

## **Fantasies, Legends, and Heroes**

### **What You Know May Not Be So and How To Tell The Difference**

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Perhaps the most important tool cult apologists possess is the ability to think critically. Without that ability, we would be overwhelmed by the mass of confusing religious ideas swirling through the worlds of the cults and the occult. If I were speaking before any other professional audience, say of lawyers or doctors, or maybe even of theology professors, I would never attempt a test of critical thinking ability. But since all of you think critically in the course of your ministries, I am sure you will be able to pass my test.

There is a room with no windows and only one door. It is completely empty except for a \$100 bill lying on the floor. A leprechaun, an honest lawyer, and a dishonest lawyer are ushered into the room. The door is sealed. The money disappears.

Now, use your critical thinking apparatus. Which one of the individuals took the money? Think very carefully and I'll give you the answer in a few minutes. Since you are all good critical thinkers you should all get the right answer. After all, we have patterned ourselves after the great apologist, the Apostle Paul, who declared to Festus, "I am not [crazy]...but speak the words of truth and reason."

Why is critical thinking so important in cult apologetics? It is because, as scripture reminds us, "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." We are fighting a spiritual battle with dimensions far beyond what we can test empirically, or with our five senses. Our physical strength or dexterity is not nearly so important as our mental and spiritual strength. Thinking critically is part of our defense against the

serpent's deceit and craftiness, which Paul says can corrupt us from the simplicity that is in Christ.

As cult apologists we have a responsibility, an obligation, to equip ourselves to confront the real world with the power of truth. Second Corinthians 10:3-5 warns us, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Let's go back to our critical thinking test. Whom do you think took the money? The leprechaun, the honest lawyer, or the dishonest lawyer? Of course, it could only have been the dishonest lawyer. Both the leprechaun and the honest lawyer are figments of the imagination, fantasies. (You should hear the applause when lawyers hear the story!) And the subject of fantasies is one of three parts to my message today.

### **Fantasies, Legends, and Heroes**

I have retitled my talk *Fantasies, Legends, and Heroes: What You Know May Not Be So, and How to Tell the Difference* because I want to emphasize that cult apologetics is as vulnerable to mistakes, inadequacies, frauds, and stories as any other field of study. Certainly our goal is both to "rightly divide the word of truth" and "test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." But the road to reaching our goal is full of potholes, cracks, and detours, any of which can sidetrack us from our goal. Most of these problems can be divided into two major categories for which I have made my own labels. First, fantasies are the logical fallacies, wrong assumptions, misunderstandings, and other delusions we often labor under, mistakenly thinking we are practicing apologetics. Second, legends are the personal experience stories we too often substitute for comprehensive research, viable evidence, and critical evaluation. Finally, cult apologists can become "heroes"

to those they help if they demonstrate their trustworthiness and integrity by their research, evidence, and critical evaluation. We can tell the difference between fantasies and legends on the one hand, and "heroes" on the other, by being equipped for responsible apologetics research, some of which I will survey here.

## **What Is at Stake?**

Cult apologetics is not a game. It is a very serious calling and ministry predicated on the ability of cult apologists to help those harmed by the cults and the occult. Second Timothy 2:24-26 tells us that "a servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." At stake are the lives, well-being, and souls of those who have been harmed by the cults and the occult.

Second, at stake is our credibility within the Church as Christians who can be trusted to educate and warn about cultism and occultism. Titus 1:9 lists as one of the qualifications and duties of a church leader that he hold "fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

Third, at stake is our credibility outside the Church as people who tell the truth, even if the non-believers don't always respond to the truth. I had an agnostic friend and we used to spend hours talking about anthropology, his field of study, and Christianity. Despite the arguments and evidence that I gave him for the truth of Christianity, he didn't become a Christian. However, he respected me as someone who had integrity. When his sister, who was a Christian, became confused because of college classes antagonistic to Christianity, he asked me to talk to her, to, as he put it, "straighten her out so she doesn't lose her faith because of what ignorant philosophy professors say."

Responsible apologetics is one way of speaking to the world. Peter says we are to have "our conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against [us] as evildoers, they may, by [our] good works which they observe, glorify God." Fourth, at stake is our personal integrity as representatives of Christ's Body. Even if no other Christian knew how we helped someone who was a cult victim, even if no one in the world saw our efforts on behalf of the gospel, we have an obligation before God to act as though we were his representatives to do his will, "in all things showing [ourselves] to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of [us]."

### **Why Is It Important?**

First, the Bible tells us it is the truth (embodied in Christ) that sets us free, and so the best help we can give those harmed by the cults and the occult is truth. I'm sure each of us could think of many cultists who have gone from one cult to another, often through several different cults, searching for truth, but never finding it until they encountered the truth which is in Christ Jesus. We can't give anything more important than truth to those who are seeking. That is why we are in cult apologetics. That is why we care enough to come to a conference like this. We want to help people who are trapped by the cults and the occult. Second, the Bible gives us standards for those who seek leadership or teaching positions in the Body of Christ. If we attempt to influence or persuade someone else about the gospel and Christian living, then we are teaching and leading, and we need to meet biblical standards. Paul gives us a good summary of those standards:

...if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination....blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not

greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

Third, responsible cult apologetics is important because the Bible commands us to be without reproach even from the heathen, a testimony to the truthfulness and life-transforming power of the gospel. Peter reminds us, "as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."

Fourth, responsible cult apologetics is an indication of the integrity we have as individual Christians before our Lord and Savior. Personal holiness, made possible by the transforming life of the Holy Spirit within us, and evidenced even in our research and apologetics, reflects our commitment to God. Responsible research and apologetics comes from a life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit.

There is a lot at stake in responsible cult apologetics research, and much to be gained from ministering in truth, both for individuals and the Body of Christ. If we are aware of the pitfalls, and we are committed to responsible ministry, we will fulfill the calling God has given us.

Today we will survey the problems of cult apologetics research and the principles of responsible research. With a good introduction, we will have a good foundation by which we can test our work and its correspondence to biblical truth.

### **How This Talk Is Structured**

My message is divided into three parts, "Fantasies," "Legends," and "Heroes." Within the first two sections we will survey some of the most prevalent problems in apologetics research, and in the third section we will survey the principles of good research. Fantasies refers to mistakes in thinking and judgment that do not provide a sound system of discernment. I will discuss first why people accept fantasies and lies, and second, some of the kinds of logical fallacies for which we fall or even which sometimes

we use unwittingly.

Here's an example. How many of you have thought about why crime, especially violent crime, increases during a full moon? Of course we reject the superstitious explanation that the full moon is the time of werewolves and vampires, but what reasonable explanations can we come up with? Think about it for a minute.

Here's the fantasy. Careful, multiple statistical studies have shown that there is no significant increase in violent crime during full moons. We don't have to postulate satanic or witchcraft calendars, extra light at night, or other reasonable explanations. There is actually nothing to explain. Careful research avoids the trap of fantasy.

Legends are the stories of what I call "novel people." That is, people and stories that tend to substitute personal experiences, delusions, guesses, fictions, and other "stories" for solid, evidential research.

Here's an example of a legend. How many of you have heard that Darwin repudiated evolution on his deathbed and embraced the gospel? What an argument against evolution! If the father of evolution finally gave it up, then it must not be true, right?

Wrong. First of all, Darwin could have given it up because he was senile, because he was hedging his bets at the end of his life and wanted eternal "fire insurance," or because he was given some insidious mind-altering drug. His repudiation doesn't say anything about the truthfulness or falsity of evolution. Second, the story itself is a legend. While Darwin appeared to be somewhat religious and referred to the Bible in conversation and correspondence, there is no verified evidence that he rejected his ideas concerning the origin of the species, the theory of evolution.

When I use the term heroes, I am not referring to the somewhat larger-than-life egos some of us get from our much learning. Instead, I am referring to the good, old-fashioned hero of the TV western, the guy with the white hat who saves people from certain death and vanquishes the enemy from the land. Cult apologetics heroes help victims of the cults and combat evil

by (1) thinking critically; (2) preparing research adequately; and (3) conducting responsible research and evaluation. In my last section I will discuss the fundamentals of research, the legitimate role of personal experience, field research, libraries, networking, interviewing, testing, and reporting.

## **FANTASIES**

### **Why People Accept Fantasies and Lies**

One morning my daughter Karen, who has very vivid dreams and even more vivid stories retelling her dreams, was telling me about a dream she had just had. "It was a great dream," she started, "just like real life, but better!"

Following are ten common reasons even cult researchers sometimes accept what's not true instead of what's true. The common thread running through most reasons people accept fantasies or even lies is what Karen said, "just like real life, but better!"

And yet, as cult apologetics researchers we have a serious responsibility to observe, understand, and explain the world as it really is, not "better" than real. We can't treat our ministry like a child treats a dream, or we risk drawing both ourselves and others who trust us into deceit. Paul admonishes,

. . . we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ. . . .

Keep in mind that one of the reasons we can be so susceptible to fantasies is that we sometimes unwittingly suspend our critical thinking ability. After the following survey of common reasons people accept fantasies, I will discuss some of the most common logical fallacies, into which and for which we sometimes fall in our research and evaluation of the cults and the occult.

1. It fits into our world view.

Because something is possible, doesn't mean that it is true; and just because something exists, doesn't mean every report we receive of it must be true.

Let me explain what I mean with an example. As Christians we believe that God specially and directly created life on this planet. Given his attribute of omnipotence and the fact that he is the God of all existence, and not just, like the Mormons would say, of this planet, it is certainly possible that God could have created life somewhere else in the universe. However, we have no biblical or scientific evidence that he did. It is possible, but it is not necessarily true.

Another example will illustrate my second point. How do you explain UFO reports? As "lying signs and wonders in the air"? As demonic apparitions? If you're thinking critically, you won't accept my question in the way it was posed. Instead, you will ask, "Which UFO reports do you want me to explain?" In fact, careful investigation shows that the vast majority of UFO sightings are of natural or manmade phenomena, misidentified by observers.

