

METHODS OF RECRUITMENT TO CULTS: THE SOCIAL INFLUENCE PERSPECTIVE

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У статті проаналізовано і типологізовано основні методи рекрутації до сект. Серед основних методів, на які звертає увагу автор, розглянуто такі, як метод емоційного впливу, метод камуфляжу і метод авторитету. Значну увагу приділено перспективі впливу суспільства на процес рекрутування до сект. Автор формулює кілька практичних рекомендацій щодо протидії стратегіям залучення до сект.

В статье проанализированы и типологизированы основные методы рекрутирования в секты. Среди основных методов, на которые обращает внимание автор, рассмотрены такие, как метод эмоционального влияния, метод камуфляжа и метод авторитета. Значительное внимание уделено перспективе влияния общества на процесс рекрутирования в секты. Автор формулирует несколько практических рекомендаций относительно противодействия стратегиям привлечения в секты.

Key words: cults, typology, methods of recruitment.

It is better to prevent than to treat a disease – people working with the young, especially parents and teachers, should be guided by this idea while dealing with difficult but interesting question of cults. Poland has achieved good results in conducting, on a fairly wide scale, prophylactic activities against controversial religious movements. Polish citizens' knowledge in this sphere has risen since the beginning of the 1990s. On the basis of my research (interviews, observations, analyses of documents), and with specific reference to achievements of such professionals as, for example, Michael D. Langone or Steven Hassan, I make an attempt to formulate a classification of methods used during the process of recruitment to cults. The classification can be useful in the process of prophylaxis while organizing special prophylactic meetings for young people. Its logical and simple structure should cause no troubles in understanding.

A certain kind of 'pathologization' of religion is characteristic of cult structures; thus it is not surprising that the problem finds its expression in their – not only ethical – methods of recruitment. Trying to generalize a principle, it would be appropriate to mention that people who recruit to cults know that it is impossible to change somebody's way of thinking at one stroke. Therefore, their general strategy involves a *gradual introduction into the group*, i.e., they proceed step by step. Let's imagine the situation: a recruiter, dressed in a long coat with raised collar, comes up to you in the dark evening and says: "Hello, I am a member of a cult. I'd like to recruit you. Will you join us?" That is absurd. He would not tell this. He won't reveal many other things as well, because it is a standard for recruiters that they do not tell all the truth about their group, but they merely use 'half-truths' or 'quarter-truths' during their first meeting. They select information precisely and hide their purposes providently, that leads to the situation in which potential adherents are constantly underinformed. In principle, the candidates are told only as much as they are allowed to know.

One of the author's interlocutors, Rafał from Cracow recalls that during his first meeting at the Unification Church he obtained very little information. Afterwards he was learning more and more. He was not allowed to know everything at once. For example at one of the first meetings he asked a question about the relation of the Unification Movement to the dogma of the Holy Trinity, and he received the answer: "This is a subject for a longer discussion. We invite you to the lecture on the Holy Trinity." In a similar way Dariusz from Lublin reports on his participation in workshops organized by the moonies: "I was even allowed to ask questions during lectures. Later I was, so to say, forbidden to do it. I was told: 'You will receive the answer during the next lecture, wait a little;' it was repeated several times. Such a postponement" [1].

What is more, the recruiter *obtains personal information* about the potential adherent in order to estimate whether he/she will be a valuable 'acquisition' for the group or not. When the candidate is assessed as worth being invested in, he/she will still be receiving attention and care by the time he/she commits himself/herself to join the group [2]. At the next step, the author presents three categories of methods of recruitment:

- methods of emotional influence,
- methods of camouflage,
- methods of authority [3].

Methods of emotional influence

In the first category one can find *the methods of emotional influence*. The process of recruitment can be successfully performed thanks to relatives and friends engaged in the cult. But in most cases the recruiter is a stranger and has to earn the confidence of a potential adherent. One of the most widespread and efficient ways of gaining new members is the well-known method called *love bombing*. Its mechanism is very simple. The chosen person becomes cherished (simply bombarded) with affection, warm-heartedness, and solicitude. At first, the cult offers nearly everything, requiring nothing in return. Thus, step by step it gains larger and larger confidence of the potential adherent. Heartiness and devotion win his/her heart to such a degree that the person becomes subordinated through 'an emotional umbilical cord' to the cult members and wants at any cost to maintain the warm and comfortable relation. By way of illustration, let us present the case of ex-member of Hare Krishna movement from Poland. He recalls: "They came after my parents' death. At my friends' instigation I hired a part of my flat to them, so as a matter of fact we lived together. They introduced bustle of charity, took a great care of me. They were consolation I needed so much at this time. They won my heart with cordiality and friendly treatment. There was a young, philosophically educated boy who edited Hare Krishna magazine at the university. He cooked perfectly for all of us: breakfasts, dinners, suppers. One can seldom meet a man so devoted to others. There was a *liturgy* – songs, dances, playing the drums since 4 a.m. At the same time an agitation began. They invited me to repeat mantra together and gave me vegetarian food, they were talking about their guru, encouraged to take part in meetings and lectures, they even invited me to their farm" [4].

