

## **THE ADVANCED BONEWITS CULT DANGER EVALUATION FRAME**

Events in the last few decades have clearly indicated just how dangerous some religious and secular groups (usually called "cults") can be to their own members as well as to anyone else whom they can influence. Brainwashing, beatings, rapes and murders, mass suicides, military drilling and gunrunning, meddling in civil governments and other crimes have been charged against many groups, and in several cases those accusations have been true. People need a relatively simple way to evaluate just how dangerous or harmless a given group is liable to be, without either subjecting themselves to its power or judging solely on theological or ideological grounds (the usual method used by anticult groups).

In 1979 I constructed an analytical tool which I now call the "Advanced Bonewits Cult Danger Evaluation Frame," or "ABCDEF," a copy of which was included in the revised edition of my book, "Real Magic" (Samuel Weiser, Inc., York Beach, ME 03910, \$13 ppd) and is reproduced at the end of these notes. I realize its shortcomings, but feel that it can be effectively used to separate the sheep from the wolves. Feedback from those attempting to use the system would be appreciated.

The purpose of this evaluation tool is to help both amateur and professional observers, including current or would-be members, of various organizations (including religious, occult, psychological or political groups) to determine just how dangerous a given group is liable to be, in comparison with other groups, to the physical and mental health of its members and of others subject to its influence. It cannot speak to the spiritual "dangers," if any, that might be involved, for the simple reason that one person's path to enlightenment/salvation is often viewed by another as the path to ignorance/damnation.

As a general rule, the higher the numerical total scored by a given group (the further to the right of the scale), the more dangerous it is likely to be. Though it is obvious that many of the scales in the frame are subjective, it is still possible to make practical judgments using it, provided that all numerical assignments are based on accurate and unbiased observation of actual behavior (as distinct from official pronouncements).

This frame can be used by parents, reporters, law enforcement agents, social scientists and others interested in evaluating the actual dangers presented by a given group or movement. Obviously, different observers will achieve differing degrees of precision, depending upon the sophistication of their numerical assignments on each scale. However, if the same observer used the same methods of scoring and weighting each scale, their comparisons of relative danger or harmlessness between groups will be reasonably valid, at least for their own purposes. People who cannot, on the other hand, view competing belief systems as ever having possible spiritual value to anyone, will find the Frame annoyingly useless for promoting their theocratic agendas.

It should be pointed out that this evaluation frame is founded upon a) modern ideas of humanistic psychology concerning the nature of mental health and personal growth, and b) the author's many years of participant observation and historical research into minority belief systems. Those who believe that relativism and anarchy are as dangerous to mental health as absolutism and authoritarianism are, should count groups with total scores nearing either extreme (high or low) as being equally hazardous. As far as dangers to physical well being are concerned, however, both historical records and

current events clearly indicate the direction in which the greatest threats lie. This is especially so since the low-scoring groups usually seem to have survival and growth rates so small that they seldom develop the abilities to commit large scale atrocities even had they the philosophical or political inclinations to do so.

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1. INTERNAL CONTROL: Amount of internal political power exercised by leader(s) over members.
2. WISDOM CLAIMED by leader(s); amount of infallibility declared about decisions.
3. WISDOM CREDITED to leader(s) by members; amount of trust in decisions made by leader(s).
4. DOGMA: Rigidity of reality concepts taught; amount of doctrinal inflexibility.
5. RECRUITING: Emphasis put on attracting new members; amount of proselytizing.
6. FRONT GROUPS: Number of subsidiary groups using different names from that of main group.
7. WEALTH: Amount of money and/or property desired or obtained; emphasis on members donations; economic lifestyle of leader(s).
8. POLITICAL POWER: Amount of external political influence desired or obtained.
9. SEXUAL MANIPULATION: of members by leader(s); amount of control over sex lives of members.
10. CENSORSHIP: Amount of control over members' access to outside opinions on group, its doctrines or leader(s).
11. DROPOUT CONTROL: Intensity of efforts directed at preventing or returning dropouts.
12. ENDORSEMENT OF VIOLENCE when used by or for the group, its doctrines or leader(s).
13. PARANOIA: amount of fear concerning real or imagined enemies; perceived power of opponents.
14. GRIMNESS: Amount of disapproval concerning jokes about the group, its doctrines or its leader(s).
15. SURRENDER OF WILL: Amount of emphasis on members not having to be responsible for personal decisions; degree of individual disempowerment created by the group, its doctrines or its leader(s).