Second Corinthians 11:4 and 13-15 teach us that Satan and his followers can transform themselves so that they look like "ministers of righteousness." In our biblical world view, we would expect to find instances of demonic evil masquerading as what is good, perhaps as UFO phenomenon. However, we fall for fantasies if we do not discriminate among the reports of evil-in-progress.

We tend to believe what is allowed for and predicted by our world view, but investigation is necessary to determine the explanation for a particular report. This is a vulnerability to which counselors seem especially prone. We tend to believe the personal experiences we're told that correspond to our world view without checking to see whether there is any validity to the report at all.

2. We accept what we're told.

Researchers under time constraints sometimes find themselves accepting what they're told without sufficient testing. It's not



that we don't want to be critical, but we don't always have time to check everything we're told. We forget that finding someone willing to tell us what to think about a certain situation is not the same as finding the right person to tell us what can be verified. How many different applications of the term "brainwashing" can you think of? We're told our kids are brainwashed by television commercials, Christians are brainwashed by televangelists, Moonies are brainwashed by too much rice, Americans are brainwashed by the liberal media, and adult Jews are brainwashed by Jews for Jesus. I'm sure you can think of other examples.

But how many of you have studied classic brainwashing and know its symptoms, how it is accomplished, and how its effects are maintained? I don't mean what you've been told, I mean the reports of clinical studies and military research on, for example, U.S. POWs in North Korea? In fact, most of us are not even aware that out of 4500 American POWs in North Korea, who were exposed to classic, isolationist brainwashing, only twenty-two elected to stay voluntarily in North Korea after the war. All too often we have accepted what we've been told about brainwashing, even when it refers to cultists, without checking it out for ourselves.

3. We base our knowledge on common sense.

Something I said earlier bears repeating here. Sometimes we stumble on the truth even in the midst of our vulnerability. If I were paranoid, I could attribute all sorts of menacing motives to each of you to support my contention that you are all out to get me. But just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean you're not out to get me. Your fiendish plot couldn't be proved by my delusional ravings.

Often common sense parallels the truth. That is, what we commonly think makes sense, and it may even correspond to truth, but common sense is not a trustworthy method to find truth.

Let's take a quick survey. How many of you think college enrollment goes up during a recession? Why do you think so? Maybe because out-of-work people have more time for classes

and want to better their job market potential? That's a sensible idea.

Now, how many of you think college enrollment goes down during a recession? Why? Maybe because fewer people have the money to afford college and people don't want to have their time tied up in case they get offered a job? That makes sense, too. Common sense can be used to answer my question either way, but only an actual investigation of college enrollment figures before, during, and after recessions can tell us what the true answer is.

4. We place too much faith in "experts."

This is a tendency I can see in myself when it comes to my children and their welfare. My wife and I may be pretty sure that one of our children has the flu, but I accept the diagnosis a lot better if I pay the pediatrician forty dollars to tell me the same thing. I can help my children with their homework, check their papers, and talk to them about what they're learning in school, but I feel much more assured of their progress at Parent-Teacher Conference time when their teachers agree, "Your children are doing fine in school." But because pediatricians and teachers are "experts" doesn't make them infallible. It is possible to place blind faith in experts. What if our pediatrician misdiagnoses my son's illness as flu when it's really meningitis? What if my daughter's teacher has missed a serious learning disability that doesn't show up in standard classroom work?

Even cult apologetics research is susceptible to placing too much faith in experts. This is especially true when there are very few experts in any one area and we are forced to get all or most of our information from one source, or when we trust experts to tell us about something outside their field of expertise. We seem to think that truth gets truer if someone important says it, even if that important person has no particular knowledge of that field. On the contrary, two plus two still equals four, no matter if a mathematician, a zoologist, or our young son says it. Conversely, the popular proposition, "People can achieve anything they want" isn't true whether Shirley MacLaine, Ronald Reagan, or even Mother Theresa says it.

One contemporary book relegating psychology to the world of the cults quotes Nobel prize winner Richard Feynman criticizing psychoanalysis as being unscientific "witch doctoring." Well, that proves it! Psychoanalysis is down the drain! Now, I'm not trying to defend psychoanalysis, and I have other reasons for questioning its validity, but Richard Feynman's opinion and status as a Nobel prize winner isn't sufficient.

Richard Feynman was a brilliant atomic physicist who worked in pioneering atomic energy and weaponry. His Nobel prize was awarded for his work in physics. He was an inspiring scientist, teacher, and innovative researcher. His ability to think creatively in the field of quantum electrodynamics was unsurpassed.

But he was not an expert in psychology, psychotherapy, or the philosophy of science. (In fact, he thought philosophers operated in a state of complete chaos.) He was opinionated and cared little for subjects that didn't interest him. He is entitled to his opinion about psychoanalysis, but he has no special knowledge, experience, or education to give it special weight. Believing an expert without appropriate authority and without corroborating evidence is not a trustworthy way to discern truth.

5. We think seeing is believing.

Raised in the "scientific" age, we tend to think that whatever we encounter empirically, or with any of our five senses, must be real. We describe something incredible by "You have to see it to believe it!" We express our doubt by "I won't believe it until I see it!" And even the Apostle Thomas affirmed his scientific status by qualifying what it would take for him to believe Jesus' resurrection, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

There's nothing inherently wrong with empirical testing. In fact, some things must be tested empirically. But we need to be careful of two things.

First, not everything is empirically verifiable. What laboratory experiments can you devise to test my assertion that I love Jesus? My ministry? What if I'm doing it for the vast fortune I can amass from cult apologetics? (Ok, maybe that's not a great

"what if.") My public profession of faith? What if I was coerced into it by "cultic brainwashing"? My attendance at church? What if I only go because I don't want to listen to my wife nag me? You get the point. Some things are not inherently material and cannot be tested adequately by the senses.

Second, when we test empirically, we cannot always trust our senses. We have to add critical thinking to our sensory experience. If sensory experience were sufficient in itself, we would assume that pencils bend each time we place them in glasses of water because they look bent. Critical thinking reconciles what our eyes tell us with what other tests tell us. That way we can explain the illusion of the bent pencil in terms of light refraction in the two different mediums of air and water. How does this relate to cult apologetics? As cult apologists, we need to be careful that we don't fall for misperceptions by our senses. For example, when I was a young Christian, the church I was involved in was really into miraculous healing. They even imported a traveling healing evangelist. Since I was practically blind in my left eye, I got in line that night to have the evangelist pray for my healing. I believed God could do it, and I even activated my faith by my offering. But here's what happened.

Finally I was at the head of the line. The rest of the congregation sat and watched as the evangelist asked me my problem. "I'm practically blind in my left eye," I told him. "Praise God!" the evangelist shouted, "This man is blind in one eye and we're going to pray for his healing right now!" After his very impassioned prayer, he put his hand over my left eye, the nearly blind one, and shouted, "Can you see, brother?" "Yes, but that's not the eye . . . ." "Glory be to God, He can see! Hallelujah! Everybody say Amen!"

Well, the entire congregation thought they saw me healed of blindness, but I still have worse than 20/400 vision in that eye. (Maybe it is healed and I just have the symptoms left. That makes as much sense as believing the "healing" I received.)

6. We draw conclusions from faulty evidence.

Here's a common reason we believe fantasies. We do a great job

of thinking critically from evidence to conclusion, but we forget to check our evidence. What if the evidence is faulty? All the critical thinking in the world can't change bad evidence into good evidence.

Contemporary cultic and occultic "myths" fall into this category. A caller to our radio program once told us what she had decided to do in light of the evidence that a major luxury hotel in our area was owned by the Church of Satan. She was going to call all of the radio, television, and newspaper offices she could to get the widest possible publicity about this terrible situation, and she was urging all Christians to boycott the hotel as a protest against satanism. There was nothing wrong with her action plan. Except she hadn't checked her evidence. It is true that the Westin South Coast Plaza Hotel in my city of Costa Mesa is at 666 Anton Way, and it is true that Anton is also the first name of Anton Szandor LaVey, the founder of the Church of Satan. But it's not true that the Church of Satan owns the hotel (it's owned by one of the wealthiest families in Southern California, the Segerstroms); it's not true that the Church of Satan picked the street number 666 (the hotel falls just past half-way through the 600 block square of the Costa Mesa city street number grid); and Anton Way is in honor of two Segerstrom family members, not LaVey. Trusting faulty evidence had sabotaged our caller's entire action plan.

7. We draw faulty conclusions from good evidence.

It's fairly easy to recognize when we draw conclusions from faulty evidence, but it's harder to recognize drawing faulty conclusions from good evidence. Check for this vulnerability the next time you have a conclusion that doesn't seem true, and yet you have checked, double checked, and even triple checked your evidence. Maybe your evidence isn't the problem. Maybe you have drawn a faulty conclusion from your evidence.

For example, we have heard the warning that, since Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, we should devote a large portion of our American cult apologetic ministry to combatting Islam. However, that conclusion doesn't necessarily follow from the evidence. We need to find out why and where Islam is the

fastest growing religion before we can justify making it the number one target of American cult apologetics. In fact, Islam's growth is due mostly to Islamic nationalism in the East and to the fact that strict Muslims neither practice birth control nor kill one-third of their unborn children, unlike Americans. I don't mean that we shouldn't care about evangelism to Muslims. My former organization published materials by the noted missionary to the Muslims, William McElwee Miller; we have had representatives of the Zwemer Institute on our radio show; and we have assisted several Christian missions to Muslims. But one can't jump from an isolated statistic on membership growth to an immediate and close threat.

8. We believe what makes us feel comfortable.

How many calls do you think your ministry receives in any given week from people who want you to come witness to their Jehovah's Witness neighbor, their Mormon co-worker, their New Age relative? How many of those callers make you feel good by commenting something like this, "I just know you can get through to So-and-so. I want so much for him (or her) to know the Lord, but he needs a real professional to talk to him." Well, comments like those make the caller feel even better. Why? Rarely is it because the caller is totally incapable of sharing the gospel with the cultist. Mostly its because the caller wants to be believe only a professional can witness to a cultist. That way the caller can feel comfortable about never witnessing or sticking up for the gospel with the cultist.