A companion method in the relation to the above-mentioned is using *flattery*. There is no denying the fact that such tactic is usually primitive but – in contrast to other strategies – bring immediate effects. We are all excessively avid devourers of compliments. It even happens that we keep flatterers at a distance, particularly when we know that they can obtain something at our cost, nevertheless we are mostly disposed to believe the flatteries – even if they are improbable – and to like flatterers [5]. Especially individuals of low self-esteem are liable to manipulation. Polish psychologist Bogdan Wojciszke remarks that such people are not exactly convinced about their own worthlessness but rather uncertain of their value: "They think that this or that is wrong with them but they are hopeful that it is not truth. This is why they eagerly answer to a liking showed by others, greater than they – in their opinion – deserve, because it relieves (for a short time) their uncertainty" [6].

The specialists know the term *Flirty Fishing* (in short: *FFing*) as well. The father of this particular and very intimate form of recruitment is David Berg, the founder of Children of God (aka The Family or The Family of Love). *FFing* dates from the 1970s. In fact this ritual prostitution of sorts proves to be a mere sexual abuse. Nowadays, *Flirty Fishing* can be interpreted as an ordinary coquetry or seduction of a person of the opposite sex in order to win his/her heart for the group. To come into close contact with a victim, the recruiter organizes an 'accidental' meeting. E-mails, telephones, letters, and greeting cards may be the continuation of the first contact. Longer letter acquaintance transforms into a series of meetings in the atmosphere of a flirt, often connected with reading together adequate texts and discussion. The aim of this stage of recruitment is to gain victim's confidence and collect necessary information about him/her. Finally, the candidate for an adherent of cult cements his/her membership of the group.

Methods of camouflage

To the next category belong *the methods of camouflage* which express themselves particularly in founding front (or parallel) organizations by cults. These apparently independent enterprises are in practice supported and controlled by a cult. Under the facade of science, therapy, humanitarianism, charity, pro-family values, ecology, Christianity and etc. cult members hide the initiatives that are to help the mother cult in its activity and in its recruitment undertakings. Furthermore, cults do not avoid penetrating schools, universities and engaging in mechanisms of economy. The best example is the activity of the Unification Church. Sun Myung Moon expanded a number of profitable and unprofitable organizations by means of which the cult members penetrate various environments and classes of society. In this way they get in touch with politicians, scientists, clergy, artists, students and etc., inviting them to participate in the entertainments organized by the cult. *Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP)* and *Family Federation for World Peace (FFWP)* belong to the most known 'satellites' of the Moonies. The first of them is well-known in Poland for an incident which took place at University of Gdańsk. On November 18, 1996 there was organized the Week of Student Culture (Tydzień Kultury Studenckiej). One of the organizers was CARP. Probably no one of the university authorities knew that they had connections with a satellite of the Unification Church. The enterprise would have materialized but on the day of its beginning the rector of the university read in *The Baltic Daily (Dziennik Bałtycki)* that – to his much surprise – a cult organizes the Week of Student Culture at his university. The result was that he immediately decided to call off the meeting [7].

Let's present *the 'coat' of therapy* as an additional example. It often happens that a suffering and ill person, disappointed with the results of traditional medicine, looks for help from various charlatans, 'masters,' 'wonder-workers' and 'therapists' or goes to a 'centre' of alternative medicine. Even momentary and apparent relief induces him/her to accept the doctrine that accompanies the therapeutic session. Finally, such person experiences the next painful disappointment, and leaves this specific 'centre.' But the scenario can be different: the 'therapist' recruits him/her to a cult. The example of a therapeutic group that transformed into a toxic organization was the Polish cult called Niebo (the Heaven). At first leader of this group, Bogdan Kacmajor, took to heal by putting his hands on the sick. After some years of such activity he gathered former patients and created a semi-religious community and moved to Majdan Kozłowiecki (near Lublin) [8]. Sometimes it is difficult to identify a therapeutic facade. Families of victims do not react when their relatives attend various courses and often look with favour on this idea. Over the course of time, they notice that something wrong happens – behaviour of the person taking part in and their attitude towards life is being changed. The promotion of therapeutic methods is an excellent way of making the cult credible and incline wider classes of society towards interest in the doctrine. However, one should remember that not each centre of alternative medicine must be a cult.

