counselor ministering to an exiting unbeliever should seek to direct the client to Christ as the source of new life and as the ultimate answer to all his/her problems (Eph.1:3; 2:21, 22; 3:20, 21; 4: 13-16). Both believers and unbelievers can understand how mind control has effected them, but the believer has additional resources in Christian truth and experience on which he/she can draw for future growth. Exit counseling can offer the ex-cultist tools for analysis so they can understand how their victimization occurred. For example, biblical theology may be thought of as external to the exiting cultist s experience and therefore an encouragement to objectivity. The Reformation emphasis on each person s responsibility for private judgement under the Bible s instruction is clearly relevant here.

Suggestions for Further Research and Study.

Mind control then, is an important but insufficient paradigm for understanding cultic involvement and the following topics need to be considered for additional research and study:

1) Further investigation needs to be done examining the significance of the family in cult involvement and recovery. The accepted rules placed upon members, the already established individual roles played by one s own family members, and the poorly defined and practiced personal boundaries of the former members of significantly dysfunctional families must all be taken into account by those wishing to assist cult and ex-cult members.

2) Ecclesiastical psychologists need to develop theories of the relationship between natural parents and the parenting task of Christians in the church. Converts to Christianity frequently find that natural parental influences have been replaced by their new Christian community. A good beginning in research on this topic has been made by Edwin Friedman s book *Generation to Generation*.

3) Well-defined future research should address these family elements and uncover the extent to which they influence the development of cultic involvement and assist in cult recovery.

4) Research is needed on the influence of hierarchical views of how males and females relate in society, and how males and females are separately influenced to enter or stay in cults. The ideals of male supremacy and female submissiveness must be examined as they effect male cult leadership and the passivity of female cult members even after they leave the cultic environment.

5) Theologians need to clarify for the counseling professional the relationship between such topics as responsibility and the image of God, soteriological freedom and responsibility, and the communal nature of salvation from a Reformed perspective. For a helpful start in this project, this writer recommends unpublished papers by Dr. Alan Myatt and Kathy Myatt, The Christian s Self Image, parts one and two.[40]

This task of future research should weigh heavily on the Christian community as it considers the level of commitment needed to adequately address cult involvement and recovery. Yet Christians need not despair assisting those affected by cults, neither must the ex-cultist become despondent, for none of us are left alone in our efforts:

> *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor* (Isa. 61:1-3).

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[40] Available from Http://www.pobox.com/~Myatt

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