9. We see the world as we would like it to be rather than as it really is.

I get upset at injustice. I can't stand to see someone taken advantage of, the victim of a scam. When I get a chain letter in the mail, I turn it over to the Postmaster, fully confident that the perpetrators will be caught. When I see a police officer make an illegal U-turn, I think I should be able to complain to the desk sergeant and have the officer disciplined. When I talk with a cultist, I never give up. I keep thinking that if I can hit upon the perfect combination of arguments, or the exact set of scriptures, any cultist will see the error of his ways and come to Christ.

I also spend time being frustrated. Postmasters don't have time for petty crooks. The desk sergeant makes illegal U-turns too. And some people won't believe no matter what, even if, as Jesus said, someone were to rise from the dead with the truth. I have to keep reminding myself that the world is not really the way I would like it to be. When I forget, I don't make accurate evaluations about the world.

10. We base our beliefs on personal experience.

We have a serious disease in Christian apologetics today. That is, we too often substitute personal stories or experience for comprehensive, accurate research and evaluation. It's so much easier to tell a story or get a guest speaker with a great story than it is to put in good, hard work at apologetics.

Christian bookstores are full of personal stories, testimonies, and experiences on everything from possibility thinking through "I was a baby breeder for Satan." Most of these stories are characterized by subjective emotionalism, undocumented assertions, and little or no biblical or theological evaluation. But that's ok, we're told, because So-and-so really experienced it, so he knows all about it. We don't need doctrine. We don't need theology. We don't need facts. We don't need documentation. Just tell a story. It makes people feel good, and who can argue with a story?

But personal experience doesn't always tell the truth. Think about "personal experience" and cult apologetics. How many Jehovah's Witnesses have you had tell you that they used to be "born- againers" before they joined the Watchtower, and they used to believe Jesus was the Father, so they know that's what the deity of Christ means." Or Mormons who say that they won't argue about the Book of Mormon because they've prayed about it and they testify to you that they know the Book of Mormon is the Word of God and Joseph Smith is a prophet of God.

Personal experience can be deceiving.

Have a healthy skepticism toward Christian "stories," too. If the book you're reading on satanism, for example, has no dates, no places, no names, no events -- is completely undatable and untestable, how can we know it is true? And even if the events

recorded happened, how do we know they are interpreted properly by the story teller? No matter how tempting and easy, don't substitute stories for responsible research and evaluation.

## **Summary**

These are ten of the most common reasons people -- sometimes even cult apologists -- fall for fantasies instead of truth. Closely related to, and often overlapping, these vulnerabilities are the logical fallacies that scatter the landscape of cult apologetics. Sometimes we fall for logical fallacies when they are used by cultists or occultists, and sometimes we fall into using logical fallacies ourselves.

In common language, a logical fallacy is a false idea or notion, something that appears to make perfect sense, and yet doesn't. A lack of critical thinking ability creates two kinds of Christians: (1) those who don't think at all and who consequently don't worship and serve God with their minds; and (2) those who attempt to use their minds, but who end up making mistakes that could be avoided by learning to think straight.

Mistakes in thinking and reasoning, or logical fallacies, make up the largest group of discernment faults. If an argument or accusation cannot stand the test of logic, is inconsistent, and fails to prove its point, then it loses all rational force. However, it can be used destructively to obscure the truth, mislead people, or even harm the very cultists and occultists who need our help. These problems become even more pronounced and have even greater consequences when they are picked up by novice readers or listeners and are misused even more.

There are many logical fallacies, some with long fancy Latin names and some with ordinary folk names. This talk is not the forum for a lengthy listing or discussion of logical fallacies, but I refer you to my recommended reading list for several good books on logical fallacies.

My survey today will cover a few of the fallacies that I have seen frequently in cult apologetics. Remember, logical fallacies are very user-friendly. The same ones can be used both by



cultists (to mislead us), and by us (as mistaken substitutes for critical thinking).

### 1. Unfalsifiability

This is the favorite fallacy of the conspiricist. How does Satan-battler Rebecca Brown explain the devastating medical and legal documentation of the loss of her medical license for mental instability and drug abuse? Easy -- the satanists and witches' conspiracy manufactured false records. When every piece of even hypothetical evidence that could be proposed to falsify a claim is twisted to be an evidence for the claim, then the claim is unfalsifiable and useless.

In one movie, a client at a mental institution claimed that he saw a man sitting in a cypress tree, talking to an owl. When the medic pointed out that there were no cypress trees on the grounds, the client responded, "Anyone with money can dig up a tree. And after that it's a simple matter to fill in the hole."

Because his story was unfalsifiable, it was unbelievable. But you don't have to go to a mental institution to find instances of unfalsifiability. Cult apologetics abounds with unfalsifiable conspiracies. I was even accused of being part of a conspiracy.

Several years ago I received a letter from someone I'll call Roscoe. He said he had ordered materials from us for witnessing to the cults but had not received them. I wrote back that we had no record of his order or payment, but that if he would re-order and send a copy of his canceled check, we would be happy to replace his order and reimburse him for the extra postage and the copying cost of his check.

I didn't hear from Roscoe, but we did hear from our local Postal Inspector. Roscoe had lodged a formal complaint against us for mail fraud. Two reasons were listed on the complaint form. First, he repeated his claim that he had ordered materials and not received them. Second, he accused us of misrepresentation since we called ourselves a "counter-cult ministry" and yet we had no publications against what he termed "the biggest cult of all, the Great Whore of Babylon, the Roman Catholic Church."

It was easy to provide the Postal Inspector with copies of our correspondence asking for verification that his check had

cleared, and we went ahead and sent his order without proof of payment (which we never did receive) to go the extra mile. Fortunately, the Postal Inspector didn't require us to respond to him concerning Roscoe's second charge. He said that if he got involved in that, he'd be violating separation of church and state and free speech. But we wanted to respond to Roscoe anyway. I got his phone number from directory assistance and called him one evening. Our conversation quickly degenerated into Roscoe shouting epithets at me about my conspiracy with Roman Catholicism. I tried in vain to reason with him. Then Roscoe's real argument came out. He was convinced that I was on a secret mission of the Roman Catholic Church, commissioned by the Jesuits to masquerade as a non-Catholic cult apologist. In fact, Roscoe announced, he was convinced that I was a Jesuit myself! I tried to reason with him. "Look, Roscoe, how can I be a Jesuit?"

"That's easy," Roscoe cut in, "Look at your last name -- Passantino -- that's Italian Catholic if I ever heard it!"

"But Roscoe," I answered, "you can talk to my mother. She'll tell you I haven't practiced Catholicism since I made my first communion. Talk to my pastor. He'll tell you I'm not Catholic. And because we don't have a tract against them, and I don't think they're the Great Whore of Babylon, doesn't prove I'm their secret agent, much less a Jesuit. Come on, Roscoe, Jesuits spend half their lives in Catholic schools and seminaries. They've taken vows of celibacy. Roscoe, I have a wife and children. I can't be a Jesuit!"

"Only a Jesuit would have such a clever disguise!" Roscoe hung up.

## 2. Accident

The accident fallacy does not mean a fallacy you made by mistake, although I hope all of you don't make fallacies on purpose. The accident fallacy is a useful (but not valid) way of getting out of responsibility for a general principle you don't like. For example, a general principle is that we should obey speed laws. But how many of us rationalize to ourselves, "Well, if I had a medical emergency instead of being late to work, it

would be all right to speed. So I don't really have to obey the speed law." That's the accident fallacy at work: you overturn the trustworthiness of a general principle on the basis of an extreme case, the extremity of which has nothing to do with your general principle. The extremity is an "accident" of the principle.

Plato brought up an accident fallacy. Is it really good to repay what you borrow? What if you borrowed weapons from a man who since has gone crazy? Surely you would not put human life in danger by repaying what you borrowed! In fact, it can be dangerous to believe that principle! (Plato's example omits the fact that the man's mental instability is incidental, or accidental, to the general moral.)

Here's another one. Someone might tell you that cult apologetics can't possibly be biblical because he knows someone in a cult who was so depressed after a Christian witnessed to him that he went out and got drunk. Cult apologetics can't be of God if it gets people drunk! (The critic has failed to notice that the cultist's drunkenness was not caused by the witnessing, but was accidental to it.)

### 3. Affirming the Consequent

You "affirm the consequent" when you have an "if...then" argument, but you put things backwards, affirming your "then," or "consequent," before you affirm your "if," or the antecedent which rightfully proves the consequent. This is kind of complicated, so let me quote an example from The Book of the Fallacy:

'If he had wanted to cut up the body, he would have needed a big saw. Such a saw was found in his toolshed. [Therefore, we can assume he is the murderer.]'

(There could be alternative explanations, innocent ones, for all of these actions. It would be fallacious to say that any of them proved him guilty. But as they mount up, it becomes progressively easier for [juries] to eliminate reasonable doubts about coincidence. No doubt they are sometimes wrong and thereby hangs many a tale, together with the occasional innocent man.)

We find this fallacy in cult apologetics when a cultist's "if" doesn't have only one "then," but the cultist wants you to believe there's only one "then." This is a handy fallacy for someone whose story of cultic involvement isn't credible and is being questioned. The person can respond to all inquiries for documentation with, "You wouldn't be asking me these questions unless you were out to get me. You must be out to get me!"

Whitley Strieber, horror novelist, talk show gadfly, and, he would have you believe, UFO abductee, uses this fallacy well. So does fellow UFO enthusiast and author Budd Hopkins. Without going into their whole stories, here's how they use "affirming the consequent" as one way to prove that hundreds, maybe thousands of people have been abducted by UFO entities.

Now, as we all know, UFO entities don't want anyone to know they're here. But they also have to do their specimen studies on us humans. So after they're done abducting us and studying us, they erase that portion of our memory so we don't know we were abducted. We are left with a "time gap," or "missing time," a period of time for which we cannot account.

This is Strieber and Hopkin's use of "affirming the consequence." They say that they have been contacted by hundreds of people who have "time gaps," evidence that they are abductees. Strieber and Hopkins conclude that the time gaps themselves provide one of the proofs of UFO abductions. While it is possible that the time gaps are the result of UFO abductions (whatever those are), they could be due to daydreaming, inattention, forgetfulness, mind-altering drugs -- a variety of options.

