



continuous conversion

Continuous conversion is the process of living as a Christian; sanctification is another term for this process.

Cults, Friendships and Respect

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For the past few years I've been thinking about cults. Two of the educational institutions (both church-related) where I used to work had some cult-like features, as did several of the churches I've attended. No surprise there! But I've also had friendships that were more like cults than real friendships.

Here are a few hallmarks of cults:

1. There's only one accepted way to see the world.

This "accepted philosophy" is expressed as ideology, dogma, or worldview. There is one, and only one, right way to see things. If you diverge or disagree, you are wrong. You may get away with some incorrect ideas and opinions without being thrown out of the cult immediately, but you won't find yourself in a leadership role. You'll be marginalized, or shunned, as the Amish put it, to see if you can repent and redeem yourself with more acceptable behavior.

In normal institutions, there's room for different ideas. Especially in creative endeavors, diversity of opinion is seen as the necessary environment for progress and change. If you have different ideas that are useful and innovative, you may be rewarded. In any event, you won't be punished and vilified, as you would be in a cult.



2. If you leave, you're wrong.

This negative judgment on all who leave the group is a key identifying trait of a cult. This is a primitive way to throw fear into the members who may be wavering, as they can see the consequences of leaving.

People who've left are trashed; all the good they did, all the praise they received before they left are forgotten in a flash.

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Cults, Friendships and Respect

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2. If you leave, you're wrong (continued)

Those who leave are now *persona non grata*, and nothing good can be said about them. In the most extreme cases, people who leave are erased from the cult's memory. Soviet dictator Josef Stalin favored this method of rewriting history, cropping people's faces out of group photos (but sometimes leaving their shoes, to the amusement of his critics).

3. Those within the group are "saved"; those outside are "damned."

In the 11th century the Christian church split between the Roman West (Western and parts of Central Europe) and the Orthodox East (Some of Central Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia).

The two churches did it like this: they excommunicated each other. Rather than having an amicable no-fault divorce (you go your way, I'll go mine), they damned each other. That's downright childish.

Cult-like Friendships

When I look back at some of my friendships, they were very cult-like. Their opinions on food (brown rice vs. white rice), politics (Left vs. Right), childrearing (permissive vs. rigid), childbirth (natural vs. drugs; home

vs. hospital), sex (free sex vs. commitment to one person), and on and on, were alike in one crucial factor: there was a RIGHT and a WRONG.

I have always like to have a great variety of friends, and have had many friends with wildly different opinions. With some, if we clash, we agree to disagree and remain friends. If your friends demand that you think like them, that's a cult, not a friendship, which is defined by equality and respect.



If your friendship dissolves, or you drift apart, you still hold fond memories of the person and wish him or her well. If you leave a cult friendship, you're made into an evil person and torn apart behind your back.

Some of this nasty behavior is possessiveness (which is often substituted for love) and envy. Real love wants the best for the loved one. If "the best" for my loved one is to leave me, I won't

like it but I will wish him or her well. I'll ask God to bless my friend, not curse him or her.

Cults and cult-like friendships have this in common: lack of respect for individual opinions and choices. I'd rather have a secular friend who lets me believe what I want than a "Christian" friend who wants to clean up my thinking. I really don't like cults; I'd rather have true respect than the dubious security of being in a cult.