

# Is it 'cult' or 'new religion'?

By Joan Herman  
Of the Emerald

This is the last in four-part series examining the Unification Church and other cults. In this installment Joan Herman offers her analysis of some common and uncommon religious groups.

The more generous-minded observer calls them "new religions," the less generous, "cults." Yet history proves the new religious movement is not really so new, after all.

From the Jewish Zealots of 73 A.D. protecting their home of Masada against the Roman legions, to the 19th century Mormons pioneering what is today one of America's fastest growing religions, the emergence of new religions

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seems as perennial as the four seasons.

The United States is often seen as an especially fertile bed for new religions. From early childhood, Americans are taught that their nation was founded upon the principle of religious freedom. History lessons often refer to the pioneering Puritans seeking a land where they could worship freely without castigation from the Church of England.

And what is condemned as a "cult" at its outset often becomes an established and respected "religion" in time. Even the Western world's most popular religion today — Christianity — was seen as a cult by the orthodox Romans.

This distinction between "religions" and "cults" is defined by society. Organized religions are perceived by citizens as upholding traditional, societal values. Yet cults tend to attract society's outcasts who hope to usher in a new, better world.

Historians and sociologists believe cults arise during times of extreme societal turmoil. Cults flourished directly after the French Revolution and England's industrial revolution, as well as during America's westward movement. Because of this, the Western United States continues to have the highest percentage of cult followers.

Some sociologists believe cults peaked during the tumultuous Vietnam and post-Vietnam era of the 1960s and 1970s. Others say the nuclear war threat in the 1980s will spawn even more cults.

Either way, historians and sociologists agree cults will thrive as long as society's core institutions — the family, organized religion and public education — continue to

disenchant citizens.

Today about three million Americans are involved in 3,000 religious and nonreligious cults across the nation. Cults attract literally all ages, races and economic classes — not to mention interests.

There are cults for the spiritually confused, such as the Unification Church and the Children of God, cults for the drug addicts and alcoholics, such as Synanon and cults for those wanting self-enlightenment, such as EST and Lifespring.

In Eugene's own backyard, the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and his band of loyal red-robed followers are thriving against the wishes of many Oregonians. On campus, the fundamentalist Christian group, Maranatha Ministries, preaches almost daily to students outside the EMU.

Nationally, Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church has attracted more attention than other cults, yet it is only one of many religious "fringe" movements in the United States. Some of the more popular ones include:

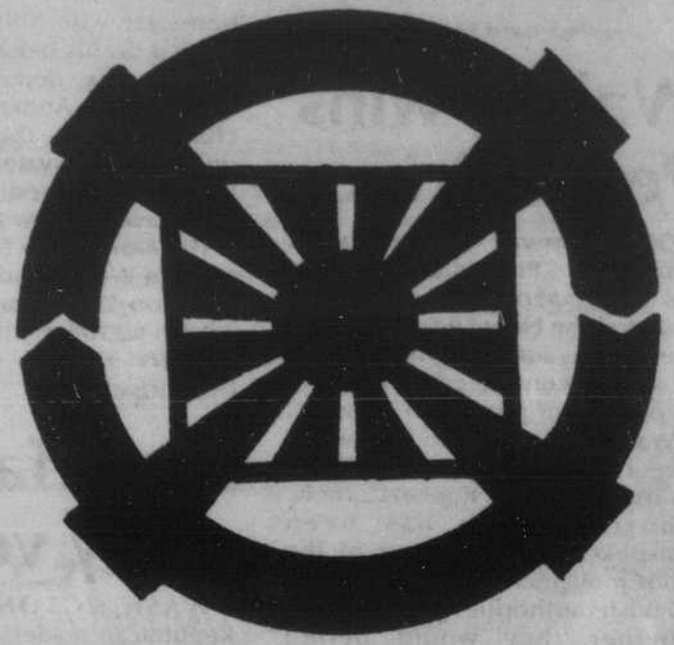
**The Church of Scientology or Dianetics**, founded by science fiction writer-philosopher-engineer L. Ron Hubbard in 1952, weaves Christian and Eastern philosophy together. Its central philosophy is that people must release all negative thoughts and feelings — or "engrams" — by using an "E-meter" if they hope to achieve their potential. As one of America's largest cults, Scientology boasts about 600,000 followers. Like the "Moonies," Scientology has been accused of brainwashing and deceiving followers.