#### 4. Argumentum ad Baculum

Behind the Latin phraseology is a very persuasive fallacy: believe (or do) what I say, or I'll smash your face! This is an appeal to force. Kruschev put it this way, "When Stalin says dance, the wise man dances!"

Sometimes cult apologists find themselves hard pressed to reject

this fallacy, especially when it is used against them. How many of you have written books on Scientology or Witness Lee's Local Church? "Oh," but you respond, "those groups (we won't call them cults -- that might be misconstrued as libelous) have a reputation for suing their detractors!" But does that have anything to do with whether or not their doctrines are biblical? Where is the liberal press and the ACLU when we need them to help us with prior restraint problems?

#### 5. Blinding with science

This is one of my favorite fallacies. There's such a solid sound to an argument that's filled with scientific jargon and fifty dollar words. One is "blinded with science" when an argument consists of complicated, technical vocabulary or allusions to sophisticated scientific reports, charts, or (best of all) statistics. You don't understand a word of the argument, but you're not about to let anyone know, or argue with it when you don't know what you're talking about. Your opponent has won by default. Pirie notes the rules for using this fallacy:

The first rule for using this fallacy is to remember to use long words . . . . Never use a four-letter word, especially if you can think of a twenty-four lettered word to take its place. The jargon itself is harder to master . . . . Remember that the basic function of words is to transform what is banal, trivial and easily refuted into something profound, impressive and hard to deny . . . . The fallacy of blinding with science is well worth the time and trouble required to master it. The years of work at it will repay you not only with a doctorate in the social sciences, but with the ability to deceive an audience utterly into believing that you know what you are talking about.

Think about your work with the cults. Which cult used to be known as a religion (old Beatle fans don't get to vote), but now bills itself as a scientific method of relaxation? Which cult has voluminous appendices "explaining" its aberrant translations of the Bible?

Do you ever use "blinding with science?" Do you explain

clearly and simply what you mean by "an anarthrous predicate nominative"? Do you report to your supporters about witnessing to people, or "handling cases"?

#### 6. Arguing in a circle

This is one of the most common fallacies. This fallacy occurs when you try to prove one point by another point that is in turn proved by the first point. It's kind of like the Three Stooges vouching for each other's intelligence. Larry says Moe is smart, Moe says Curly Joe is brilliant, and Curly Joe returns the compliment to Larry. Does such circular endorsement prove anything about the IQ's of the Three Stooges?

Circular arguing is encountered frequently in cult apologetics. I have noticed what appears to be a particularly disturbing use of it recently in attempts to document individuals' involvement in satanism and witchcraft. We might get a phone call from someone who tells us he used to be a satanist. In an attempt to determine the caller's credibility, we might ask him to describe the satanism he was involved in. But we ask him leading questions which actually reveal to him some of our own knowledge. By the end of the conversation, our caller could acquire a credible amount of knowledge about satanism just from what we said, and yet because he echoes it back to us, we believe him, and, to complete the circle, add his "testimony" to our list of people "confirming" what we know about satanism! This circular arguing is even more easy to fall for when we expand our circle to include other cult apologists. Let's say my hypothetical caller has also called four other ministries to cults and got even a little bit of information from each one. Then he calls five more after me. By the time he has finished ten phone calls, he's mixed all the information together, passed it off as his own experience, and added it in bits and pieces to every other ministry's accumulation of information. We have helped to create a phantom data base and to elevate someone's dubious testimony to legendary status! We don't really know any more than when we started, but the real danger is that we think our knowledge has multiplied abundantly.

#### 7. Complex question

This is another of the most common fallacies. A "complex question" is formed when your proposition affirms more than one thing, but your question allows for an answer to only one thing. The standard example is the question, "When did you stop beating your wife?" Two things are affirmed: First, that you beat your wife, and second, that you stopped. Once the two affirmations are made, then the question remains, "When?" The respondent has no opportunity to deny the first affirmation. He is stuck with providing information just about the second affirmation.

"Is your stupidity inborn?" is another complex question. It assumes that you are stupid, and then asks you to explain the source of your stupidity.

Cultists often use complex questions when they ask, "Why are you persecuting us?" They haven't established that we are persecuting them, but they're already demanding to know why.

#### 8. Emotional appeals

How many of you have given a talk on satanism? How many of you have given a talk on satanism accompanied by pictures of bloody cauldrons, skulls with wax dripped on them, and church windows with satanic graffiti? What is the difference in your audience's reactions?

If your experience is like mine, I think you will agree that talks with graphic slides generate more response than those without. Why? Because of emotional appeal. Facts and figures can communicate truth, but, as the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words." This is because of emotional appeal. Satanism isn't really any better or worse with or without pictures, but when our emotions are engaged, we tend to take things more seriously.

Appeal to emotion can be an effective tool of cult apologetics, but it should never be confused with proof or valid argumentation. For another example, abortion is as bad whether you give a dry and boring lecture on it or show a picture of a bloody, dismembered victim of abortion. But the picture catches our emotions.

#### 9. Equivocation

Equivocation is the skill of being able to use one word or idea with varying meanings depending on what you want your hearer to think you mean. Those of you who are parents know the most equivocal word in our parental vocabulary: "Maybe." It serves as the universal answer to any request from any or all of our children. "Dad, can I have ice cream for dinner tonight?" I answer, "Maybe. Leave me alone. I'm working." At that moment I want my child to understand "maybe" as "Sure -- as long as you let me work in peace." But at dinner time, when the broccoli and cod stare up from his plate, I want him to understand "maybe" as "I said maybe, not yes, now eat your dinner! It's good for you!"

Jehovah's Witnesses are good at equivocation. "Greek scholars support our translation," they'll say. They want us to believe their translation is reliable and approved by Greek scholars. But when they're pressed, we find out they really mean that they have quoted Greek scholars out of context and to "prove" things the scholars' statements were never meant to prove.

Mormons equivocate on the "miraculous" birth of Christ, hoping Christians (and even many of their unsuspecting members) will (mistakenly) think that "miraculous birth" means the same thing as "virgin birth." They also say they only believe in "one God." Of course, they want you to think that means they believe only one God exists, but they know it means they worship only the one God of this planet.

#### 10. Secundum Quid

My final fallacy for consideration today is better known by its common name, "hasty generalization." That is, you make a general conclusion based on insufficient evidence. We in cult apologetics can slide into this fallacy easily because we never have enough time, money, staff, or resources to do the exhaustive research projects we would like. How much easier, quicker, and less expensive it is to make a general conclusion about a cult based on two or three brief encounters with its members than to do a full-scale research project! Unfortunately, our brief encounters are not always representative of the cult as a whole.



How many cultists have you talked to who have made eternal decisions based on a hasty generalization like, "I've known three so-called Christian pastors, and all three were dishonest. That proves Christianity is a lie! I'm so thankful I left it for my cult!"

## **Summary**

By now you have a good idea of why we tend to fall for fantasies instead of truth. It should be no wonder, then, that the religious world is full of "legends," people, stories, and ideas that are poor substitutes for real apologetics. Now, armed with our critical thinking, we can take a brief look at some of these legends before we move to the last portion of our study, the right way to accomplish religious research.

## **LEGENDS**

### **The People**

Keep in mind the reasons people fall for fantasies. Keep in mind the logical fallacies I've mentioned, and others you may be familiar with already, as we look at just two of the people whose legends have fooled a lot of people -- sometimes even cult apologists -- at least some of the time. The legend people are the Joe Isuzus of religious research.

Let me first make an important distinction here. Although I will be referring to people whose stories have been shown to be false, there are actually two kinds of legends. The first is what we commonly think of as legend, that is, a story that purports to represent personal experience but doesn't. It's "made up."

Obviously, this kind of legend should never be trusted as part of cult apologetics research.

The second kind of legend is a story that really is someone's personal experience, but which cannot be verified or falsified. For example, one of my first encounters with witches happened almost twenty years ago, before I began in cult apologetics. I was backpacking on Mt. San Gorgonio, near Palm Springs, and

night had fallen. As I crested a ridge, I saw robed figures with candles moving through the trees toward a ritual site. The witches never saw me as I hid and watched. That's my personal experience that really happened to me.

But if there hadn't been two people with me to confirm my experience, it would have been this second kind of legend, true but not verifiable or falsifiable and therefore not trustworthy as research.

So, there are two kinds of legends, neither of which is trustworthy as research: people's stories that never happened, and people's stories that (may) have happened, but which are unverifiable and unfalsifiable. For stories to be useful for research, they must have some verifiability and falsifiability. In other words, research stories at least must have explanatory power and empirical adequacy.

## **John Todd**

How many of you remember John Todd, who claimed to have been a "Grand Druid" of witchcraft and a member of the secret high council of the "Illuminati"? Todd claimed that there was a secret conspiracy to take over the world and destroy Christianity. He had his time in the limelight as a traveling speaker in churches and as one of the people promoted through Jack Chick Publications. Todd implicated Christian leaders such as Walter Martin and Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel. For example, he claimed that, as a courier he delivered \$8 million worth of checks to Chuck Smith to start Maranatha! Music as a satanic plot to deceive Christians. He made outrageous claims based on what he claimed was his "personal experience," but could provide no objective or empirical documentation for his claims. In fact, any evidence that was adduced to disprove his claims, he said were manufactured by the conspiracy. His story was neither verifiable nor falsifiable, and was thus untrustworthy for research.

In fact, his story fit the first kind of legend: Investigation showed that the story was false. Listen, for example, to the

contrast between Todd's unprovable allegations and Pastor Chuck Smith's response:

Maranatha Music was actually started with my own personal investment of \$3,000.00. The first album was made on a 4-trac[k] tape recorder. The first distribution was out of the trunk of the car to the local bookstores. If we had a \$1 million budget, or \$4 million, or \$8 million budget, you can believe we would have started out fancier than we did . . . . . Even to the present date [October 5, 1978], Maranatha Music has not done a total of \$8 million in business, and this also can be easily verified and confirmed, and any reputable person is welcome to look at the books of both Calvary Chapel and Maranatha Music in order to prove the statements I make are correct.

