

CULTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

They Thought It Couldn't Happen to Them

by Paul Carden

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They thought it couldn't happen to them. But it did.

CASE 1: From the June 20, 2004 issue of the Chicago Tribune:

When she joined a fledgling missionary group at evangelical Wheaton College, Carrie Andreson expected to grow closer to God.

She and other students would gather mornings in graduate student Feroze Golwalla's apartment to pray and plan for an overseas mission trip. But as the weeks passed, the students began fasting and soon were depriving themselves of sleep. Some cut off ties to family and friends and left Wheaton to follow Golwalla and his strict directives.

In her desire to become a missionary, Andreson had become part of a cult.

At Golwalla's orders, Andreson said, she even beat other members and ultimately caused self-inflicted wounds, puncturing her face and buttocks with a hanger until she bled and scarred.

"I always hated the pain," she said. "But at the same time, it made me feel more... worthy to be there. I thought that this is what I needed for my own preparation as a missionary."

Carrie wasn't the only one. At least 20 Christian young people have suffered under Golwalla, who is still at large. He cunningly twisted Scripture and exploited noble motives, such as a desire for missionary service, as a pretext for appalling physical and psychological abuse. (The apostle Paul wrote to naïve believers of the false shepherds in his day: "For you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face" — 2 Cor. 11:20.)

Were the young people whom Golwalla took captive "losers" — marginal Christians, mentally retarded, or emotionally crippled? Press reports indicate that he sought bright students who were unusually active and committed to their faith and had caring, supportive parents. Writes one survivor: "It is not a mystical process by which stupid or emotionally unstable people overnight become zombies (as many believe). It is a very gradual and understandable process by which idealistic and sometimes highly intelligent people join an organization they're interested in and then have their freedoms gradually limited and their perceptions colored to the point that they do not choose to leave even when they are physically able to do so."

CASE 2: A few months ago I received a request from a ministry in Utah to assist a local parent seeking help. The woman's seventeen-year-old daughter (who had attended a wealthy, well-known evangelical church since she was four) had fallen in love with a

Mormon boy and wanted desperately to join the cult. Worse, when the parents sought the help of the church's youth pastor, he refused to meet with the girl in order to discuss the dangers and deception of Mormonism! I spent several hours with her and her mother, and I was surprised by her level of biblical illiteracy and her inability (or unwillingness) — even when lovingly confronted with the evidence — to recognize that Mormonism cannot possibly be reconciled with biblical Christianity. Sadly, this scenario is far from uncommon.

I highlight these two cases because they're symptomatic of a much larger problem. Christian young people are at risk, both here and abroad — especially as the church loses its will to discern, and especially among those who think, "It can't happen to us."

Writing in the July 9, 2004 edition of the *Wall Street Journal*, Dale Buss observes that "while they may profess the faith and indeed love Jesus, the vast majority of Christian teenagers in this country actually hold beliefs fundamentally antithetical to the creed. The forces of moral relativism and 'tolerance' have gotten to them in a big way. In fact, some leaders believe that mushy doctrine among the younger generation ranks as the No. 1 crisis facing American Christendom today.

"About one-third of American teenagers claim they're 'born again' believers, according to data gathered over the past few years by Barna Research Group...and 88% of teens say they are Christians. About 60% believe that 'the Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings.' And 56% feel that their religious faith is very important in their life.

"Yet, Barna says, slightly more than half of all U.S. teens also believe that Jesus committed sins while he was on earth. About 60% agree that enough good works will earn them a place in heaven.... About two-thirds say that Satan is just a symbol of evil, not really a living being. Only 6% of all teens believe that there are moral absolutes — and, most troubling to evangelical leaders, only 9% of self-described born-again teens believe that moral truth is absolute." (Barna adds that it's "disconcerting to realize that we're relying on this generation for the future defense of Judeo-Christian civilization against the highly motivated forces of militant Islam.")

As the American Family Foundation explains, cults lure the unsuspecting by two interacting forces:

- The tactics the cult uses to recruit, convert, acculturate, and hold members, and
- The personal vulnerability of the potential recruit

So what can parents do? Paranoia isn't the answer! But to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Bible-wielding cult recruiters come in all shapes and sizes, and a healthy respect for their persuasive powers goes a long way. One of Feroze Golwalla's former followers writes: "The Lord Jesus said that we need to be wise as serpents and that we need to understand that there are things out there that look like sheep but that are actually wolves [Matt. 7:15ff]. Feroze was a wolf in sheep's clothing if ever there was one. Please, be aware that things are not always as they seem. Don't assume that they are. You can't always tell from a first impression." Said the mother of two victims: "If

Feroze had walked on campus with a bottle of wine and cigarettes in his pocket, he'd be kicked out of Wheaton....But there's nothing protecting students from a predator like Feroze." Nothing, perhaps, except vigilance — and an awareness that even Christians are prey for such deceivers. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12)

As we raise our families and encourage the young people around us, we can make a difference by consistently recognizing and applying two basic principles:

1. KNOW THE TRUTH

To avoid deception, Christian young people should know how to interpret God's Word, know the essentials of the historic Christian faith (especially as reflected in ancient affirmations like the Apostles' creed), and have some grasp of church history.

2. KNOW THE CULTS

To avoid deception, Christian young people should be familiar with contemporary cults — their names, their errors, and their recruiting methods (the "dynamics" of deception) — and appreciate their areas of personal vulnerability.

Around the world, CFAR is warning the Body of Christ — young and old — about the dangers and deception of cultic groups. Through seminars and CDs, tracts and television, we're committed to inoculating God's people against deception. Together, you and I can reduce the casualties in this spiritual battle, equipping young believers in many nations to stand for truth and win cultists to Christ. 🌐

"You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness..."
(2 Peter 3:17)



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CFAR equips God's people across borders and cultures for discernment, the defense of the faith, and cult evangelism. To learn how you can help, call CFAR at (949) 496-2000 or visit our web site at www.TheCenters.org.