

# Experts say: psychological health can be protected

By SCOTT ABEL

College campuses across the country have reported an increase in the number of complaints against Bible-based groups that utilize cult-like techniques, according to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Nov. 15).

This increase has caused some campus administrators to wonder how college students become involved with such groups.

Some cult experts believe college students may be prime targets of cult-like groups because they are often struggling to balance both a job and an education.

Some psychologists, including IUPUI's Stuart Hart, say many students may become involved with charismatic, value-oriented groups because they lack a sense of belonging as well.

Hart is the director of the Office for the Study of the Psychological Rights of the Child, part of the IU School of Education.

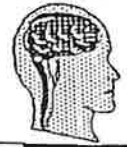
"It's important to realize that all people want to have some purpose in their lives," he said. "They want to have some sense of belonging. And they want to feel like they are making some sort of contribution to something bigger than themselves."

"Cults, or any legitimate value-oriented group," Hart said, "are oftentimes designed around the needs of the people they are trying to attract."

## What the experts say about mind control

### Steve Hassan

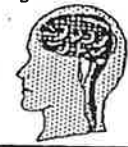
- Behavioral control: regulation of a person's physical reality.
- Emotional control: manipulating and narrowing the range of a person's feelings.
- Information control: denying people access to information needed to make sound judgements while exposing them to cult-generated propaganda.
- Thought control: Indoctrinating members so they internalize the group philosophy, believing everything they do is good and everything outside their belief is bad.



Steve Hassan is an exit-counselor and author of the book "Combatting Cult Mind Control," (Park Street Press)

### Margaret Thaler Singe

- They deceive people in the course of recruiting them.
- They use mind control or brainwashing while indoctrinating recruits.
- They exploit people, usually for the financial benefit of the group or its leaders.
- Members are usually psychologically entrapped as a result of brainwashing.
- Cults do not have to be religious in nature. Cult-like practices can also be found in business and social organizations.



Margaret Thaler Singe is a professor at the University of California, Berkely, and an expert on cults.

"But, you have to realize how strongly these cult-like groups work at making their particular organizations seem attractive to people who lack a sense of belonging," Hart said. "People are particularly vulnerable when they are suffering emotionally."

Cynthia Kissler, executive director of the Cult Awareness Network, a non-

profit organization that collects and disseminates information on cults, said she agrees.

"College campuses have continued to be a good environment for cults to tap into," said Kissler.

According to network statistics, college campuses are supporting nearly 2,500 different cults which attract nearly 3 million students annually.

Hart said he believes that students who become involved in religious cults may have very strong needs that may have been unfulfilled during the earlier part of their lives.

New graduates are also targeted by religious cults, Kissler said, because they are often in a transitional period and may be unsure of themselves or lonely.

### Names may cause confusion; groups not affiliated

Neither the Boston Church of Christ nor the Indianapolis Church of Christ is affiliated with the mainstream United Church of Christ.

In fact, the United Church of Christ, in an effort to avoid becoming confused with the Church of Christ, spent \$20,000 on an advertising campaign and conference last April.

The conference was designed to show the differences between the two groups and to raise awareness of manipulative religious groups on the East Coast. The United Church of Christ has more than 2 million members in the United States.

It is estimated that the Boston Church of Christ has 3,500 to 5,000 members. Bi-weekly service is held at the Boston Garden, home of the Boston Celtics basketball team.

The Indianapolis Church of Christ has approximately 35 members in their campus organization. Campus leaders are paid for their services by the organization. Weekly services are held at the Murat Temple.

The group also reserves space on campus for additional meetings, a situation Wagoner said he is monitoring.

"Students who want to know about any organization on this campus can come and ask me," Wagoner said, "and I'll be glad to sit down and discuss what we know about them."

"I am genuinely concerned that some students may not know what they may be getting into," said Wagoner, who claimed he understands how manipulative groups work.

Wagoner said his sister and brother-in-law were once involved with a similar cult-like group known as The Way.

"They had to get out of it, because she (Wagoner's sister) and her husband

started to get so mixed up in it. She started giving everything (money) to the church."

Wagoner's office does not have the power to ban groups from proselytizing on campus but said his office would investigate any student complaints.

Other Indianapolis college campuses are apparently also facing similar problems with the Indianapolis Church of Christ.

A recent letter to the editor which appeared in *The Butler Collegian* (Nov. 8) described the group as "distorted" and accused the group of employing "cult-like techniques that often border on harassment."