Pastor Smith's "story" can be checked out -- it has both explanatory power and empirical adequacy, and is therefore trustworthy for research.

### **Carlos Castaneda**

Christians aren't the only ones who accept legends substituted for real research. Those of you who are around my age and who remember (or were even part of) the 1960s age of "drug enlightenment" probably remember Carlos Castaneda as the anthropologist who discovered that hallucinatory drugs bring spiritual enlightenment. He didn't do it the way many of my generation did, by dropping acid, staring into a flower, and suddenly realizing that everything is "God." He did it by spending portions of several years in the American Southwest and Mexican deserts as apprentice to an Indian shaman.

UCLA awarded Castaneda a Ph.D. in anthropology in 1973 for his field work and ethnography dissertation on Native American shamanism. *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yacqi Way of Knowledge* represents that work and is known worldwide for its vivid portrayal of Castaneda's apprenticeship to the shaman, Don Juan.

However, practically nothing about Castaneda, including his name, birth date, and original nationality is what it appears to be. In fact, careful investigation and analysis shows that his books represent more of the Castaneda his college friend described as "witty, imaginative, cheerful -- a big liar and a real friend" than they do Castaneda as the serious anthropologist and reporter who sacrifices himself for scientific ethnographic research.

Like most legends, the Castaneda legend is missing dates, times, people, places and documents. Careful research and investigation uncovered gaping holes, inconsistencies, and outright fabrications in the convoluted stories Castaneda told in his four books.

But the reason I mention the Castaneda legend particularly is that I never would have expected the professional reaction to the expos. Rather than relegating his books to the legend shelf, some professionals still depend on them for ethnographic information, and still herald him as the father of the ethnographic "revolution" in anthropology!

What is most interesting is the response that has greeted the revelation that Castaneda's works are fictional. First, there has been no real attempt to revoke his Ph.D., based as it is on fraudulent "research." Secondly, as de Mille . . . documents, the response among many anthropologists and others who share the Don Juan type of philosophical outlook has been neutral. In other words, it doesn't matter if the works are fictional because the underlying philosophy is, in some vague sense, true. An excellent example of this approach is Shelburne's (1987) article titled "Carlos Castaneda: If It Didn't Happen, What Does It Matter?" Shelburne argues that "the issue of whether it [Castaneda's experience] literally happened or not makes no fundamental difference to the truth of the account" (p. 217). Such excuses are little more than intellectual used-car salesmanship.

Let's relate this back to our legend/research paradigm.

Castaneda based his "revolutionary" cultural anthropological ideas on fiction. That's like building a house on sinking sand instead of solid rock. Now Shelburne and other professionals like him say it doesn't matter, because the "truth" is the same. That's like saying your sinking sand house is fine where it is -- the house itself is well- built. But, no matter how well-built the house is, it will fall apart since it's built on sand instead of solid ground. You need both a well-built house and solid ground if you expect to live in the house.

This is very different from using personal stories as illustrations or examples of what your research and evaluation have already determined. I collect stories on the cults and the occult like any other cult apologist. But I don't base my argument on stories. I heard an excellent story during our summer speaking tour this year about the emotional bondage someone can be under for going to a psychic and getting a scary prediction. It makes a good illustration when I'm talking about the subject. But hypothetically one of you could come up to me today and tell me the story isn't true. You've checked it out and the guy who told it to me made it up. That wouldn't change my basic talk on the power of suggestion in psychic predictions at all. I just wouldn't use that anymore as an example.

When Christian leaders like cult apologists substitute legends for critical thinking, evidence, and comprehensive evaluation, we lose the trust of those who have believed us, we participate (even unknowingly) in promoting what is not true, and we fail to give the trustworthy help those harmed by the cults and the occult really need.

## **The Stories**

Stories that are not necessarily autobiographies can also be legends. Many of you may be familiar with the term "urban myth," which refers to stories everybody hears about and everybody believes, nobody knows the source of, and nobody can prove. You've probably heard about the alligators in the sewers of New York. Or the young person who had been

stalling about making a commitment to Christ, showed up at church one night for a service without knowing it had been canceled, assumed the empty church meant the rapture had happened but he had been left behind, and so he repented, sure he would have to suffer through the Tribulation. Or even the one about George Washington chopping down the cherry tree and then confessing. Each of these are legends.

Legendary stories appeal especially to the vulnerabilities I mentioned at the beginning of my talk such as "It fits into my world view," "I accept what I'm told," or "I base my knowledge on common sense." Legendary stories impact cult apologetics, too. Four examples will show you what I mean.

We still get questions from people who want to know how to protest and boycott Proctor and Gamble products because "if you buy any products with this symbol, you will be taking part in supporting the Church of Satan." The legend achieved its first popularity in 1982. It includes the story that the president of Proctor and Gamble confessed that company profits go to the Church of Satan on the Phil Donahue Show and the story that the familiar P&G symbol of the man in the crescent moon with thirteen stars was a satanic symbol. Of course, like all good myths, none of this is true, and Proctor and Gamble has spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars combatting the rumor.

The story I recounted earlier in my talk about Darwin's deathbed repentance is another legend. This legend fits especially well the ninth reason I gave for why people fall for fantasy -- it confirms the world as I would like it to be rather than as it really is.

Wouldn't it be nice if Darwin repented? Wouldn't that strike a blow at evolution and warm our hearts? It ought to be true. There's one short step from "it ought to be true" to a legendary story.

And if Madayln Murray O'Hair isn't given enough credit for waging battle against Christianity through her American Atheists Association, Christians are happy to give her more by creating their own legends for her. They spun stories about her petitioning NASA to forbid astronauts to read the Bible out loud

during their space flights, about her suing to have all of the United States place names with religious elements changed, and the most popular O'Hair legend to date, that she is petitioning the FCC to ban all religious broadcasting. One typical legend-repeating petition reads, "Madalyn Murray O'Hair...has been granted a Federal hearing in Washington, D. C. on the subject (F.C.C., THE PETITION, R.M. 2493) which would ultimately pave the way to stop the reading of the Gospel on the airways of America. She took her petition with 27,000 signatures to back her stand." However, there is no truth to the legend at all. The FCC statement reads, "the Commission isn't considering taking religious programming off the air, nor has a petition making such a suggestion ever been filed with the Agency." Propagation of such a rumor costs our tax dollars to cope with. At the end of 1985, the FCC averaged 100,000 letters per month protesting this non-existent petition.

Worst of all about this particular legend is that we are being duped by the atheists, from whose ranks this "rumor" evidently first started. Christians are called foolish for perpetuating a myth, and doubly foolish for perpetuating a myth started by atheists!

Our last legend story concerns the Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (EMNR), the sponsors of this conference. Have you heard the story that EMNR banned Constance Cumbey from its last conference (in Denver in 1985) and even hired security guards to keep her out? Here's what Cumbey said,

Walter Martin and a number of others got together and organized a conference in Denver in 1985. I was the only person in the country who was not invited. They hired security guards to keep me away.

We carefully investigated Cumbey's charges. We talked independently with several of the people who organized the conference, and with several people who attended. No one with direct knowledge backed up Cumbey's claims. Dr. Gordon Lewis, who hosted the conference at Denver Seminary,

confirmed that Cumbey was not asked to be a speaker or make a presentation at the conference, but that she was welcome to attend like anyone else. There were many professional cult apologists who attended without being speakers. They didn't feel discriminated against. It was not a closed meeting, and those who attended without receiving personal invitations didn't feel slighted, either. Elliot Miller of the Christian Research Institute noted,

Dr. Martin was a speaker there, but . . . he was not involved in the conference's planning and organization . . . . It's true that Mrs. Cumbey was not invited to speak (which is no more strange than Walter Martin's not being invited to speak at certain end-time prophecy conferences where Cumbey is a featured attraction). However, she was more than welcome to attend. The claim that there were security guards hired to keep her out is both false (this writer was there) and preposterous.

Legendary stories may intrigue and entertain, but they do not educate and protect people from the real dangers of the world.

### **Characteristics of a Legend**

Now, think about some stories you know. Could any of them be legendary stories? Be extra cautious if the story fits any of the following characteristics.

1. There's no evidence to back it up.

Sometimes there is no evidence because of the very nature of the story, like if I had been alone when I saw the witches while I was backpacking. That doesn't mean such a story can't be true, it just means that it's not a story that can be considered trustworthy research. At most it's an illustration or example.

2. Its strongest commendation is that it ought to be true.

Be careful that you are not persuaded to believe a particular story simply because you wish it to be true. This can be a strong temptation, but don't give in to it. God won't excuse us for supporting made up stories because they serve a useful purpose.



3. It's so detailed or bizarre that we can't believe someone could make it up.

When I was in the National Guard (like my buddy Dan Quayle) I sold a car stereo to another guardsman. He still owed me ten dollars. At every monthly drill I would remind him about the ten dollars. Each time he had a different elaborate story about how he had saved the money for me, but somehow something always happened and he didn't have it with him. Finally, after months, I told him to forget the money. It wasn't worth having to put up with all of his stories. "Wait," he said, "I can't let you do that! Tell you what I'm gonna do. I raise and breed champion dogs and I'll give you a puppy for free instead." I was skeptical at first, until he told me all about his house, his dogs, his kennels, his horses, his tenants quarters, and his machine shop. What a spread! He couldn't make up something like this!

Well, the months went on and he always had some reason that a puppy wasn't available that month, but for sure would be the next month. Finally I wormed his address out of him and told him I would come to his house the next evening to pick up my dog. By this time I didn't really believe his story, but he would never admit he was lying. If he had told me the truth, I would have said, "forget it." But when he gave me his address, and agreed to meet me there to give me the puppy, I had second thoughts. Maybe he was telling the truth. Who would make all that up and then give me his address?

The next night I showed up at the address the guardsman had given me. No mansion, no kennel, no stable, no tenant's quarters, no dogs. Just a run down little California bungalow with some tools in the garage. Of course, no one was home. But I couldn't resist going next door and asking the neighbor who lived there. The name and description matched the guardsman, but the neighbor said he was a backyard mechanic with no steady employment.

