



**AN EXAMINATION OF THE CULTS
FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE
TO AID THE BELIEVER IN FACING
ONE OF THE GREATEST DANGERS
CONFRONTING THE CHURCH TODAY**

WHAT IS A CULT?

- The media views such groups as Jim Jones' People's Temple and Rev. Moon's Unification Church as cults, but not groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).
- Psychologists define a cult as a group which deviates from cultural norms.
- The dictionary defines a cult as "a group of followers."
- For the Christian, Dr. Walter R. Martin states:

"A cult, then, is a group of people polarized around someone's interpretation of the Bible and is characterized by major deviations from orthodox Christianity relative to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, particularly the fact that God became man in Jesus Christ." (The Rise of the Cults, page 12).

THE MARKS OF THE CULTS

The four basic operations of math, when applied in the following manner to any religious group, will aid Christians in detecting theological errors which characterize a cult.

+ ADDITION +

Does the religious group under consideration *add* to the Word of God through indispensable publications that claim to give the Bible's clear meaning or through present-day direct revelation from God?

- SUBTRACTION -

Does the examined group *subtract* from the person of the Lord Jesus Christ by making Him less "God" than His Father or by elevating man one day to become like Him?

x MULTIPLICATION x

Does the sect under consideration *multiply* the requirements for salvation by making works a necessary condition for redemption?

÷ DIVISION ÷

Does the religious group in question *divide* the loyalty of its members between God and itself and its leaders? Also does the sect make devotion to the organization a test of faith and consider adherence to itself the vehicle of salvation for the follower?

ADDING TO THE WORD OF GOD — Christians regard the Bible as the sole final authority in God's revelation to mankind and its meaning clear. While most cults will regard the Bible as the Word of God, a major pattern in these sects is their addition to the Word of God.

• *Jehovah's Witnesses* claim that one cannot understand the Bible without their publications. The May 1, 1957 *Watchtower* magazine states: "God has not arranged for that Word to speak independently or to shine forth life-giving truths by itself." (page 274).

• *Mormons* in their publication *The Pearl of Great Price* announce, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly." (page 64). The *Mormons* further regard their *Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price* as more reliable Scriptures than the Bible.

• *The Unification Church* claims, in its *Divine Principle*, that "The Bible, however, is not the truth itself, but a textbook teaching the truth... we must not regard the textbook as absolute in every detail." (page 9).

• *Christian Scientists* believe that "a material and mortal sense stole into the divine record, with its own hue darkening to some extent the inspired pages." (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, page 139). Thus the writings of *Christian Science* founder Mary Baker Eddy are used to remove the hue that "darkens the inspired pages."

SUBTRACTING FROM THE PERSON OF CHRIST — The hallmark of the Christian faith is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament authors wrote, the Apostolic Fathers believed and the Church today affirms the Deity of Jesus Christ. A re-occurring major deviation from biblical Christianity, adhered to by the cults, is a defective Christology. Some sects attempt to have a "Jesus" who worked his way to Godhood, while others only give him the status of an angel.

• *Jehovah's Witnesses* claim that the Lord Jesus is not Almighty God, but rather may be called "a god" because of His divine-like qualities. *The Truth Shall Make You Free* states: "Being the only begotten Son of God and 'the firstborn of every creature,' the Word would be a prince among all other creatures. In this office he bore another name in heaven, which name is Michael." (page 49).

• *Mormons* appear to announce the Christian teaching that Jesus is God, however, a radical twist is presented. Namely that Jesus was both spiritually and physically begotten by God the Father. Jesus supposedly worked His way to Godhood as His Father before Him and as thousands will do after Him. *The Articles of Faith* states: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be." (page 430).

• *The Way International* emphatically makes known its Christology through the title of its founder's book, *Jesus Christ Is Not God*. This publication states that, "Jesus Christ is not God, but the Son of God. They are not 'co-eternal, without beginning or end, and co-equal.' Jesus Christ was not literally with God in the beginning; neither does he have all the assets of God." (page 5).

• *The Unification Church* also looks to a "Jesus" who is less than very God. Rev. Moon, in *The Divine Principle*, announces, "Jesus, being one body with God, may be called a second God (image of God), but he can by no means be God Himself." (page 211).

MULTIPLYING THE REQUIREMENTS FOR SALVATION –For the Christian, God's grace is the vehicle for salvation. The Bible declares, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (Ephesians 2:8,9). However, in the cults, works play a major role in achieving salvation.

The system of salvation for many of the major non-Christian groups can be better understood by the formula:

FAITH + WORKS = SALVATION

The Biblical plan can be described by the formula:

FAITH = SALVATION + WORKS

- *Mormons* achieve their ultimate salvation through a series of work-related actions. For a person to enter the highest degree of glory (where one becomes a "God") one must, in addition to faith and repentance, be baptized, tithed, perform temple duties, be married in a Mormon temple and rid from their life such things as the drinking of coffee and alcoholic beverages.