The letter also complained that "when students have tried to stop going to meetings, people from the church have sought to manipulate them through the use of guilt and threats about how leav-

ing the church means one is rejecting God." The letter was signed by nine campus ministers representing various mainstream churches.

### Butler bans group

Staten said the contents of the letter that appeared in the *Butler Collegian* (Nov. 8) were not true and he doesn't think Butler's complaints about his group were handled in a very "Christian manner."

"Even from a scriptural standpoint, they (other Christians) have an obligation to confront me biblically, before they could ever talk to somebody else," Staten said.

Staten said he assumes the Indianapolis Church of Christ may have made mistakes but that Butler University religious figures also erred by "going around spreading slanderous things."

The Indianapolis Church of Christ has removed their campus Bible study group

Kisser said she believes that colleges have a responsibility to protect students by educating them on how to spot unethical recruiting techniques and where to draw the line between legitimate demands on time and excessive group pressure.

Regardless of where the burden of educating students falls, both experts on cult-like groups and campus administrators agree that best defense college students can take against coercive religious groups is education.

Students who are, or know someone who is, seeking a way out of a coercive cult-like group are encouraged to contact either the IUPUI Counseling Center at 274-2548 or a representative of any mainstream religious organization on campus.

Students who have questions about any particular group on the IUPUI campus can contact the Student Activities office, located in the basement of the University Library 274-3931.

Some national organizations that offer information concerning cult-like or manipulative religious groups are:

• The Cult Awareness Network, 2421 W. Pratt Blvd., Suite 1173, Chicago, Ill. 60645;

• Spiritual Counterfeits Project Information and Referral Service, Berkeley, Calif. (415) 540-5767;

• The American Family Foundation, Weston, Mass. (617) 893-0930;

• Citizens Freedom Foundation, Information Services Department, Hancroix, NY (518) 756-8014.

from Butler at the request of university officials.

Staten said he is greatly concerned about the agenda of the persons attacking his Indianapolis campus ministry.

"The truth of it is, if somebody feels definitely, really hurt, or if they still have unresolved feelings, bitterness, whatever, I would want to sit down with them," Staten said, "and fix any problem that may have been caused by our group. I don't want anybody to be hurt by the impact of our church."

Kordas has dealt with his pain without the help of Staten's church.

"I wish I would have known then what I know now," Kordas said. "I would have been more prepared to deal with them."

SAGAMORE GRAPHIC



Cindy Dormans, a Butler University senior (left) and Dorian Kordas (right), a freshman at IUPUI, say they believe many college students are vulnerable targets for cult-like religious groups that use mind-control techniques. In sharing their experiences, the two say they hope to raise campus cult awareness. Photo by SANDY VAN VLYMAN

But Kordas and Dormans aren't the only students who claim their experiences with the Indianapolis Church of Christ were questionable.

"This is the strangest group I have ever seen in my whole life," said an IUPUI student who requested anonymity out of fear of reprisals.

### Students feel self-doubt

"They can get you so turned-in on yourself that you are constantly questioning yourself. I kept thinking that something was wrong with me," Kordas said.

But Kordas only doubted himself for a short time.

Comments from the Indianapolis Church of Christ campus group leader, Keith Nauert, caused him to question the group's motives.

"They made sweeping generalizations as well as direct comments about other religions, organizations and people," Kordas said. "In other words, if you didn't believe the way they did you were going to hell ... your parents, family and friends included."

The church's local leader acknowledged the practice and offered a justification for it.

"We are not afraid to say that some religions are far-off from Christianity, or only a fragment of their teaching is Christian," Staten said. "We'll spell it out."

### Recruits break free

After managing to get away from his disciple for a period of about four days, Kordas said he spent many hours thinking about his faith and his relationship with the Indianapolis Church of Christ.

"I started thinking about what had happened to me, and I realized that they had manipulated me. They had lied to me. They had used techniques to cause me to think about certain things, to question myself instead of their motives," Kordas said.

So Kordas went back to the group and announced his decision to stop his association with them.

After breaking ties with the group, Kordas received phone calls from his disciple, Dannielson, for several weeks. Dannielson also visited Kordas' home and asked him to go out and talk for a while. Kordas continued to express his disinterest in the group, and eventually the calls and attention stopped.

"I was approached on campus by someone who invited me to a Bible study meeting, and that's how it all began," the student said.

