

Cult Land

—The Foundation for Freedom—

By Ken Hutchins

As anyone who has read my treatise, *Cult Bashing 2.0*, knows, I characterize human belief aggregations—be they correct or incorrect, evil or good, secular or religious—as cults. [This pre-requisite treatise can be easily found by online search or at seriousexercise.com.]

Eric Hoffer—author of *True Believer* (1951, my birth year, coincidentally)—explained mass movement(s). Although he did not use all of the following descriptors, I see them as roughly synonymous: following, faction, groupie(s), cult, fan base, supporter(s), sect, market, denomination, and many others. My father would infuriate me as a teenager by referring to my friends and influences as “your public.”

*“Jesus was not a Christian, nor was
Marx a Marxist.”*

—Eric Hoffer—

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When caught reading *Positioning—The Battle for Your Mind* by Al Ries and Jack Trout, Arthur Jones—the founder and owner of Nautilus Sports/Medical Industries, INC, ripped it out of my hand, brusquely thumbed through it and shoved it back to me and declared:

“If you really want to read THE BOOK about marketing, read *True Believer*.”

Inquisitions

The despots of human society have always endeavored to control the rest of us. And this begins with controlling what we think and believe as this will ultimately determine our actions and become a threat to them.

If the reader will permit me to restrict my illustrations to Judeo-Christian history, I can trace despotic religious rule that consistently sought to control cultish thought and practice. Before the Romans (a secular cult) took over much of the Mediterranean, the Jewish (a religious cult) leaders dealt with many rebels who emerged to deviate from Jewish law. Then, when the Romans were in charge, they allowed the Jews to marginalize Jesus of Nazareth. All of these corrective actions were a

form of censorship (heresy abatement) to preserve the status quo, but also to prevent mob rule through imposed conformity.

However, the Jesus cult was so powerful that it spawned many subcults. And some of these subcults eventually coalesced to form a formidable mass movement. With the formalization of the Catholic Church (*The Church*), the master cult, and the canonization of their writings into *The Bible. The Church*, was able to transcend the lifespan of even rulers and countries. The Church attained everlasting life in a sense.

As I have mentioned in my other writings, the mind—under the right conditions—is a fertile source of ideas, good or bad. And when allowed what a despot might consider excessive latitude, it often becomes a threat to the despot.

For the Church, heresy might include the obvious practices of witchcraft, sorcery, paganism, satanism, etc.—convenient categories for casting anything novel or mysterious—or the practices of anyone of a competing religion or those who refused the sacrament. In a sense, a country (a secular cult) used the Church to guard against internal threats

while the country used its military to guard against external threats.

[Similarly and internally, the NAZIs employed their Schutzstaffel (*SS*) and the Bolsheviks employed their Cheka to seek and destroy threatening ideologues. In Orwell's *1984*, the Ministry of Truth serves the same purpose.]

The Church became a despot of sorts and worked cooperatively with the rulers (secular despots) of Western nations for over a thousand years. Starting in about 1184 AD, different countries sponsored official inquisitions conducted by the Church. The whole object of the inquisitions was thought control, a heavy-handed way to censor deviant thought (heresy) and expression.

Gradually, the Church lost control and Western creativity found cracks in the Church's bulwark. From these cracks, the Renaissance leaked out like air slowly escaping from a shaken bottle of pop. And an eventual explosion of ideas entailed both secular as well as ecclesiastical abstracts and physical embodiments.

For instance, the art of the Renaissance embellished the visual majesty of the Church through paintings, sculpture and architecture, while the emergence of astronomy via Copernicus was abject heresy that begged for censorship. Leonardo invented and constructed many military weapons and public works and contraptions in addition to being prosecuted by the Roman Inquisition. However, the Church did enjoy his Godly portraits.

[With the advent of astronomy (a science-based cult), astrology (a mysticism-based cult) was increasingly relegated to the auspices of the *occult* (another word to conflate with *cult*). I suppose this weakened the Church, but I would need much more study to confirm this. Perhaps Copernicus was able to dodge the inquisition for his sun-centric model of the solar system due to being a Catholic canon.]

I, like many, confused the Renaissance with the Reformation for most of my life. And they are certainly related and do overlap chronologically. It can be argued that the Renaissance led to the Reformation. But before the Reformation started with Luther's so-called *heresy*, the Renaissance bestowed a great gift to the Church.

With Columbian entrepreneuring, the Church, in cooperation with the Spanish monarchs and their military, claimed vast territories to plunder for wealth beyond imagination. Note that conquering Spanish conquistadores are almost always pictured with a priest.

But after 1492, containment of the cults began to unravel. With the writings of Martin Luther in 1517, the proverbial Pandora's Box gapped wide in Christendom. And for the many decades afterwards, religious wars ravaged Europe with Christian against Christian. Even the infamous Spanish Inquisition could not put the genie back into the bottle.

