

The Reachout Trust story

Biblical truth

It is sobering to reflect that the day I stepped out with some tracts and a handful of friends I started something that would grow to national proportions. Reachout Trust began in 1982 as a local outreach to Jehovah's Witnesses. From a single initiative, by a handful of people, at a Witness convention in Twickenham the Trust has grown to become a nationwide evangelical Christian ministry to those in cults, the occult and the New Age movement.

Over the years we have taken on responsibilities, met needs and developed in ways that were never envisaged in those early days. No-one sat down and said, 'Why don't we see if we can achieve this?' The ministry simply grew, and today Reachout Trust is one of the foremost Christian groups in its field.

This type of ministry, that upholds biblical truth, has a long and noble history. It is at the very centre of what the Church is about: reaching the lost, saving souls and championing the true Christian message.

Paul combated the cult of Gnosticism – desire for secret spiritual knowledge – in his day (Colossians 2:8,18,19) as did the apostle John (1 John). Church leaders frequently fought against the doctrines of salvation by works and by faith in religious systems and secret initiation. In the first few centuries of Church history the work of firming up and clearly

It is sobering to reflect that the day I stepped out with some tracts and a handful of friends I started something that would grow to national proportions

Our spiritual forebears fought hard for the eternal truths cherished by today's believers. Similarly, tomorrow's believers will inherit what we contend earnestly for today

defining the Christian faith happened largely in response to the threat of error both from outside and inside the Church.

Spiritual thirst

In our post-Christian era, the seeker is faced with a smorgasbord of new ideas and spiritual concepts. People are spiritually thirsty and willing to consider any remedy that is different from the same old formula. In the UK today, all sorts of alternative spiritual realities are made available to the seeker. Our society is international and pluralistic, much like the one into which the Early Church was born.

With the advent of the New Age movement and the rise of home-made religion, spiritual deception is no longer something that happens to someone else somewhere else. Our neighbours, our friends and work colleagues are looking to luck, fortune tellers, Mystic Meg, crystals, tarots, totems, the god within, and the new age to come. It is the role of the Christian Church to be a light bearer in the darkness and confusion. It is the calling of the Christian to 'contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 4).

Our spiritual forebears fought hard for the eternal truths cherished by today's believers. Similarly, tomorrow's believers will inherit what we contend earnestly for today.

With the advent of the New Age movement and the rise of home-made religion, spiritual deception is no longer something that happens to someone else somewhere else

The woman at the well

Our journey has not always been smooth. The Reachout Trust has made mistakes along the way. We do not set ourselves up as 'the experts', indeed the 'L-Plates' are still firmly attached. However, we have learnt some valuable lessons over the years especially about relating to people of other belief systems.

In John's Gospel, chapter 4, we encounter the story of Jesus meeting with the woman of Samaria by the well. This passage shows us how we ought to act towards people who do not share our beliefs. We are told in verse four that Jesus had to pass through Samaria. No self-respecting Jew would do that, but Jesus did. Why? For one woman who was part of the Samaritan cult. She had been condemned and outcast by many of her peers, yet Jesus went out of his way to speak with her.

Tragically, some Christians are quick to judge or condemn those involved in cults today. But, on what scriptural basis do we condemn them without giving them the chance to hear the Gospel of Grace, possibly for the first time? Does God not love the Jehovah's Witness at the door, or the Moonie in the High Street, or even the witch in the coven? John 3:16 has no exceptions in my Bible. God loves the whole world, including people in cults. John 3:17 clearly shows that Jesus did not come to condemn. Instead, Jesus came to save. Yes, judgement will come in the end but, for now, we are still living in the day of grace.

Building bridges

So, what scriptural right do we have to judge or condemn? Jesus could have acted the same way to the Samaritan woman. He knew all about her and could have pointed the finger and exclaimed, 'You adulteress!' Instead He asked her for a drink of water. The woman was puzzled because Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus had begun to build a bridge of love and trust to the woman. He caused her to wonder, because this is not how He was supposed to have acted.



Doug Harris is the founder-director of Reachout Trust, a Christian ministry to people involved in cults and the occult. In 2004, over 275,000 people were helped by the Reachout team and the Trust's website received over 1,500,000 hits.

Doug's work involves leading seminars and taking part in TV and radio interviews. He is the author of several books, including *Occult Dangers Explained Safely* and *Jehovah's Witnesses*.

Doug has been a governor at his local primary school for 20 years, and has been Chair of Governors for the last ten. He says he especially enjoys speaking and debating in schools.

Doug has been a Christian since 1963. He is married with three grown up-children.

Contact details:
Reachout Trust,
24 Ormond Road, Richmond,
Surrey, TW2 7EA

T: 0870 770 3258
E: rt@reachouttrust.org
W: www.reachouttrust.org

Cult members have been told how Christians will react. When we do what is expected and attack and condemn, we are forcing them deeper into the cult. But when we love and show interest in them as people, it puts a question mark in their life and builds another piece of the bridge.

You may not feel ready and prepared to act like this, which is where 1 Peter 3:15 comes in: 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect' (NIV).

Surely that is impossible! No, because being ready is a process and the clock doesn't start ticking until you know that you are not ready – then you get ready. We are all different and so the process for getting ready will be different. We should not need to feel guilty if we cannot answer the first time we are challenged by a cult member, whether at school, at home or in our neighbourhood.