At the next Guard drill, I walked up to the guardsman. "What happened to you? I went to your house, but you weren't there." "Yeah, one of my dogs got sick and I had to go to this special vet across town. He only treats show dogs."

"But what happened to your other dogs? There weren't any dogs there at all."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. They're at my parents' house while I'm getting the kennel remodeled."

"But there wasn't any kennel. There wasn't any mansion or stable, either."

"Oh, you must have gone to my tenant's quarters instead. You got it mixed up. My house is way in the back of the lot. You can hardly see it from the street. You must have been confused."

I never did tell him I had talked to his neighbor. But I figure I got my ten dollars worth anyway. The story makes a great illustration! Be skeptical of a story that seems too detailed or too bizarre to be made up.

## **Summary**

Legends are poor substitutes for adequately researched evaluations. "Novel people" do not make trustworthy experts, and legendary stories don't equip us to deal with the real threats of the cults and the occult.

Whether or not the people of legends know their stories aren't true, are simply delusional, or even if their stories are true but unverifiable and unfalsifiable, they should never be used as the basis for research evaluation. Bad testimonies hurt real victims and hurt our credibility, too. When we trust people who aren't telling the truth we trust a lie. When we trust people who are delusional we exploit people who need Christian counseling and discipleship. When we trust people whose stories can be neither proven nor disproved we are substituting vicarious experience for evidence.

## **HEROES**

Now that we've cleared away the dross of cult apologetics research, we can talk about how to do responsible religious research. This last portion of my talk is divided into three sections: (1) Critical Thinking; (2) Preparation for Research; (3)

and How to Do Research.

## 1. Critical Thinking

Here are some considerations to help you think critically as a researcher. Of course, steering clear of the pitfalls and fallacies we have already surveyed is one important way to think critically.

### **Objectivity in research**

You may think this principle goes without saying. After all, no researcher plans to be subjective. But you would be surprised how many times subjectivity creeps in without you even being aware of it. Subjectivity keeps us from looking at all sides of an issue and from understanding alternate perspectives. This does not mean that we should believe all sides, or that we don't have a particular, Christian point of view. But it means that we are capable of accurately understanding and representing what we don't agree with and answering it on those terms rather than terms manufactured out of our own subjectivity.

Subjectivity fails to take into account even major differences among world religions and world views. This is especially easy to do when one does not have a solid background of study and education in biblical doctrine. It is easy to confuse Mormonism and Hinduism, thinking that they have the same religious ideas, simply because both believe in more than one god (polytheism), even though the way they explain and understand their respective beliefs about god are very different. In the same way, many people don't realize that Hinayanic Buddhism, while incorporating religious practices and traditions, is actually atheistic. Others lump Satanism and witchcraft together, failing to understand that their beliefs are as divergent from each other as are the views of the Way International cult from those of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Failing to understand someone's beliefs and world view harms our credibility, both among Christians and in the world. It also makes people think you don't care enough to find out what they really believe -- you just want to ridicule them. Subjective

understanding or presentation of contrary beliefs sabotages one's apologetic against those beliefs. It is impossible to be persuasive in your refutation of a position if you can't even articulate or properly present that position. We cannot afford to be subjective in our research.

One step toward objectivity is to use primary sources in your research. Don't take someone else's word for what happened, or why a cult has a particular practice, or what someone believes. Check it out with the cult, or the cultic literature, or the cultist.

Another principle of objectivity is to try to understand your research from the perspective of its source. If you were a Mormon, how would you think about this doctrine? If you were a satanist, what would you mean by this phrase?

A third step in objectivity is checking your research with others. Let someone you trust see your research and check your conclusions. Try your ideas on someone with knowledge in the field. Try your new apologetic argument on several cultists before you put it in your new book.

### **When to believe or reject a story**

Here's a brief checklist that can give you a good general indication of whether or not you should tend to believe a story you hear:

1. Is the story documentable? Does it have names, dates, locations, facts that can be checked? Be especially wary of the story that has what I call "phantom documentation." That is, the story teller may say, "I would give you the documentation, but the satanists said they'd kill me if I tell anyone," or, "There used to be records that I graduated from that seminary, but the New Agers sneaked in and changed the records." Phantom documentation is no more trustworthy or useful for research than is no documentation.
2. Is the source for the story reliable? Is the main figure in the story someone whose credibility, integrity, and honesty

- are well-known or can be checked? If not, you need to find out why not, and reconsider trusting that story.
3. Does the story fit the biblical world view? Does anything in it contradict the Bible or Christianity? Someone may tell a very convincing story about remembering past lives, but reincarnation contradicts what we know from the Bible to be true. No story that contradicts biblical truth can be trustworthy.
  4. Is there reliable, appropriate data supporting the major quantifiable statements in the story? For example, if a story says there were 1500 satanists following one leader in a rural area, but the population and crime data for that area makes such a claim incredible, then it should not be trusted. A story whose claims are completely unsupported by available data is not trustworthy as research.
  5. Does the story teller seem to aggrandize his role in the story, artificially inflating his importance, power, or victimization? Although this question is sometimes very difficult to answer, in clear-cut cases such myopic subjectivism lessens the credibility of the story.

These are a few principles that will help you to decide which stories to reject outright, and which ones merit further investigation and perhaps inclusion in your research.

### **Different tests for different cases**

Critical thinking recognizes that different kinds of situations need different kinds of proof. Empirical information, involving the senses and the material world, need to be tested empirically. Spiritual propositions need to be tested by spiritual values. And philosophical arguments need to be tested by philosophical means.

The story teller who tells you he can heal broken limbs through crystal power needs to provide empirical verification -- x-rays, scientifically repeatable tests, etc. The story teller who tells you he loves God should provide spiritual verification -- he should live morally, attend church regularly, express his love for other

Christians, preach the gospel, etc.

Use your critical thinking ability to figure out what kinds of claims your story makes, and which tests are appropriate for such claims.

## **The Golden Rule Apologetic**

We're all familiar with the Golden Rule, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," but unless you know me, you probably haven't heard of the Golden Rule Apologetic. This is my way of saying that whatever you require of another, you should be willing to provide of yourself. For example, if you reject someone's argument about New Testament Greek because he doesn't understand enough Greek to present his argument, but you expect him to believe your argument even though you don't know enough Greek to understand the argument you photocopied from a Greek scholar, then you are not practicing the Golden Rule Apologetic. In addition, if you wouldn't be persuaded by an argument too complicated for you to understand, don't condemn the cultist you argue with if he won't give in because he doesn't understand your argument. Conversely, if a cultist rejects your witness by saying you're judging him and Christians aren't supposed to judge, the Golden Rule Apologetic gives you every right to ask him if he is judging you.

The Golden Rule Apologetic says that your test should be fair enough that you would be willing to be judged by it as well as those you are investigating. If you practice the Golden Rule Apologetic, your research will be fair and objective.

These four principles can help us start to think critically in all of the cult apologetics research we undertake. With proper preparation and procedures, we should produce quality, trustworthy research.

### **2. Preparation for Research**

Some preliminary remarks are in order concerning preparation for research. First, we need to remember that cult apologetics research necessarily requires discernment and judgment. It

cannot be avoided. The Bible does not forbid us to judge, it demands that we judge with biblical standards, and that we remember that we are judged by those same standards. If we judge with biblical standards, our research will preserve truth, reject falsehoods, protect integrity, expose duplicity, uphold the innocent, and judge the guilty. Don't discontinue your research because someone accuses you of judging and tells you to "just leave it in God's hands, brother." If you are in cult apologetics, you should be here because God has called you to this ministry and he will use you as his hands in this area.

Second, we need to remember that simply because a person or story does not meet the special demands of cult apologetics research does not mean necessarily that it is untrue or fraudulent. The principle that a man is presumed innocent until proven guilty should govern our heart attitude, even though we rightly reject it from our research pool. My story about the witches on the mountainside, if it were not corroborated by my friends, would not be adequate as research information. But I've never made that story the basis for my knowledge about and evaluation of witchcraft. Standards for stories as illustrations, anecdotes, or examples are much less rigorous than are the standards for stories as research. When a person bases his authority in a particular field (say, for example, satanism) on his personal experience in satanism, then we can and must demand much more verifiability and falsifiability from him than from someone who bases his authority on comprehensive research, and uses his previous experiences in satanism as merely illustrative of his research findings.

### **Ethics of research**

Some general principles concerning the ethics of research are (1) be honest; (2) don't betray a confidence; (3) don't reveal your suspicions or hopes until they are fully verified; (4) don't steal any other researcher's work or ideas, or usurp his report; (5) don't withhold vital information from someone who needs to know; and (6) don't fabricate research or documentation.

Being honest doesn't mean that you have to tell your whole life story and the five year goals of your ministry every time you ask a research question. But it does mean that you conduct your research with a strong commitment to truth. You should remember the Golden Rule Apologetic and treat the subject of your investigation in exactly the same way you would want to be treated if it were your story.

A Christian researcher must be trusted to keep his word regarding what is told him confidentially. No Christian researcher should find himself in a position where he has to betray a confidence. If you are asked to keep a confidence, weigh the matter carefully before you agree. Make it a personal research practice not to agree to confidences unless you are certain there would not be any occasion when you would feel compelled to break that confidence. You should maintain this trustworthiness with your fellow researchers, too. For example, if you receive confidential information about an ongoing research project another researcher is doing, you have an obligation to keep that confidential. If you don't, you may compromise the rest of his research, needlessly hurt people, spread information that is ultimately unproven, and destroy any trust the researcher may have had for you.

Leaking information from your research before it is completed is a dishonest way of promoting your opinions without having to prove them. Telling stories you haven't verified about a group or individual is gossip, not research. You can misrepresent, slander, libel, and cause serious harm by declaring your conclusions before you do enough research to prove your conclusions true. In addition, even if you are on the right track, your precipitous report gives the target of your research the information it needs to cover its tracks or otherwise countermove.

