

CULTS ON CAMPUS Who's Out to Get Who?

Opinion

Johnathon Nordquist

If we were to take a poll right now, and ask 5,000 people if they would rather A) preserve and defend the First Amendment right to religious freedom; or B) restrict the First Amendment to only standard, mainline American religions that date back over 50 years, which do you think would enjoy overwhelming support?

I would be willing to bet a week's salary that A) preserve and defend the First Amendment would garner the majority of the respondent's votes. Yet, if some groups operating here in Chicago, with members on campus, have their way, groups like University Bible Fellowship (UBF), the Church of Christ, and Campus Crusades, would be out of business overnight.

This November 1, 2 and 3, the annual convention of deprogrammers is to take place in Chicago called the Cult Awareness Network Conference (CAN), in order to drum up support and whip up more of their traditional anti-Cult hysteria, hate, and fear.

Deprogramming, begun in the early 70's by CAN founder Ted Patrick, is the act of kidnapping someone, usually a member of a non-traditional religious sect like those mentioned above, as well as the Hare Krishnas, Moonies, Scientology, and, according to CAN, five thousand other "destructive cults" operating in the United States. This is followed by forcing, by any and all means including violence, the kidnap victim to recant his or her religious convictions. The deprogrammers themselves are the judges of what is good and what is bad religion.

There may be some churches in and around the city with

heavy-handed preaching methods, the old fire and brimstone sermons, fanatic solicitation, and other signs that would suggest they are not exactly traditional, moderate, unenthusiastic denominations. I know, because I hang out occasionally at the Hare Krishna temple and dance, sing, chant and feast, and it's nothing like the Presbyterian church I grew up with. But if we are to believe the deprogrammer line, each and every one of these "cults" may very soon become the next Jonestown massacre, including UBF and the Church of Christ.

CAN incessantly preaches that Jonestown can happen again, and fearful parents believe them and will fork over the twenty thousand dollars necessary to have their adult child kidnapped and terrorized OUT of the religion in question. In one case last year a Catholic Nun was kidnapped and deprogrammed BACK into her protestant family tradition.

Who do we have to fear? The UBF man stopping us as we walk across campus in order to invite us to a Bible study meeting, or the psycho-babbling deprogrammer who will resort to terrorism and felonies in order to "convince" you that your choice of religion was wrong?

The Deprogrammer Convention in town next month is generally attended largely by psychiatrists, clergy, and off-beat political sorts who have presented legislation to Congress that would amend the First Amendment and take away our very basic right to freedom of religion. The conference is NOT open to the public, although some UIC staff have accepted invitations (and one in particular has written a book in support of the group).

Lets take another poll. What would you rather experience? A) A person approaching you in an airport with a balding head, pony-tail and orange pajamas who tries to sell you a book; or B) a person approaching you with three big goons, a black van, and a trip across state lines to an undisclosed location for "religious-rehabilitation?"

You be the judge. Who's out to get whom?