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Psychiatrist Says Churches Should Challenge Cults

By Richard Gill

Dispatch Religion Writer

Protestant and Catholic churches are partly responsible for the increase in cults across the country, a Harvard psychiatrist said.

John G. Clark, an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School who opposes cults, said churches have melted into the background, allowing cults to increase in strength and authority.

CULTS HE considers dangerous include the Church of Scientology, the Unification Church and The Way International. Clark said the Way's membership has increased to more than 100,000 followers, and members are actively recruiting high school youths.

"(The churches) should be right out in front of a movement to battle cults," said Clark, who was in Columbus earlier this week to take part in Grant Hospital's Distinguished Lecture series. "Churches should let them (cults) know that 'we're watching you. And we are going to make public everything you do.'"

"But (churches) have failed," he said. "They don't want to understand cults. They are scared of them."

Often, cult members come in right under the noses of church leaders, and steal their youths, said Clark.



Gill

The tolerance of mainline churches toward the beliefs of others are one reason cults have been able to lure away their members, Clark said. The churches respect other people's beliefs, he said. Cults do not. "They are non-tolerant. Absolute. And they are not really interested in the individual's life," Clark said.

That is what makes them dangerous, Clark said. "They assume that they have the absolute truth and nobody else has. They will do anything to accomplish their will."

Clark claims that the "group thinking" manifested in cults poses a serious threat to society. The same type of phenomenon occurred during the Nazi takeover of Germany.

CULTS HAVE sharpened their persuasive powers to a high degree of

efficiency, Clark said.

"The conversion is the classic con," Clark said. "They change a person's mind altogether. They take a normal person, catch his attention and

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keep it under control long enough and in such a way that they bring about a trance state. In that transcendental stage they effect change.

"Our minds are put together after we are born. The mind is not the result of heredity. It has to change, to adapt. Cults use the mechanism of

adaptation in extreme forms to create a multi-personality.

"They (cults) can change the furniture of the mind completely. And then provide the new furniture."

Cults, Clark said, tend to emphasize the "truth" in the life to come, or dwell on lives of the past. "They take no responsibility and show no charity to the living," he said.

BUT HOW and why do they do this?

"If a cult leader affects one follower and then another, and they both are licking his boots, he doesn't think about the psychology of what he's doing," Clark said.

"What he sees is power, the power to change. And that's the rawest form of power," he said.

Many persons become cult mem-

bers without ever realizing it, Clark claims. "They get you in all the ways...before you know what has happened," he said.

Clark said there are about three million members of cults across the country today. Most cults, he said, tend to be short-lived, dying out within 10 years.

"Members cannot be hidden or sheltered forever from what is happening in society. When they learn, they drop out."

Clark said the whole issue of religion is built around tolerance and is sustained by a series of checks and balances. None of those things is considered in a cult.

Therefore, he suggested that churches will need to become less tolerant and lead the fight against cultism.

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