Stealing research is as wrong (and often illegal) as stealing a watch or money from a bank. There is not enough power, fame, or fortune in the business of cult apologetics for any of us to be able to afford having our research stolen. Often the article, speaking engagement, or book resulting from our research is the



only source of reimbursement we get for our hours of research and hundreds of dollars of research expenses. More often, the monetary return on our research is nowhere near enough to cover our research expenses, and the recognition or acknowledgment we get from our work is the only "profit" involved. The researcher who steals research or scoops another researcher's story works against all the rest of us. The principle some try to use, "it's all for the Lord anyway," is a perversion of biblical truth. "He who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope."

There's not really a contradiction between "don't break a confidence" and "don't withhold information from someone who needs to know." You should never, for example, agree to keep a confidence that involves covering up about a criminal act that has been or is likely to be committed. You should never agree to keep a confidence if doing so gives someone the direct opportunity to harm someone physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

There are many ways to fabricate research or documentation. The obvious way is to make up research or documentation without any regard for the facts. Most fabrication in cult apologetics research is less deliberate.

Quoting from a secondary source as though it were a primary source is one form of fabrication. This is how we create "bibliographical ghosts." Let's say I write an article and within my article I quote the Book of Mormon. But I accidentally transpose two words and the quote ends up being inaccurate, but not noticeably so. Now let's say one of you decides to give a talk on Mormonism. You read my article, like the quote I use from the Book of Mormon, and decide to use it in your talk. But you don't actually check the Book of Mormon to make sure the quote is accurate, and when you give your talk you say, "the Book of Mormon says..." instead of "Bob Passantino says the Book of Mormon says..." You have created a bibliographical ghost. Another common form of fabrication occurs when you quote or cite incorrectly from memory. Sometimes your data isn't quite what you wish it were, and you inflate it just a bit so it

looks better, or you embellish a quote from someone you interviewed because it would make your case stronger if he actually said what he only implied. Even though it takes a lot of work and patience, be scrupulous about not fabricating. If those who trust you find out your ministry produces fabrications, you will lose their trust and hurt the very people you are trying to help. We can't serve in the name of the God of truth with fabrications.

### **Personal integrity**

Cult apologetics is by nature a profession where individual integrity is often questioned and challenged. You cannot afford to be slain by the same sword you wield against the cult leaders and occultists.

Nobody is perfect, and most people have a few skeletons in their closets. But you must be honest and above board where your personal integrity is concerned or you will have none. If you don't have advanced degrees, don't let people think you do. If you don't have experience, don't pretend you do.

Maintain scrupulous finances for your organization. Handle all financial matters openly, honestly, and in compliance with the law.

Think about your life before you were a Christian. What are the worst things about your life before you became a Christian that someone could reveal and criticize you for? Now think about your life after you became a Christian. What are the worst things about your Christian life someone could reveal and criticize you for? Now think about your organization. What are its most vulnerable points regarding its professional and organizational integrity?

Carefully weigh the consequences and take the most appropriate steps necessary to ensure your personal, professional, and organizational integrity. You don't have to publish your own edition of True Confession, but you do have to be able to live with what your previous actions or associations may cost you. Maybe an appropriate step to take is to reconcile with someone

you wronged years ago. Maybe you need to pay back a loan you received when you first started your ministry. Maybe you need to revise your printed biography so it doesn't give a false impression anymore. Maybe you need to disincorporate your organization and start over with a new Board of Directors. Maybe you need to print a retraction or apology for something you published that wasn't true.

There is a high cost for integrity. But there is also nothing more valuable. Be someone hurting people can trust.

### 3. How to do research

In this section I will survey research fundamentals; field research; library research; interviewing; networking; and reporting your research. While the scope of this talk cannot include detail on any of these areas, the following principles and the recommended reading will introduce you to comprehensive research.

#### **Research fundamentals**

Since we've come this far together, I assume that you agree with me that fantasies and legends are no substitutes for good research. Good research takes a lot of time and many people consider it boring, but it is essential to responsible cult apologetics.

##### Five Ws and One H

When I begin a new research project, I turn first to what are known as the journalists' six friends: "The Five Ws and One H." These provide the framework into which I plug the information I gather during my research. I know that when I have enough information to answer Who?, What?, Why?, Where?, When?, and How?, I will have the results of a well-rounded research project.

Answering the "Who" question identifies the players. Who founded the cult? Who is attracted to the cult? Who are its members? Who is its current leader? Who is critical of it? Who left it? Who knows more about it?

Answering the "What" question identifies the problem. What

does the cult believe? What happens to its members? What attracts people to it? What makes people stay? What makes them leave? What do outsiders say about it? What do critics say about it? What kind of world view does it promote? What does the cult teach about God, Jesus Christ, man, sin and salvation, and scripture? What do its leaders say? What do its members say? What are its primary sources for revelation, doctrine, and rules of conduct?

Answering the "Why" question gets behind the actions or events to the causes or motives. Why do members believe the cult teachings? Why does the cult leader think he's the Messiah? Why did all the members move to Tibet? Why do the members believe God is impersonal? Why are certain beliefs ridiculed by this cult? Why is this cult so antagonistic to Christianity? Why do the members have to follow certain dietary restrictions? Why are members told not to talk to outsiders? Why are ex-members shunned?

Answering the "Where" question situates the problem within its geographical and cultural setting. Where is the cult leader from? Where did the cult start? Where do most of its converts come from? Where is its headquarters? Where does its leader travel? Where is its literature distributed? Where can I find more information on it?

Answering the "When" question gives a chronology or history of the problem. When was it founded? When did other historical events happen in relation to its founding and other significant developments? When was its leader born? When did the leader first reveal himself as a spiritual leader? When does the cult see the fulfillment of certain prophecies taking place? When did the first critics respond? When are potential converts pressured to join? When are troublesome members excommunicated?

Answering the "How" question facilitates understanding the dynamics of the group or event and its relative strength. How is the cult financed? How is evangelism conducted? How does the group promote itself and its teachings? How does the power structure within the organization operate? How can I persuade members to talk to me? How can I get copies of primary source

documents? How does the leader persuade members to believe him? How many people are involved?

As you can see from this short example, by asking enough Five W and One H questions, and then searching for the answers to those questions, you can develop a good base of research categories from which you can develop your evaluation. These questions can be adapted for other kinds of research, too.

## **Twenty Questions of Research**

Remember the game "Twenty Questions?" That game is really a critical thinking exercise by which research is evaluated to give a conclusion that reaches its goal. It's a very simplified form of research method. By asking the right questions you can know what it is you need to find out in your research. Asking the right questions saves you from having to master all of the knowledge in the universe in an effort to ensure you have done enough research. The important questions you ask in your research will change somewhat from one project to another, but here are twenty that I find generally helpful in most of the research I do:

1. What is my quantifiable goal for this project?
2. Does this project involve mostly field research, interviewing, library research, statistical sampling, or what other kind of research?
3. Will I be likely to find most of my information in contemporary sources or historical sources?
4. In what geographical area(s) will I be likely to find most of the information I need?
5. Which people do I need to contact who have secondary information?
6. Which people do I need to contact who have primary information?
7. Do I know anyone who has special access to information I need?
8. What other research has already been done on this problem?

9. Which public or government agencies, directories, documents, or data bases might have information I need?
10. Which other cult apologetics ministries might have information I need?
11. Are there photographs, pictures, maps, or drawings that will help me?
12. What ideas does the reference librarian have for getting this kind of information?
13. What general information sources are available (atlases, history books, encyclopedias, almanacs, etc.)?
14. How much time can I devote to this project?
15. When does this project need to be completed?
16. What will this research be used for?
17. How will the target of my research respond to my evaluation?
18. Who will criticize my research, why, and how?
19. What do I think is the most important piece of research to find?
20. What am I going to do with this research?

Don't forget that creative thinking is one of the most important aspects of good research. Don't think that not working if you're not pounding on a keyboard or conducting an interview on the phone. Sitting and thinking through your research project, organizing your thoughts and goals, and creating a workable action plan is essential for good research.

### **Errors corrected by research**

Good research can check your critical thinking and ensure a reliable evaluation of your problem. The following summary of errors corrected by research is prepared from Arnold Binder and Gilbert Geis' *Methods of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice*:

1. Errors of observation. Humans not only fail to see important features in a given scene but often invent false observations. Good research can reconcile conflicts in

- observation and confirm accurate observation.
2. Selective observation. Different people viewing the same event or phenomenon will notice different things according to their interests and biases. Good research identifies those interests and biases and reconciles those with the recorded observations and the actual concrete evidences of the event.
  3. Errors of interpretation. Our personal biases, fears, and inclinations determine how we will interpret what we observe. Good research will investigate the situation from all perspectives, enabling us to sort the misperceptions and affirm the accurate perceptions.
  4. Incorrect generalization. This error results largely from a failure to distinguish between what actually is the case and the general principles we infer from the case. Good research ensures that no generalizations are accepted without abundant justification.
  5. Dependence on authority. Many people's beliefs are based on the statements of people they consider to be authorities. Those statements may or may not be valid. Good research sorts opinion from fact and points us toward the evidence rather than the theories.
  6. Inappropriate use of evidence. Data may be based on accurate observation and seem like good evidence for a certain conclusion. But that data might not be the right data or give us the answers we need for the situation we face. Good research distinguishes between adequate and inadequate data and tells us when we have the right data and when we need different data.

### **Developing a research pool**

Those of you who have unlimited budgets, plenty of extra time, and are wondering how to keep your staffs busy don't have to listen to this part. You can afford to start each research project from scratch. The rest of us need to develop research pools into which we can put research as we find it, even if it doesn't pertain to our current project; and from which we can then retrieve it

when we need it.

A research pool includes your research files, your ministry phone directory, your list of colleagues and their specialties, your ministry library, your collections of cassette tapes and videos, your periodicals collection, your computer data base, etc. It's everything you can get your hands on that contributes to your researching ability.

The more organized and detailed your research pool is, the more accessible its information base is, and the more helpful it will be to you. This is one part of research where you are very vulnerable. The best book in the world is no good to you if you can't remember where you put it. The greatest photocopy won't do you any good if it's misfiled and you can't find it. The world's leading authority is no help if you lost his phone number and address.

