

How to Serve Your Fellow Man

[R Hodges](#) © Feb 2023

*Take one mind—
Stir, mix well,
Add some sin
And roast, in Hell*

Recipe for Man, R Hodges c. 1975

The epigraph ditty flashed into my mind one day not long after I began the study of Gurdjieff and was in the process of being assumed into the cult. I had just awakened in a cold sweat from a nightmare in which it became clear to me that, contrary to what I had wanted to believe, there was a deep hidden agenda which was to convert me, and as many people as possible, into *food*, food for something quite alien to my personal interests. After thinking about it I calmed down and decided it was just a dream. But the ditty remained, a kind of relic that constantly reminded me not to let my natural critical function be swallowed up, something strongly innate but as yet not fully developed.

It took a long time. I persisted in The Work, in fact working very hard, practicing the practices, constantly thinking, wondering about the meaning of ideas presented, wondering even more about the meaning of the emotional pain frequently evoked by the way I was treated by others. Just my ego resisting, I was told, and I grokked the message. After years I rose to a certain status, which somewhat ameliorated the pain.

Then came covid. In the fury of the cult's response to pandemic anxiety about being near other people, my consuming round of activities in Gurdjieff suddenly came to a stop. Suddenly I was free to do other things with time and energy that had for a long time been totally absorbed. I soon realized that I didn't really *need* to go weekly to meetings, movements classes, day- and week-long make-work sessions. I found my way back to other activities more of my individual *metier* which I had almost abandoned: playing music, writing (essays such as this one). Though already old and "retired," I found rewarding employment in my career of computer research.

Also, my attempts to rejoin activities were rebuffed by being blackballed by cult members who were offended by probing questions I often expressed about ideas, beliefs, etc. which now seemed to me more and more absurd and needing to be put in question. One was supposed to reveal one's inner doubts, wasn't one? I guess not.

The capstone was the 2023 book *I Teach How to Cook (but not what to cook): A story of John Godolphin Bennett*, by his son Ben Bennett. I had heard a lot about Bennett, a leader of a major alternate cult within Gurdjieffiana. I had read, with great interest, several books by him and about him. I even met him, in 1971 when he was recruiting people for an experimental project of working together intensely with others in England. In person, I was impressed by what I can only call his "presence," and his quality of giving one his full attention, to a degree about as intense as anyone I had ever met. But something disturbed me. I realized it would be very hard work he wanted to make people do, with little sleep and normal pleasures of life, and that I would have to give up almost everything in my increasingly interesting life to follow him, even for the few

months he was proposing. We had a very interesting, though brief, conversation in which he suggested, but did not press too much, for me to join his project. I politely declined.

This was around the time of the nightmare, and might have been its stimulus. After reading his son's book I now understand better. The metaphor of *Cooking* was no joke: It was *souls* that would be cooked: people would be heated up to the point of rendering out their fat (their excess life energy, and also their money, if they had some). Nicely toasted and seasoned, some of them would then go out in the world as emissaries and evangelists and colonial work masters. "Group leaders" is what they would be called—later I was reminded of the German phrases "Gruppenführer" and "Arbeit macht frei" which the Nazis deployed in their world-conquering enterprise. More cooking would ensue until, hopefully, a critical mass of "groups" was achieved and some grand transformation of human life on earth eventuated, a brave new world of conscious service and bliss.

I am not exaggerating: this is what many of those who went with him really came to believe, and tried to implement, as I saw clearly when I occasionally met them later. In the book it is clear how unbalanced these beliefs became, and how unbalanced Bennett himself had been throughout his whole life of learning to *cook*. I thanked lucky stars that I had resisted, and stayed with the somewhat more balanced "Gurdjieff Foundation." But now I saw much more clearly how deeply unbalanced the GF had become, and in truth had been all along. It was in fact an incipient religion, a would-be new world religion.

I had always had deep suspicion of religions, especially those that claimed world salvationist purpose. I made rather intense studies of several traditions within these salvationist enterprises and realized that while there was much to admire in the way of deep ideas and powerful literature, there was a dark underbelly. Maybe religions had been necessitated when, in proto-historic times masses of people fecundated on Earth and organized themselves into cities, states, and empires, which competed sometimes violently over resources. But maybe the achievement of individual freedom which was, after all, one of the things Gurdjieff and some of the traditions seemed to espouse, made it necessary to throw off the last shackles of religion. Necessary—but possible? A big question. One that I, in my infinite lack of wisdom, am committed to explore.