Methods of authority

The third category includes *the methods of authority*. As a general rule, we treat someone's behaviour as correct so far as we see other people who behave in the same way. Analogously, we tend to forejudge the rightness of a particular doctrine or idea by referring simply to other people's opinions about a given subject. Cults turn this natural human disposition to their advantage, showing evidence that others identify with them or support them. In this way the mechanism of gaining credibility is set in motion. Not only people of public confidence (artists, actors, scientists, politicians, priests, journalists and etc.) can belong to those 'others' but also institutions of prestige (schools, universities, community centres and etc.).

Probably nobody would hear about Hare Krishna movement but for The Beatles; especially George Harrison had a fascination for the Eastern culture (to mention the song 'My Sweet Lord' that features repetitions of the avatars of Lord Vishnu) [9]. Some time earlier Harrison met Maharishi Mahesh Yogi who introduced all four of The Beatles, their wives and girlfriends to Transcendental Meditation. It naturally met with a journalists' response. As an effect of their articles, thousands of people felt attracted to the 'master' and paid a lot of money for instructions of meditation. After some time The Beatles finished their relations with guru who became the subject of a scandal of the gutter press. The Beatles immortalized him in the song 'Sexy Saddy' in remembrance of the fact that the actress Mia Farrow was being courted by him. He was presented in this hit as a false sage – note the refrain of the song: "Sexy saddhu, what have you done, you've tried to fool everyone." Nevertheless, the interest of The Beatles in the cult of Transcendental Meditation lasted long enough to give the great and important publicity to this fact [10].

Similarly, the dynamism of the Scientology Church would not be so strong if it didn't take the opportunity to use such persons as Tom Cruise or John Travolta. Many examples of using the celebrities' names can be mentioned with reference to the recruiting activity of cults. I have limited myself to the best known cases. As it was told before, cults take advantage of prestigious institutions. Because of the financial troubles, educational institutions make great effort to repair their budget and among many other things they rent their rooms to various companies and organizations. In this situation common sense is needed. The cult activity often has the features of camouflage, so the heads of educational institutions should ask about identity of organizations offering collaboration with schools, universities, community centres and etc. It is also necessary to verify qualifications of people who encourage us to take part in courses, lectures, and trainings. We should be careful if we think that they hide something.

No cult uses only one of the above described methods. It is also not unlikely that some cults use other specific methods not mentioned in the article. The inclusion of all the detailed recruiting practices has not been my purpose – I have only made an attempt to construct a general classification that could be put into preventive practice.

What to do in the case of direct contact?

Besides receiving information about cults, young man should know how to use the knowledge in practice. When he/she meets nice and friendly people who invite him/her to take part in an interesting meeting, he/she has the right to demand (in an equally friendly way) accurate answers from them. The questions can refer to *fundamental aims of the group* (Does the group hide them? Are not the aims too hazy? Are there any inconsistencies between what the group claimed at the beginning and what participants would learn later? Did not – for example – training, therapeutic or academic group transform unexpectedly into a 'religious' one? Does the group really fulfill what its members talk about?); *full designation of the group and the name of its leader* (Many compromised groups intentionally do not want to reveal their fundamental data or often change their name not to

frighten away potential adherents or clients) [11]. Above, only two examples of questions has been presented. As to the other exemplifications, please refer to the list of questions that were perfectly presented by other specialists [12].

It may happen that some people (who seem very friendly at the first contact) invite somebody to an 'important' meeting and do not give precise answers to questions but generalize, skillfully change the subject of conversation, explain that they are not well-informed about the questions they are asked. What is more, they assure that the best solution for their interlocutor is to go to the meeting and ask questions to more competent people. It is good to be on one's guard in such situation, and in addition it is possible to check if there is a reason to be afraid of anything. One can simply collect data and come into contact with adequate centre of information on cults and new religious movements.

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