

Cult Practices (what I have seen and can gather from my acquaintances in the group):

Newton runs his own little compound. I've heard him refer to it at different times as a monastery, a retreat or a chapel. Legally he is not allowed to build a church on the property, so his members must all attend a regular Orthodox church on Sunday. As the members come from different churches, typically on Sunday they will worship separately at their own church. I have noted that some of the members choose not to worship at their family church and will attend various other churches apart from their family. There seems to be about 10 hardcore followers and then a loose network that I guesstimate is somewhere between 25-60.

Followers are encouraged to live on the compound with him to be closer to god and learn more about the Orthodox way of daily living. One girl lived there for 3 years. Her parents were able to get her out, but she continues to spend all her free time there.

Newton rules by confession. He emphasizes the importance of routine confession. There is no privacy – everything must be confessed. This is used to humiliate, degrade and dominate the members.

Based upon these confessions Newton repeatedly emphasizes to the individual they are “a deeply flawed individual.”

He then gives members an unrealistic ideal to live up to as “god’s will”. They inevitably fail, confess and the cycle repeats each time reinforcing the person’s helplessness and dependency on Newton to save him.

There is a strong emphasis on routine. Newton theologically argues that this routine is a way to be closer to god. Everyone is expected to attend daily services (there are several each day). The most common one that I hear referred to is a 9pm one called Compline. I saw Newton become angry at a member when she missed a Friday night Compline for work. He said “well that’s not good enough! You tell her she will have to call me directly and tell me herself why she missed last night!”

Followers must engage in daily prayer that is suppose to be a minimum 45 minutes, as well as daily reading of the bible and other books approved by Newton.

One member reported that prayer and church gives him a release he can’t live without. He says he needs both of these – it is supplying him with some sort of high.

Group Cohesive is emphasized while outside contacts are discouraged. Despite living in another city, one member has no friends outside of this group. He is in constant contact with Newton or one of the other members through multiple daily phone calls.

Newton is extremely involved in **ALL** aspects of his follower’s lives. For example he bragged to me how he minutely directed a member’s salary negotiations.

Following Compline (which is approximately 30 minutes in a dark, candle lit, incense filled chapel and involves ritual chanting) Newton will issue out his orders on what his members should think regarding daily events. This is done in an informal social setting immediately outside the chapel.

Frequently after Compline the group will go out to eat and have extended conversations directed by Newton. Members speak of these meetings very fervently.

Newton claims he is sharing “wisdom” and advice and that he is simply showing the members how to follow “god’s will.” These are buzz words he uses frequently. This is the purpose of the group – God’s will.

Newton creates an “us” against “them” mentality. I personally heard him talk about some other priest or religious leader he thought was moving against him or in a direction opposed to him.

The group is terrified of the real world. It is viewed as a horrible place where terrible crimes occur. This sense of fear pervades all aspects of their life. For example, I was told not to drop off some cookies because it was 9:45 at night and it would be too dangerous to do so.

Newton insists on celibacy and frequent fasting (this is also followed by the legitimate Orthodox church, so it is difficult for me to tease out the extent of Newton’s control on this).

Emphasizes very rigid gender roles. He demonstrates misogynistic tendencies and works hard to keep women in traditional roles.

There is a complete, almost blank look on the followers face when Newton is telling people his opinion (aka what they should think).

At times members have poor memory recall when it comes to events involving Newton. I found many instances of significant incongruity between their reality of what occurred and mine.

When Newton’s practices clash with Orthodox policy the members are totally unable to see it. When I confronted a member with an example of an incongruity he gave me a blank look – and it is as if I hadn’t spoken or pointed it out.

When I pointed out that Newton is inserting himself as a third person in the personal relationships of his members the member became very agitated, jumped up, vehemently denied it and then moved as far away from me as he could facing the wall. He clearly felt very threatened.

Newton controls the information the group is exposed to. He does this by saying it is against god to pollute your mind and thus steers members to Newton approved media only (see next section for more on this).

Members dismiss anything that is incongruent with what Newton is asserting. For example, I once voiced a reservation I had about moving out of Miami, but since then have *repeatedly* blankly told both Newton and others that upon reconsideration I would move. Nevertheless they continue to criticize me for refusing to move. It is as if what I say doesn’t exist.

Members are unable to give one example of “wisdom” from Newton that he disagrees with. There is absolute acceptance of all he says.

None of the followers that I met had successful romantic relationships outside the group.

**I strongly suspect based upon the history of his 3 previous addictions cults that Newton also holds humiliating group confessions, has a hierarchy within his group and requires daily “moral inventories.” But I have no proof of this.

**Newton does seem to allow the members some autonomy. They are all working professionals with jobs outside of his compound (i.e. arts curator, MD, social worker, nurse, biologist, etc). I think he has targeted them because of their ability to financially support him and give him prestige. He has allowed members to move to other cities for their careers. Also I did hear one of the girls speak up to Newton once. Newton was stating that all people on Facebook were narcissistic and she readily commented that she was on Facebook. Then the group began collectively maligning Facebook...though in retrospect this could be part of the confession dynamic.

**Members refuse to use their home address for mail. Instead Newton has them using PO Boxes because “it saves hassle when your moving a lot.” All the historical data talks about how Newton’s cult organizations only ever had a PO Boxes, so I suspect this is another method Newton has used to try and keep financial contributions a secret and also to aid in the person’s loss of identity and ties to the community. But I’m not certain.

Defenses used by Newton and his Members:

The classic and main one that Newton has relied on for 30 years is that the person criticizing him has “deep unresolved psychological” problems. The person naturally denies this and then Newton says, “see how bad it is, they can’t even see it!” From that point on nothing he or she says is to be trusted.

Newton flaunts his credentials as an expert. He claims he is “the only one who can see the truth”, thus invalidating all others who are not following him.

Newton hides behind the church. He points out he is a legitimate priest of the Orthodox church and serves at a regular church with them. Orthodox watchdogs report a great deal of corruption and cover-ups by church leaders.

Newton will project criticism back onto his critics. For example he accuses others as being black and white, or rigid when in fact these are problems he suffers from. As he appears to have the moral authority to accuse others of these faults, his members come to believe (or are told) he must be the opposite of these criticisms. Thus despite the obvious, his members will ardently defend him saying that he is not black and white, he is not controlling, he is not rigid, he is not misogynistic, etc. while attacking his critics for being so.

The Orthodox church believes that your body is a gift from god and thus should not be polluted. Newton uses this to argue that it is also against god to pollute your mind. Of course polluting your mind includes any criticism of him. This is how he gets his followers to ignore his prodigious history. He also uses this in a broader context to limit how much of the outside world his followers are exposed to.

In addition to being a confessor Newton fashions himself as the member’s personal counselor. He rationalizes this relationship by comparing it to that of a normal person and their psychotherapist (e.g. “It can take people years to work through issues with their psychotherapist. How is this any different?”)

When blatant discrepancies in Newton’s statements are pointed out vague dismissals are stated. (e.g. “Oh that statement was just taken out of context”).

And of course a good dose of denial (e.g. “I am not controlled,” “I am free to make my own decisions,” “He is a good wise man, just listen to the advice he gave me earlier this week...”).