- *Jehovah's Witnesses* are taught to look to "anointed" brothers (and leaders) of its organization to gain eternal life (see *The Watchtower*, August 1, 1981, page 26). They must do this because the Watchtower has removed from them Christ's role as mediator. The April 1, 1979 *Watchtower* states: "Jesus is the mediator only for anointed Christians." (page 31).

- *The Unification Church* employs a concept similar to the Hindu teaching of Karma. This "paying of indemnity" is stressed in *The Divine Principle and Its Application*, in stating that, "God is constantly urging and inspiring man to pay off his debt quickly so that man can return to him." (page 48).

- *Christian Scientists* also disparage the atoning work of Christ. *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* announces: "Final deliverance from error, whereby we rejoice in immortality, boundless freedom, and sinless sense, is not reached through paths of flowers nor by pinning one's faith without works to another's vicarious effort." (page 22).

DIVIDING THE FOLLOWER'S LOYALTY — A Christian's allegiance is to be directed to none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul instructs "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men." (1 Corinthians 7:23). Those who are followers of the cults will be repeatedly required to divide their loyalty between their church and its leaders and God.

- *Jehovah's Witnesses* frequently utilize "double think" — that is saying one thing but meaning the opposite. The call for faith in God (see *The Watchtower* magazine cover, March 1, 1979) is overshadowed by the true nature of the Watchtower, namely placing one's faith in the Jehovah's Witness organization (see *The Watchtower* magazine cover, May 15, 1979). *The Watchtower* magazine for November 15, 1981, leaves little doubt as to the necessity of the organization for its followers by declaring that the mission of Jehovah's Witnesses "includes the invitation to come to Jehovah's organization for salvation." (page 21).

- *Unification Church* followers are to direct their faith to Rev. Moon. Moon declares that Christ failed His complete mission while here on earth, and Moon himself has accepted to undertake this aborted messianic role. *The Unification*

Church's 120-Day Training Manual states, "This is salvation, in Unification Church. Through Father and Mother [meaning Moon and his wife], we can be born anew, sinlessly." (pages 41-42).

- *Mormons* direct their ultimate devotion to a church which declares all other churches or denominations as apostate and corrupt in their ways. Joseph Smith, Jr., founder of the Mormon Church, claimed to have sought of God as to which of all the churches was right. Smith then asserted that God the Father and God the Son appeared to him and instructed him that he "must join none of them, for they were all wrong... that all their creeds were an abomination... that those professors were all corrupt." (*The Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith — History 1:19).

- *The Way International* employs the same strategy of gaining allegiance through exclusive and direct communication with God. In *The Way Living In Love*, the late founder of The Way, Victor Paul Wierwille, declares that God singled him out and "spoke to me audibly... He said He would teach me the word as it had not been known since the first century if I would teach it to others." (page 178).

ADDITIONAL PATTERNS IN THE CULTS

- A recurring trend found within many cults is *speculation and date-setting*, particularly concerning the return of Christ. This enables the sect to be able to enlist new members or converts and also to gain stronger allegiance from its present followers.

- *Obscure biblical attention* through an authoritative and dogmatic stand on debatable or minor Bible issues that have no bearing on our salvation.

- *Financial exploitation* of followers by the cult that goes beyond the voluntary giving system of the New Testament to a coercive control of the member's finances. A price may be applied to healing, whether physical or spiritual, to spiritual progress, or to salvation itself.

- The *denial of eternal punishment* can become a leading attraction for the cults. The cultic trend is to deny the existence of hell directly by opting for annihilation or offering a second chance to unbelievers or proclaiming that God will in effect save everyone regardless of where one has placed his trust while on earth.

- Another pattern is the *fostering of paranoia* by citing one group or element of society as planning a conspiracy for world takeover. Also an isolationist attitude, that is an "us against the world" elitist stance taken by the group.

- A characteristic which has plagued many a cult group is that of *doctrinal changes*. Numerous groups have found shifts in theology to take place after the death of one leader and the replacement by the successor or have made alterations because of inner strife or outside social pressure.

- Ties to *spiritualistic practices* is another trait that may be found in several cults. Such activity includes clairvoyance, automatic writings, claimed angelic direction and alleged help in spiritual matters from departed loved ones.

- The uncertain or *ambiguous hope* of salvation is an additional deceitfully clever device utilized by the cults. A person who never really has the certainty of possessing eternal life can be continually manipulated into striving for unrealizable goals. Fear becomes the motivator of one's actions.

For additional information write: North American Mission Board, SBC, Interfaith Witness Evangelism, 4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176.

Reprinted by permission from Personal Freedom Outreach, P.O. Box 26062, St. Louis, MO 63136.