But the clock starts ticking, and we owe it to our Lord to put in the time and effort required to make sure that next time we are better prepared.

Shelter and safety

People who escape cults need a new spiritual home. God's provision for all new Christians is the Church. Members of Reachout Trust are members of the local church and Reachout always seeks to work closely with local church leaders. From the beginning, it has been very important to have a network of church contacts across the country. As people have come to Reachout for help we have in turn sought to 'plant' them in an appropriate fellowship. Reachout is often simply a first point of contact leading to more appropriate ministry within the Church, perhaps involving professional help in a counselling setting.

There is an urgent need for Christians to be equipped to meet the challenges of the modern world. People are needed to act as comforters to the hurt and wounded, bringers of fresh hope to the disillusioned, friends to the betrayed and truth-tellers to the deceived. Churches need to act as communities of refuge where there is shelter and safety for the vulnerable, life and hope for the lost, and sound teaching and gentle discipling for the many who need correcting and direction.

Does God not love the Jehovah's Witness at the door, or the Moonie in the High Street, or even the witch in the coven?

As God leads

Reachout Trust seeks to provide that equipping through a training programme designed to teach individuals and churches. Through seminars and workshops we bring to the Christian community specialist knowledge, gained from first-hand experience. In so doing, we aim to arm Christians for the battle for truth that rages in our society. By means of newsletters, fact sheets, books, audio and video-tapes we share our knowledge and understanding and keep the Church informed of up-to-the-minute developments in the ministry. Literature leaves the office daily to meet the growing demand for information.

Reachout Trust has produced a number of publications including *Occult Dangers Explained Safely* (by Doug Harris), a resource book for teachers and youth workers; and *Should Christians Apologise?* (by Doug Harris, Peter Hayward and Mike Thomas), which encourages Christians to use apologetics properly to make a reasoned defence of their faith. Two other books published by the Trust, *Jehovah's Witnesses* (by Doug Harris) and *Mormonism: A Gold Plated Religion* (by Mike and Ann Thomas), are recognised as being authoritative works in the UK.

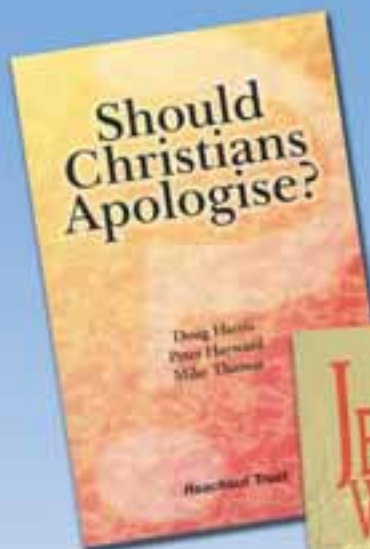
Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 PETER 3:15 (NIV)

Some of us in Reachout Trust have ourselves experienced life in a cult. In Christian love we wish to come alongside, advise, pray with and otherwise help cult members and their families and friends. Just as people who have lost loved ones through disease may feel impelled to set up a medical trust to further the work of research and treatment, Reachout Trust exists because Christians with first-hand experience of cults want to equip and support those who work to help people trapped in spiritually abusive systems. As far as our experience and knowledge takes us, as God leads, we help and minister.

■ Doug Harris

Resources



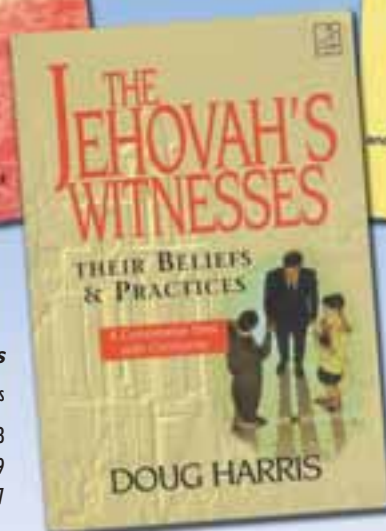
Should Christians Apologise?

by Doug Harris, Peter Hayward and Mike Thomas
Reachout Trust, 2004
146pp paperback – £6.99
ISBN: 0951363255



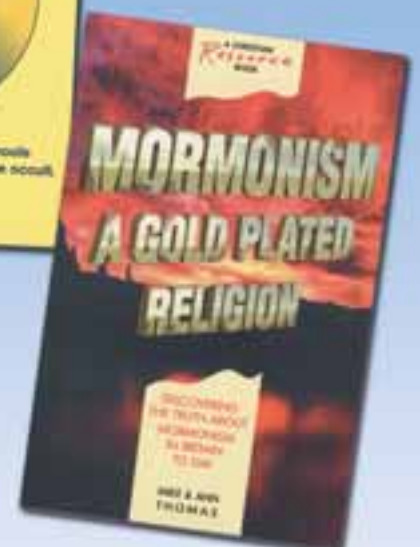
Occult Dangers Explained Safely

by Doug Harris
Reachout Trust, 2000
28pp paperback – £5.99
ISBN: 0951363247



The Jehovah's Witnesses

by Doug Harris
Gazelle Books / Reachout Trust, 1998
252pp paperback – £8.99
ISBN: 1899746137



Mormonism: A Gold Plated Religion

by Mike and Ann Thomas
Alpha / Reachout Trust, 1997
286pp paperback – £7.99
ISBN: 1898938326