The basic principle behind a workable, useful research pool is organization. Keep what will be useful. Throw out what isn't. Carefully label what you keep, put it in the right place, and keep your index up to date and handy. In a remarkably short time you will be amazed at how much research you can do in your own office.

## **Summary**

The fundamentals of research, built on top of your critical thinking bedrock, constitute the foundation of your research apparatus. You can add to good fundamentals, good field research, library research, interviewing, and networking and be able to meet almost any research challenge.

## **Field research**

Field research is varied and complex, so I will only comment briefly on some of its most common aspects. Field research means any research you can't do within your own office or library. It includes going to a physical site, telephoning someone for information, checking public records, etc.



Often cult apologetics researchers forget about field research because the library research is so easily accessible and usually also so overwhelming. But field research can add invaluable information to your research, and in some instances it is the only source of information you have.

If you go to a physical site for research, plan ahead. Know what you are looking for. Write down the questions you hope the on-site investigation will answer. Under each question, list the kinds of things you should look for that will provide the information you need to answer the question. Be sure you bring your notes, blank paper and pen, and, if appropriate, a tape recorder (with batteries and blank tapes) and camera (with film). Once you are at the site, survey the area in a general way before you concentrate on the particular things you came to investigate. Make notes of things you will need to remember later, or things to follow up on at a later time. Write down everything of significance. Record or photograph as necessary. When you are ready to leave the site, review your investigation. Look over your notes. Correct any errors you notice immediately, before you forget. Check to be sure you haven't overlooked anything before you leave. While the scene is still fresh in your mind, write down leads you would like to follow at a later time. Make a list of the information you were able to obtain, a list of what you couldn't find, and a list of what you still need to locate or check.

Telephone field research overlaps interviewing, so I will just mention it here. Before you jump into your car and rush over to the local cult headquarters for some information, think about whether you could accomplish what you need to better by phone. In fact, sometimes people are more apt to give you the information you ask for on the phone than they are if you show up in person. Maybe they assume phone calls are harmless. Here are some good contacts by telephone: reference librarians, personnel offices, authorities in the field, public officials, statistical offices like the Centers for Disease Control or the U. S. Weather Service, 800 information lines, etc.

Public records are a big part of the field research domain. There

are public records on births, deaths, marriages, adoptions, wills, passport applications, educational enrollment and graduation, employment history, name changes, home addresses and phone numbers, articles of incorporation, boards of director, non-profit organization tax information reports, civil and criminal complaints, real estate transactions, address changes, etc. If you are diligent at using public records, you can find a wealth of information before you even contact the person or organization you are investigating.

### **How to discover a credible chronology**

Let's say you wanted to research the founder of a new cult. You know that the cult was founded in 1987 in Kansas City, and the founder mentioned in a speech that he was four years old in 1940. You want to learn everything you can about the founder. So far all you have is that he was born in 1936 and has lived in Kansas City at least since 1987. That accounts for three of his fifty- three years. Start with his recent history and work your way back. Listen to his speeches. Read his books. Maybe in one speech he mentions he came to Kansas City right after he returned from his pilgrimage from San Francisco to Tibet, and in another speech he says he spent two years in Tibet, beginning in 1983. Now you know that he was born in 1936, he was in Tibet from 1983 through 1985, and he has been in Kansas City since 1986. You check with the county recorder in San Francisco and find out he applied for his passport in 1982 and listed his address as San Francisco. Now you know that he lived in San Francisco at least in 1982. And you know he hadn't been out of the country legally before 1982. Check with the reference librarian at the San Francisco Central Library and see if his phone number is listed in the phone book for 1982. It is. Have the librarian check further back. His number is also listed in 1981, 1980, and 1979. It's not listed in 1978. You now know he lived in San Francisco from at least 1978 through 1982, in Tibet from 1982-1985, and in Kansas City from 1986 through the present. By using your public document access and critical

thinking, you can build a chronology for the vast majority of people you need to research. Sometimes there's no substitute for field research.

## **Libraries**

Each of you probably has your own cult apologetics library, whether it consists of less than one hundred books or of close to 10,000 books. And it's probably divided into at least two categories: primary sources and secondary sources. But there are other libraries that can be invaluable sources of research information.

Start with your local college or university library. Visit the library and ask the reference librarian to give you a tour of the reference section. You won't believe the hundreds of different kinds of reference books available in the reference section of the average university library. There are books listing every accredited doctorate degree granted in the United States; all the religious denominations, sects, and cults with their reported memberships; every major United States corporation, its officers and boards; all of the major periodicals, with separate books for each type (sociology, religious, engineering, etc.); dictionaries tracing the historical developments of a particular language, etc. After you feel comfortable with the reference section, tackle the main part of the library.

Find out what special libraries there are in your area. If you have legitimate research needs, most special libraries will let you use them, although they may restrict you from checking books out. Many major corporations have specialized libraries dealing with their field of commerce. Hospitals have medical libraries. Courts have law libraries. Museums have historical libraries.

Find out if any of the libraries you are interested in have computer modem accessible catalogs. If you have a computer with a modem, you can access these libraries from your own computer and save a lot of time looking for the resources you need. We access the University of California library system by modem. We do our catalog search (for books and periodicals)

by modem, print out the titles we want, and then run over to the university to pick them up. We know exactly what we want and where to get it.

## **Interviewing**

As more and more cultic and occultic phenomena proliferate, cult apologists are going to spend more time interviewing. Sometimes interviewing is the only way to get information about a new cult which has produced no literature yet and about which nothing of significance has been written. Interviewing is also important for understanding exactly what someone means by what he says. In fact, often we misunderstand and even misrepresent someone's beliefs or arguments because his written words are ambiguous and we didn't interview him to allow him to explain what he meant. Interviewing could be one paper topic in itself, but a few considerations should be mentioned here.

The purpose of an interview is to get information from someone else. The information may or may not be reliable, but someone else has it and you need it. A good interviewer sets his subject at ease, moves from general questions to specific requests, doesn't respond emotionally to his subject's answers, reveals as little of his own information as possible, doesn't ask leading questions that can obscure his subject's intended answers, learns to distinguish between his subject's opinions and the facts he knows, recognizes information he wasn't expecting and follows up on it, and leaves his subject willing to talk more at a later time.

It is well worth the time to study a few good resources on interviewing, and then to practice interviewing until you begin to understand how to implement these different techniques. I especially recommend Robert F. Royal and Steven R. Schutt's *The Gentle Art of Interviewing and Investigation*, Jacob Fisher's *Faces of Deceit*, and Horgan's *Criminal Investigation*.

## **Networking**

I have seen a serious and growing lack in cult apologetics over the last few years. We have all become so busy and there are so many more of us now that we don't communicate with each other as we ought. Conferences like this are essential for us to maintain good working relationships with each other. We can all help each other. We can share information, resources, ideas, and research. This is not supposed to be a competitive field. We have a unity of purpose, a unity of the Spirit, and a unity of faith that should bind us in close association, with helping those hurt by the cults and the occult as our mutual goal.

If we remember to work with integrity, respect each other's projects, communicate clearly and frequently, and share what the Lord has given us, we will multiply our research efforts almost exponentially.

## **Reporting**

Once we have finished our research project, we need to report on it. The form of our reports will vary considerably. We might write an article, publish a newsletter, give a television interview, prepare a new speech, or contribute to someone else's project. But all good research reports contain some key common elements.

First, good reports are complete. Partial facts can distort the picture. Incomplete information can prevent us from drawing valid conclusions from our research. Be sure your report contains the negative as well as the positive. Sometimes what you don't find is as important as what you do. Consider what your report does not cover. What work would need to be done to answer some questions your report doesn't answer? Be sure your report has complete documentation and footnotes.

Second, good reports are concise. Don't take three sentences to say what can be said in one sentence. Long, repetitive, boring reports lose your reader's interest and encourage him to draw faulty conclusions because he has forgotten what you said in the beginning. Eliminate unnecessary words, technical phrases, and parentheticals. Say what you need to say and then stop.

Third, good reports are clear. Short, clear sentences written with unambiguous vocabulary communicate effectively and accurately. Never leave your reader in doubt about what you mean. Avoid generalities when being specific is more clear and accurate.

Fourth, good reports are accurate. Accuracy is essential to your trustworthiness as a researcher. Restrict your report to facts or what you can prove. Don't mix speculation or guesses in with what you know for sure. Errors or omissions in reports raise doubts about the accuracy, reliability, and ability of the reporter. These are essential characteristics of any good report. When you couple sound, comprehensive research with good reporting, you are able to communicate effectively and accurately.

There are three other considerations to keep in mind. First, don't let exclusivism prevent those who need to know from receiving the results of your research. It is reasonable for you to want the right to report on your research before anyone else does. But if one stall after another happens and you don't report in a timely fashion, have the grace to let someone else make your report (with due credit to you for the research, of course). Did you know that at least 400 documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls have never been publicly translated and published, more than forty years after their discovery? The scholars with proprietary rights to them have not yet found the time.

Second, it is a good idea to submit your research and reports to your peers for evaluation, suggestions, and criticism. This cooperative effort ensures quality, tested research and reporting. Better to have your colleague find out your argument is flawed than to wait till it's published and the cultist finds the flaw!

Third, be mature enough to recognize when you don't have adequate research from which to make an adequate report.

Sometimes it's impossible to come up with a sufficient amount of the right kind of research, and we have to realize that we can't make a definitive statement on the subject as we had hoped.

Don't publish an inadequate report. It doesn't meet the need, and it can mislead people.

## CONCLUSION

In this far-reaching survey we have seen the good and the bad of religious research theory, techniques, and application. We've learned how to tell the fantasies and the legends from the truth, and we have established some basic guidelines for responsible religious research.

I leave you with the challenge to follow in the footsteps of the early Christian research reporter, Luke:

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which are most surely believed among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account,...that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

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**The Lord's Servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will give them a change of heart leading to a knowledge of the truthII Timothy 2:24-26**