

EST (THE FORUM)

WHAT IS IT?

Our Western Society with its emphasis on materialism lacked only a religion to match its life-style. "Do your own thing" has become a catch-phrase, and many people have attempted to do just that - none more so than a man named Werner Erhard, founder and director of *Est*, (now called "The Forum").

Who is Werner Erhard? A religion is only as good as its prophet or founder. Werner Erhard was born as Jack Rosenberg in 1935. He changed his name after abandoning his wife and four children in 1960, although he made amends some eleven years later. Mr. Erhard also ran a motor vehicle dealership under the name of Jack Frost. His diligence in the field of encyclopedia sales made him a supervisor of salesmen in Grolier Society, Inc. The State of California sued the Company for using lies and trickery to persuade people to buy its encyclopedias and won both cases. Mr. Erhard also turned his talents to religion.



Werner Erhard

While in San Francisco, Werner Erhard became acquainted with Dr. Leo Zeff, who was doing research into LSD, the mind-altering drug, and Dr. Zeff is now on *Est's* Advisory Board. Zeff led Erhard into Scientology, which is a contemporary western religion, founded and directed by sometime science-fiction writer, Ron Hubbard. Scientology is characterised by an imaginative occultish combination of psychotherapy, science-fiction and

Eastern religious philosophies. Scientology believes that each human being is a fallen god. The basis for *Est* beliefs was being laid, back in Scientology. Erhard also associated with Alex Everett, the founder of a group called "Mind Dynamics", a self-hypnosis mind-control enterprise. This too, was to have its influence on the future of *est*.

Prior to starting *Est*, Erhard had extensive occult involvement. He studied Zen Buddhism, Hypnosis, Subud, Yoga, Silva Mind Control, Psychocybernetics, Gestalt, Encounter Therapy and Transpersonal Psychology. Now he was ready to promote his own peculiar brand of this mixture he claimed an amazing conversion experience, and launched his new religion - *Est* (Erhard Seminars Training).

The official biographer of Werner Erhard, William Warren Bartley, made this statement, "*The responsible person does not hunger and thirst after righteousness.*" Compare this with the statement of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 5:6, "**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**" Christians will want to pay close attention to the claims of *Est*, and compare them to the Bible. This is the purpose of this tract. Although *Est* pays lip service to Jesus Christ, we shall see that their philosophy is absolutely opposed to the person of Jesus Christ and the Bible. In the *East-West Journal* of September 1974, Erhard implies that Jesus Christ is "*dog excrement*", (He used the four-letter equivalent). When luring Christians into his seminars, however, he makes the following statement, "*I consider myself one of Christ's staunchest supporters.*" (Wilson). The Bible teaches in James 1:8, "... a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

How does *Est* win converts to their strange mixture of

Hindu religion and mind-control? Let's investigate. Erhard Seminars Training (or *Est*) is an intensive sixty-hour seminar of psychological indoctrination designed to reconstruct a person's world view. By January 1979, there were over 160,000 *Est* graduates. Nine people trained by Erhard himself taught these 160,000. John Denver was a dedicated *Est* graduate, and also Valerie Harper of *Rhoda* fame, and many other well-known persons. About 20% of *Est* graduates are in the field of education. Erhard plainly states, "*The real thrust and goal of est is to put it in education.*" (*East-West Journal*, Sept. 1974). *Est* seminars can be found in prisons and police forces, and clergy receive a 50% discount. What happens to you when you pay your \$400 or so and enter the *Est* seminar?

Est does not want you to have a sixty-hour experience. Erhard states, "*We want nothing short of a total transformation - an alteration of substance, not a change in form.*" (What's So magazine of the *est* organization, Jan. 1975). Erhard further states, "*See, all we want to do is change the notion of who you are.*" (Adam Smith, Powers of Mind, Part II: The *Est* Experience, New York, 8, No. 39, 29th Sept. 1975, p. 35). Erhard, in fact, wants it all - your mind, your life and your soul. He is often successful.

The experience transforms people because through intensive, and at times brutal and cruel physical and mental conditioning, the individual undergoes a "conversion episode", where the old way of viewing reality is supplanted with the *Est* way. As one *Est* Trainer so aptly put it, "*we're gonna throw away your whole belief system - we're gonna tear you down and put you back together.*" (*Psychology Today*, Aug. 1975, p. 39). In the *Est* seminar, participants are subjected to tensions, harassment, deliberately foul language and trauma. The bombarding with foul language is kept up until the person becomes numb, and after a period of time ceases to be shocked by it, and in fact becomes passively, wearily, open to it. Compare this with Ephesians 4:29-32, "**Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. An be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**"

The concept of "keeping agreements" is used to persuade people to stay at the seminar for the entire four days, since 80% of the effect is gotten on the fourth day. One elderly woman who was shocked at the brutality of the trainer's language said that "*if the doors hadn't been locked and if she hadn't made an agreement*", she would have left. (Adam Smith, Powers of Mind, Part II: The *Est* Experience, New York, 8, No. 39, 29th Sept. 1975, p. 36). *Est* trainers manipulate the audience through guilt and human weakness. The level of control of the trainers over the audience is so great that hardly anyone leaves, despite the offer of a refund several times (if they don't leave at that particular point - then the doors are again locked).