While Spain annexed most of the Caribbean and Central America and much of North and South America, they seemed to ignore the northeastern coast of North America. I guess that this area was not attractive as it was colder and because their expeditions to find wealth in these areas were failures. But it attracted the interests of other European countries who wanted to avoid trouble with the Spanish-American holdings. And note that the Spanish holdings were almost exclusively Catholic while the Spanish Inquisition initiated by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella was still in

progress in their homeland as well as in all Spanish colonies and territories, which included the Canary Islands, the Kingdom of Naples, and all Spanish possessions in North, Central, and South America. Spanish territories were no place for protestant cults. [The Spanish Inquisition lasted from 1484-1834!]

Almost 100 years after the major Spanish conquests in the Americas, Jamestown was established as a business concern, but then other enclaves sprang up as many cults fled Europe seeking asylum. Most of these cults were protestant sects spawned by the Reformation and oppressed by the rulers of their homeland. And some enclaves were Catholic asylums for those who had been banished by protestants in Europe, particularly by those of England where Henry VIII had formed his own state church in opposition to Catholicism.

Come One, Come All to *Cult Land*

Ironically, the various cults along the eastern seaboard—although almost all protestant Christian—did not take kindly to the specific beliefs and practices of the others. Some enclaves enacted and enforced onerous laws prohibiting certain behaviors after sundown or on the Sabbath. Those neighbors caught in the wrong community at the

wrong time were often harshly punished. Torture, hanging, imprisonment, and enslavement might transpire. Being exposed as a Jew or an atheist evoked a certain death sentence among some of the enclaves. So, if you were told, “Escape to America for religious freedom,” think again.

Between 1607 and 1649, many settlers died due to starvation, disease, Indian wars, exposure, and miscellaneous violence.

[Between 1607 and 1624, when the first Jamestown site was abandoned and relocated, typhoid fever and dysentery visited Jamestown in recurrent epidemics, killing 30% or more of the inhabitants with each onslaught. With regular injections of new colonists to replace the expired ones, thousands died over a period of 17 years due to these diseases as well as due to other dangers. As Jamestown was a business venture, precise records were kept that might not have been kept so well for the other settlements.]

And with so many challenges to life in their harsh environment, the leaders of these enclaves got together with a spirit of cooperation to survive and enacted the *Religious Tolerance Act of 1649*. This act protected everyone of all faiths—Jews and

atheists excluded—from the special religious rules of the various cults. This established what I consider to be the one special sanctuary on the planet for the undesirable cults of Europe. And, of course, many more cults were spawned by and/or attracted by this sanctuary.

The United States of America experienced a cult explosion. And this was fertile ground for the emergence of the fourth major Abrahamic religion which became *The Church of the Latter-day Saints*.

Of course, the freedoms protected by the United States fostered many other cults: the Seventh-day Adventists, the Amish, the Branch Davidians, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, the Church of Christ, Scientist, the Church of Scientology, the Peoples Temple (Jim Jones), the Methodists, the Quakers, the Shakers, the Mennonites, and on and on. And there were also many new Jewish sects, Islamic sects, and atheist organizations. It seemed that once a church or synagogue or mosque was established, more sects would break off from it to expand additional followings geometrically.

[I assumed for many years that the phrase, *Wackos from Waco* originated with those who mocked the Branch Davidians. Actually, the phrase originated in 1839 with the contest to decide the location for the capital of Texas (before statehood). I believe that Harrisburg (the present site of Houston), Austin (formerly Waterloo), Washington (on the Brazos), and Waco were contenders. The other three, in their attempt to discount Waco's bid, marginalized Waco as a community of undesirables.

Coincidentally, the Branch Davidians and the Peoples Temple originated in the same year (1955).]

And as time progressed, the Spanish colonies divorced Spain and most of the North America English colonies divorced England. And all those conflicting and competing *legacy cults* [my word for those cults arriving before 1649]—the Presbyterians, the Calvinists, the Baptists, the Pilgrims, the Puritans, the Jews, the Catholics, the atheists and probably others, along with the others that followed between 1649 and the inception of the United States—consorted to morph the *Religious Tolerance Act of 1649* into the *First Amendment* of the *United States Bill of Rights* to guarantee us freedom of assembly, speech, and religion.

So please be careful when you slam some group you dislike as a *cult*. If you live in the United States, you are probably slamming yourself.

Perhaps a descriptor would help to denote a *cult* as *good* or *bad*. Something like *death cult* or *pedophilia cult* would mark the cult as *bad*; however, the contextual connotation leads many readers to conclude that all cults are *bad*. And there's another consideration to this natural prejudice.

I challenge the reader to name a cult—any organization or group devoted to some cause—that does not have detractors. Naming a cult that has a 100% positive following is nigh impossible. Even *your* favorite sports team is despised by its opponents. Even ostensibly good organizations—the United Way, Rotary International, the Lions Club, the Shriners, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Girl Scouts, the YMCA, Goodwill, the Salvation Army, etc.—have those who regard them as *evil*.

And as I thoroughly documented in *Cult Bashing 2.0*, *Cult* did not have a pejorative meaning as listed in formal dictionaries until about the advent of

Google. I wonder why. Are the so-called *fact checkers* merely the latest version of the thought police?

“Who knows why we were taught to fear the witches and not those who burned them alive?”

—Author Unknown—