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Kisser:

Destructive cults: a new organized crime

By Cynthia Kisser

Any serious researcher in the area of cults can easily document the fact that leaders and members of destructive cults and their front organizations have interacted in an organized manner for mutual benefit for some time. These groups have left a trail of convictions that clearly reveal the criminal overtones to their activities. Law enforcement and the community at large should now begin to view destructive cults as non-traditional organized criminal groups.

Convictions linked to these destructive cults and their front groups include, but are not limited to, drug offenses, weapons offenses, fraudulent fund-raising activities, tax fraud, conspiracy, and threatening the life of the President of the United States. These crimes have occurred both in the United States and abroad.

These destructive cults are interrelated through an elaborate network of front groups that practically require a flow chart to comprehend. For example, the Unification Church of Sun Myung

Moon (also known as the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity) has ties to the Coalition for Religious Freedom, the Wisconsin Committee on Religious Liberty, the American Freedom Coalition, and the World Council for Religious Freedom. The Church of Scientology similarly has ties to the Coalition for Religious Freedom, the Wisconsin Committee on Religious Liberty, and the Friends of Freedom. Greater Grace World Outreach has ties to the Friends of Freedom. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (the Hare Krishnas), the Church of Scientology, Greater Grace World Outreach and certain front groups mentioned above (including the Coalition for Religious Freedom, the Wisconsin Committee on Religious Liberty, the American Freedom Coalition, and the Friends of Freedom) all sponsor the Religious Freedom Project. And the intricacy of the relationships among the destructive cults goes far beyond this.

Always seeking to advance their common agenda, this consortium of destructive cults has seized upon the issue of satanism, and fought to gain a foothold in the law enforcement community on the basis of this topic. It is crucial to destructive cults that their front groups be viewed

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as the only valid sources for information on satanism, and that law enforcement be discouraged from locating truly reliable sources for information and training on satanism. Any source outside of this consortium's control with which law enforcement might become familiar is branded as promoting "Christian fantasies of what people think satanism would be like" and feeding on "unreliable information" and "public hysteria," as Donald Sills asserted in a recent commentary in these pages ("Bedeviling Questions about Workshops," *Law Enforcement News*, Dec. 15, 1990). There are some interesting reasons for this position.

First, these destructive cults must thwart the development of investigative techniques concerning the criminal activities of destructive cults. Careful research into all of the dimensions of satanism as a movement in this country will eventually lead to more thorough investigation by law enforcement of those aspects that are criminal in nature. Just as successful investigative techniques concerning gang-related criminal activity had to evolve before major successful prosecutions could occur, so must this avenue now be undertaken with respect to cult-linked crimes. However, as satanically-linked cult crime becomes more clearly identified and the investigative techniques are perfected to deal with it, this creates a threat to the consortium of destructive cults. Should destructive cults come to be viewed as the organized criminal groups that they truly are, techniques developed to deal with satanic and hate crimes could be effectively used to interfere with their operations as well.

Second, law enforcement has to

some degree already investigated the link between satanic activity and crime, and this type of investigation is likely to continue. It is crucial to the consortium of destructive cults that they achieve a position through front groups as a definitive source on satanism, and thereby effectively eliminate truly credible sources that might also have information about the destructive cults' own criminal activities. The Cult Awareness Network, for example, has contributed information and supplied witnesses and informants to the courts which have assisted in successful prosecution of the criminal acts of cult leaders and members. As more cases concerning satanism are making their way into the courts, the need for this type of service is becoming evident. In 1986, the Maine Supreme Court ruled in *Maine v. Waterhouse* that evidence of satanism and a defendant's belief in satanism could be a relevant factor in proving the identity and intent of the perpetrator of the strangulation killing of a 12-year-old girl.

Third, this strategy also allows a certain amount of disinformation and propaganda to be disseminated which, in the long run, can help the cults influence others, including representatives of governmental agencies.

The destructive cults will continue to be encouraged in acting as organized criminal groups as long as they can find unwitting allies among respectable professionals, including those in law enforcement. CAN urges a close examination of those organizations that purport to defend religious freedom and to promote idealism when in fact this may be a veneer for self-gratification, power and financial gain.

(Cynthia Kisser is executive director of the Cult Awareness Network, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to promoting public awareness of the harmful effects of mind control.)