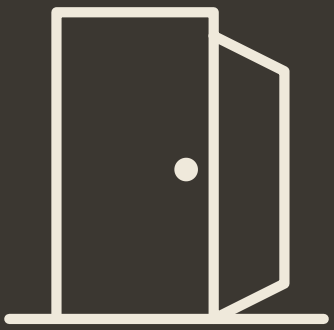
BOOK / 1987



MANUAL FOR THE UNCONVINCED: NOTES FROM PEOPLE WHO LEFT

The Thursday Circle

APOCALYPSE CULT

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MANUAL FOR THE UNCONVINCED: NOTES FROM PEOPLE WHO LEFT

The Thursday Circle, 1987

TO THE READER WHO IS NOT SURE

You are probably reading this somewhere you will not be interrupted. You may have been given it by someone who was careful not to say much. You have not decided anything. Good. This is not written for people who have decided.

We are not going to tell you that your group is a cult. We do not know your group. It may be a fine one. Most groups are, and the fact that yours asks a great deal of you is not, by itself, a sign of anything; so does a marriage, and so does medicine.

Nor are we going to tell you that what you believe is false. We believed things too, and some of us still believe some of them. Leaving a group is not the same as leaving a belief. Several of us found we could keep the second once we had done the first.

All we are going to do is ask you some questions. You need not answer them to anybody. You need not even answer them today. But we would ask you to notice one thing as you read. If you find that you are afraid to think about a question, afraid not of the answer but of the thinking, then that is information. A true thing is not harmed by being looked at.

TWELVE QUESTIONS TO ASK OF ANY GROUP

We put these in the order in which they occurred to us, which was not the order of importance. Take them slowly.

1. **Can you say no?** Not to the large things; to a small one. Can you decline an invitation, miss a meeting, or disagree about something minor, without being made to feel you have done wrong?

1. **What happens to people who leave?** Do you still see them? Are you allowed to? How are they spoken of? If everyone who has left is said to be bitter, weak or lost, consider how likely that is.

1. **Who does the leader answer to?** If the answer is God, history or nobody, then in practice it is nobody.

1. **Is there anything you may not read?** Is there anyone you may not talk to? A group confident of what it teaches has no need to manage your information.

1. **Where does the money go?** Could you find out, if you asked? What do you think would happen if you asked?

1. **When did you last sleep enough?** We mean this literally. A tired person agrees. So does a hungry one, and one with no hour to themselves.

1. **Are doubts treated as questions or as symptoms?** If you raise a difficulty, are you given an answer, or are you told something about yourself: that you are proud, that you are being tested, that you need to work harder?

1. **Has the demand ever gone down?** Think back. Each thing asked of you was a little more than the last. Has there ever been a time when you were asked for less?

1. **Who were you before?** Can you remember what you liked, what you found funny, whom you loved? Are those things still permitted, or have they been explained to you as part of what was wrong?

1. **Does the rule apply to the top?** Whatever is forbidden to you, is it forbidden to those who lead?

1. **Do you have anywhere to go?** Money of your own, a friend outside, a place to sleep? If not, how did that come about? Was it your idea?

1. **If you were wrong about this, how would you find out?** We think this is the most important one. If there is no event, no evidence and no argument that could ever show you that the group is mistaken, then you are no longer holding a belief. The belief is holding you.

You will notice that none of these is about doctrine. That is deliberate. We came from groups that taught opposite things about the universe, and the answers to these twelve questions were the same in every one.

WHAT NOBODY TOLD US ABOUT LEAVING

We set this down because we were not warned, and it would have helped.

It is not a relief at first. We had expected to feel free. What we felt was cold. The group had been our family, our work, our purpose and our timetable. We had not understood how much it was holding up until it was gone. Several of us wanted to go back within the week, not because we believed again, but because we could not bear the quiet.

You will not know what you like. For years someone else had decided. One of us stood in a shop for most of an hour, unable to choose a loaf. This passes. It passes sooner if you do not scold yourself for it.

You will grieve, and people will not understand why. They will say you are well out of it. They are right, and it does not help. You have lost people you loved, who were not pretending to love you, whatever else was going on. That was real. You are allowed to miss it.

You will be angry, later. Usually around the end of the first year. It is unpleasant and it is a good sign. It means you have begun to believe that it should not have happened.

Not everything you learned was false. We want to say this carefully. You were not a fool. You went in looking for something, meaning or company or a way of being of use, and those were good things to look for. Some of what you were given was worth having. You can keep it. Throwing out everything is the group's way of thinking, turned inside out.

It was not because you were weak. Every one of us was told afterwards, by kind and by unkind people, that it could never have happened to them. It could. The people it happens to are the ones who are open, loyal and willing to work for something larger than

themselves. We do not think those are faults. We think they were used.

FOR THE FAMILY

Someone you love is in a group and you are frightened. We have been on the other side of your kitchen table, so let us tell you what it was like to be argued with.

Do not attack the group. Every hard word you say has already been predicted. We were told that our families would oppose us, that this was how we would know we were on the right path. When you did, you proved them right.

Do not argue about belief. You will lose. They have had a great deal more practice than you.

Stay in touch, on any terms. Write. Send the photographs of the new baby. Mention nothing. A letter about the dog can do more than any amount of evidence, because it is from the world, and it shows that the world is still there and that you are in it and have not gone away.

Ask about them, not about it. Are they eating? Are they sleeping? What do they do in a day? You are not gathering ammunition. You are reminding them that they are a person and that somebody is interested.

Keep a door open, and say so. Say it once, plainly, and do not repeat it: there is a bed here, there is no price, and nobody will say I told you so. Then keep the promise. One of us came home after six years because of a sentence her mother had written in the first month and never mentioned again.

Look after yourself. This may take years. It may not end the way you want. You are no use to them worn out, and you are a person as well.

We end with the only thing we are certain of. Nobody was ever talked out of a group. People leave when something inside them is ready and something outside is waiting. You cannot do the first part for them. The second part is yours. Be there. That is the whole of the manual, and the rest is detail.

ABOUT THIS TEXT

TITLE	Manual for the Unconvinced: Notes from People Who Left
AUTHOR	The Thursday Circle
DATE	1987
TYPE	Book
PUBLISHER	Duplicated and distributed by the authors
EXTENT	62 pages, comb-bound; four chapters given here
LANGUAGE	English
SOURCE	Set from a second-printing copy. The authors asked that the manual be reproduced freely and never sold.

The Thursday Circle was six people who met on Thursday evenings in one another's kitchens. Each had spent years in a religious or quasi-religious group that had taken over their life, and each had got out. The groups were quite different: a communal sect, a therapy movement, a political cell that had become a faith in all but name. What struck the six, comparing notes, was how little the differences mattered. The experience of being inside, and the experience of leaving, were nearly identical.

They wrote the manual for the person they had each once been: someone still inside, not ready to leave, who has started to notice things. It does not tell that reader what to believe. It contains no attack on any doctrine and names no organization. Its method is to ask questions and to describe, plainly, what the authors found on the other side.

This restraint is what distinguishes it from the anti-cult literature of the time, much of which was as coercive as what it opposed. The manual was duplicated by hand and passed from one person to another, often secretly.

We give four of its eleven chapters. Our field guide, How to Read a Fringe Religious Movement, relies on it throughout.

COLOPHON

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