**Children of God** was founded in the late 1960s by David "Moses" Berg, 63, who urged his street disciples to spread God's word on street corners and college campuses. Berg's religion centers around his belief that "Doomsday" is just around the corner. His alleged preoccupation with sex was evidenced in his "Moletters," which often urged his female followers to use their feminine "charms" to lure men into the organization.

There were also accusations that Berg forced his followers to search garbage cans for food and clothing and forced them to memorize Bible verses before they could eat or sleep. Berg fled the United States in 1974 and shortly thereafter, the New York attorney general exposed Berg's questionable actions in a report. Despite the report, Children of God has about 10,000 members worldwide.

**Synanon** began in 1958 as a revolutionary drug and alcohol treatment center in California and immediately drew addicts and alcoholics to its doors. After curing most of its first clients, the therapeutic center grew to a \$20 million business for founder Charles Dederich. After membership peaked at 1,700 in 1973, Dederich began making unusual demands on his clients. He forced all men, in-

## UNIFICATION



## CHURCH

cluding himself, to have vasectomies and women to have abortions. He also ordered 230 couples to divorce and swap spouses, which they did. Today, Synanon claims a 900-member following.

**Hare Krishna** followers epitomize the counterculture '60s generation, with their shaved heads, long robes, and Hindu chants. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's cult grew out of 16th century Indian sects. Bhaktivedanta brought the sect, unpopular in India, to the United States in 1965, promising his followers an alternative of inner peace.

Hare Krishnas, as members are called, usually live on large communal farms or in older urban homes and chant their "mantra" as many as 1,728 times a day. When Bhaktivedanta died in 1977, about 10,000 Hare Krishnas and a \$16 million a year income from book sales comprised his group. Members are notorious for aggressively soliciting funds in large airports and city streets across the nation. Like some other cults, this one has been accused of brainwashing its members.

New religious movements have undoubtedly garnered more negative publicity than positive, giving the word "cult" pejorative overtones.

# Panelists say Solomon Amendment useless

By Melissa Martin  
Of the Emerald



Photo by Melissa Martin

Dave Fidanque of the ACLU spoke to an audience of 35 at a "brown bag forum" Wednesday.

Panelists bounced the Solomon Amendment ball back and forth in the EMU Forum Wednesday noon and scored on one point — the amendment is having little impact on enforcing overall registration.

The Solomon Amendment, which requires all students receiving federal financial aid to certify draft registration, was the topic for the first Brown Bag Forum sponsored by ASUO and Campus Interfaith Ministries.

"If we go to war tomorrow, there's going to be an incredible amount of people who will not get their induction notifications," because people have not sent in change of address notification forms, Dave Fidanque of the American Civil Liberties Union told the audience of more than 35.

Jim O'Fallon of the law school said opponents accuse Solomon of punishing people who are not criminals. Congress, amendment proponents, call it inducement, not punishment, he said.

"I don't think the prospects of winning this in the courts is very good," O'Fallon said. "I find it very unlikely they will strike this down as Bill of Attainder."

Two more issues in the amendment, called Solomon I and Solomon II, are entering the challenge, Fidanque said. Both issues deal with draft registration and employment situations.

"Solomon II is aimed at economically disadvantaged people even more than Solomon I," Fidanque

said.

"Selective Service will have unbelievable problems in enforcing the registration.

"People who are not complying with the law are being virtually ignored by the government because there's so many of them it is impossible to deal with them all," Fidanque said.

The Solomon Amendment is "direct discrimination" against men, said Julie Sinai of Students Opposing Registration and the Draft.

The Reagan administration announced the Solomon decision in the summer out of fear of student activists, she said.

In the state of Oregon 98 percent of the students complied with the new law. At the University, one woman between the ages of 30 and 45, refused to comply, Vignoul said.

"People are registering because it is not in their career goals at 18 to 21 to go to the state institution," said Mike Stoops of the Northwest Draft Counseling Center.

The State System of Higher Education will audit the University in December to make sure all the students who signed the form actually registered, according to Ed Vignoul, financial aid director.

Some 60 percent of the students would have felt the crunch of a \$22 million loss if the University did not comply with the new law, Vignoul said.

The initial implementing costs for the new law were small, Vignoul said — 6,000 stamps to mail students the signature forms over the summer.

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