"It's unlike anything else you can imagine. Their approach is so phenomenal and powerful," said the student, who added that members of the Indianapolis Church of Christ actively tried recruiting techniques for about four months.

"They can actually get you turned against everything you believed in the past if you let them," the student said.

Manipulative Bible study sessions, unnecessary peer pressure and constant phone harassment were several reasons the student didn't want to be associated with the church.

According to a church official, there is no specific policy on calling prospective members.

"We don't encourage or discourage phone communication," said Staten. "I hope it is not a regular practice to do that. If it is, I want to know so I can correct that. Dog-gonit, if we're doing things like that, I want to correct anything that causes people uncomfortable feelings."

The student was eventually approached by Kordas, who asked him if he had any strange feelings about the group. "That's when I realized I wasn't the only one," the student said. "There were other people who had questions about the group. I guess that's when I realized that they were nothing more than a cult."

### Student questions idealism

The student also claimed to have a problem dealing with some of the ideas presented by Keith Nauert, the group's campus leader.

Nauert, the student said, "is extremely arrogant, judgmental of other religions, oftentimes condemning them, and talked about how seductive the girls at IUPUI dressed."

Nauert refused to comment on the specific allegations and launched his own interview of the reporter.

"What has brought the sudden interest on, or rather who?" Nauert asked. "How many students have said anything negative, and are they IUPUI students?"

"If you want an interview with me, I'll be more than happy to give it to you, but it's going to be a two-way conversation. So, what I'm saying right now is, who are the other campuses?"

When *The Sagamore* declined to disclose that information, Nauert refused to be interviewed.

Staten, who was contacted one day after Nauert's refusal, said Nauert may have been defensive because he had recently had a negative experience with reporters from another local college newspaper. Staten said that he had no problem with being interviewed and apologized for Nauert's actions.

"We (Indianapolis Church of Christ) believe that it is not right to pass judgment on religious organizations. It would be wrong for us to make assumptions about groups we do not know about," said Staten.

### Expert identifies group

Buddy Martin, an exit-counselor and 17-year veteran preacher in the <sup>United mainline</sup> Church of Christ in Massachusetts, said, "You're looking at a very dangerous religious group (Indianapolis Church of Christ) that uses a one-over-one methodology to recruit and retain cult members."

"Your group there in Indianapolis is a direct planting from the Chicago Church of Christ, which answers to the Boston Church of Christ," he said.

The Boston Church of Christ was founded by Kip McKean, a former campus minister in Charleston, Ill.

Before founding the Boston church, McKean was fired by his sponsoring church as the result of a 1977 decision by church elders. The elders, in a letter from the church dated April 4, 1977, claimed (among other things) that McKean practiced "unsound doctrines." McKean's termination coincided with local media reports of cultic practices and emotional manipulation by the group.

Since that time, the Boston Church of Christ, according to its monthly newsletter, has planted churches overseas in Kingston, Jamaica; Paris, France; Stockholm, Sweden; and in Chicago, New York, Cincinnati, Providence and Toronto as well as numerous other cities both in the U.S. and abroad.

Members of the Boston Church of Christ and their affiliates will hold an international seminar, World Missions Jubilee, at the Hoosier Dome in 1991. The event, according to church literature, is expected to draw over 25,000 attendees.

### Group uses pyramid tactics

"It's like Amway in that they employ a pyramid selling scheme to spread their brand of gospel," Martin said, noting that each member answers to another member further up in the hierarchy. "Each church is planted by another above them."

The Chicago Church of Christ, according to *The Boston Church of Christ Bulletin* (Aug. 27, 1989), announced that the Indianapolis Church of Christ was planted in June 1988.

According to articles printed in *The Northeastern News* and *The Harvard Crimson*, the Boston Church of Christ has been booted off a number of private college campuses in Massachusetts for, among other reasons, deception in their recruiting approaches and for constantly pursuing prospects to the point of harassment.

The group was also banned from the University of Lowell, a public university.

Normally public universities like IUPUI cannot ban groups from becoming student organizations, according to Student Activities Director Mike Wagoner.

At the University of Lowell, the student senate, the official voice of the student body, took action against the group by refusing to allow the group to be represented on the campus.

The Indianapolis Church of Christ, however, has been recognized on the IUPUI campus for several years as a student organization. They have gone under several names, including the Landmark Church of Christ, Campus Advance and Operation Saturation, according to files in the Student Activities office.