Erhard publishes a list called "*Rules About Life*". Number one states that life has no rules, and number two and thereafter are blank. In order for life to have no rules, each person must

become a god himself, and this is precisely what is encouraged at the seminars. Erhard does away with evil also. *Est* will teach you "Life is always perfect just the way it is. When you realize that, then no matter how strongly it may appear to be otherwise, you know that whatever is happening right now will turn out all right. Knowing this, you are in a position to begin mastering life." (What's So, Jan. 1975). Compare this with the Bible. I John 5:19 says, "... the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Erhard further states, "As you can see, this universe is perfect. Don't lie about it. You're god in your universe. You caused it. You pretended not to cause it so that you could play in it." (Werner Erhard, If God Had Meant Man To Fly, He Would Have Given Him Wings, 1974, p. 11).

Not only is the *Est* candidate persuaded that he can be god himself, but *Est* has this viewpoint of people who would believe in God as Christians do: "For instance, I believe that the 'belief' in God is the greatest barrier to God in the universe - the single greatest barrier. I would prefer someone who is ignorant to someone who believes in God. Because belief in God is a total barrier, almost a total barrier to the experience of God." (East-West Journal, Sept. 1974). What Erhard is admitting here is that he can't seem to brainwash believing Christians. They seem to be stronger than the powers that are using him. I John 4:4 says, "... greater is He (the indwelling Christ) who is in you than he who is in the world." Satan has no new tricks. The message of *est* is the same message Satan gave to Eve in the garden of Eden, tricking her into mortal sin, "... you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4,5).

Although a Christian believer is told *Est* will not interfere with his religious beliefs, this is simply not true. It is a lie, and originated with the Father of Lies, Satan. *Est* claims to be non-religious, but upon examination, its concept is totally religious, attempting to replace belief in a personal God who loves and cares for us, with the impersonal, pantheistic god of Hinduism. William Greene states, "In *Est* training you are God...Therefore you cannot look to any supreme being for special treatment, goodness, or award." (William Greene, *Est: Four Days to Make Your Life Work*, p. 131). Looking to the Bible, we find this statement in Hebrews 11:6, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." *Est* is opposed to the very core of Christianity. *Est* believers would see no need whatsoever to turn to Christ. Since they believe they are gods, there is no sin and anything goes - what would they need a savior for? Likewise, *Est* is a completely selfish religion, being Hinduism. Since they teach the universe is perfect and everything is God and God is good, there is no need to reach out to others to show them a better way. We need only look at India to see the fruits of Hinduism. As Christians we are to take a good look at the fruits of a thing, (Matthew 7:13-21). People in India born into poverty and filth just sit down passively and stay that way, without trying to improve their situation. All the Eastern Religions are essentially selfish, teaching people to "tune out" everything by meditation for longer and longer periods of time. This may make the person feel better, but it does not show love and concern for our fellow man.

The Hunger Project, founded in 1977 by Werner Erhard is a notable

addition to the world's list of charity ripoffs. Ask yourself, why would *Est* want to help the world's hungry, when the universe is perfect and those people are exactly as they personally want to be, being God, and in control of their own lives? *Est* has stated that they are accepting responsibility for the world's hunger, but this does not involve a moral obligation to do anything about it. Erhard does not need to feed the hungry - he only needs to philosophise about it. Actress Valerie Harper, utilising *Est* double-talk says that *Hunger Project* enrollees will create "a critical mass of agreement about an idea, and then out of that, things will manifest." (Suzanne Gordon, "Let Them Eat *Est*", *Mother Jones*, Dec. 1978, p. 44). So, everyone is to align their thinking on the hunger issue, and a "context will be created in which hunger cannot exist", and starvation will somehow end - a comforting thought for well-fed people. Over one million dollars collected has gone almost exclusively to the *Est* organization to inform more Americans about the *Hunger Project*. Very little food has been put in actual hungry stomachs. Lester Brown, who is highly respected in the field of world food problems, says that *The Hunger Project* has "probably collected more money in the name of hunger and done the least about hunger than any group I can think of." (Ibid, p. 52). When criticized, *Est* claims *The Hunger Project* is separate from the *Est* Organisation, but the two are intimately related. Almost all *Hunger Project* staff are *est* graduates, and the rest are pressured into taking the *est* training. In fact, *The Hunger Project* has become a recruiting outreach for *Est*. In contrast, Jesus Christ fed the multitudes when they were hungry, (see Matthew 14:13-21).

Since the death of Erhard, *Est* has been replaced by *Landmark Education LLC*, now know as *Landmark Worldwide LLC*. It is claimed they have never paid any royalties for using the *Est* program.

This examination of *Est* (The Forum) in the light of Scripture, is not to attack individuals caught up in *Est*. Jesus Christ loves them even as He loves us. However, their doctrine is corrupt and must be exposed, as their eternal lives are at stake. They must choose whom they will serve and then answer for this choice on the great and fear-inspiring day spoken of in Isaiah 5:24-25. Our prayer is that this tract will be used to reach *Est* followers with the love of Jesus Christ and show them the only way to salvation is in the acceptance of the free gift of life from Jesus (Ephesians 2:8,9). It is not too late - you have not sinned beyond the ability of Christ to forgive you. Receive Him into your heart today (John 1:12,13). Know His peace (John 14:27). Learn to live abundantly.

"Have nothing to do with the things of darkness, but rather expose them." (Ephesians 5:11)

"Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"

(John 14:6)



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