

# **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CULTS †**

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## **CULT, CULTS, CULTISM: A DEFINITION**

Everyone is against the cults, no one admits being in a cult, and those in the cults condemn other cults. Everyone knows what a cult is, but most who know cannot agree on the definition of a cult with others who also know what a cult is. Religionists define cults the way they identify conservatives and liberals. I have noticed that conservatives tend to agree with me, ultraconservatives come to rest on my right, and every certified liberal has ended up too far to my left for me to hug theologically. I suppose that if my search for pure truth drives me off my present center, I will have to notify all liberals and ultraconservatives that their positions have also been adjusted.

In this scheme, cults are those religious groups that have broken so many rules that they are playing neither right nor left field. They are out of the game, off the field, banned from the league.

Definitions of cult usually focus on content -- what is taught, and methodology -- how the doctrine of the cult is presented. Secular humanists often hang the cult label on anyone holding an active supernaturalism. Theological liberals are sometimes careless in their definition of cult, so identifying conservatives given to unblushing proselytism. (Liberals, who are intellectual exclusivists to the extreme, do not appreciate conservative exclusivism. Conservatives are guilty of ignorant enthusiasm, liberals only of education.) Gainesville is the unofficial Florida headquarters of a group calling itself Crossroads Church of Christ. These brethren are of the anti-instrument persuasion of the Restoration Movement and have established dynamic ministries in various college communities. When they set up shop at Central Florida University

in Orlando, a leading Episcopal clergyman published that Crossroads is a cult. He proved the charge by demonstrating that Crossroads people thought they had the truth and presumed to evangelize Episcopalians and other breeds without the law.

The field of candidates for the cult label is somewhat narrower for conservatives, but the approach is basically the same. The apostolic Church was identified by leaders of diaspora Jewish communities as “the cult [hairesis = heresy, separated from truth] everywhere spoken against” (Acts 28:22). In the sixteenth century the Roman church called the Protestants a new cult and the Protestants called the Roman church and old cult.

The nineteenth-century American Restoration Movement was accused of being cultic and the reformers were lumped with the Mormons and the Millerites. Examples: J. B. Jeter, *Campbellism Examined* (1855); J. T. Paxton, *Satan’s Loudest Laugh* (1855), and W. F. Smith, *A Death Shot at Campbellism* (1899). It is in the traditions of many of the belief-only Protestant churches to at least suspect the Campbell-Stone movement of cultism. This is especially true of the Baptists. (Perhaps this is why leaders of our brotherhood seldom speak to Baptist gatherings although leading Baptists are often included on our convention programs.) Pilgrim Publications (Baptist) of Pasadena, Texas, publishes against us in the same spirit that evangelicals write against the Moonies. In such pamphlets as *Campbellism, its History and Heresies* and *Acts 2:38 and Baptismal Remission* Bob Ross sets himself to “further expose the Restoration Movement.” In the booklet *Baptism and the Restoration Movement*, he identifies the Campbellites as a cult using the following standards:

1. The leaders of the American Restoration Movement appear as “angels of light.”
2. The Restoration Movement teaches “another” doctrine of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Gospel.
3. The Restoration Movement teaches salvation by works as all other cults do.
4. The Restoration Movement quotes the Bible but twists it.
5. The Restoration Movement proselytes.

6. The Restoration Movement claims to preach the truth in contrast to the error preached by others.

7. The leaders of the Restoration Movement were “strongly dominant” over their followers.

Protestants in the broader Reformed tradition generally will accept other evangelicals - and fundamentalists reluctantly - as Christians as long as they hold to miraculous regeneration and do not baptize for the remission of sins. Belief-only is the outer-limit; the fence beyond which one is no longer in the game.

Some of the standard general books on cults work from uncertain and unsatisfactory definitions of cult. In Van Baalen’s *Chaos of Cults*:

The writer has been asked repeatedly why Roman Catholicism has not been included as one of the major cults. The answer is that the Roman Catholic Church is a stone with many faces. It is a corrupt and exceedingly dangerous political machine, and it is a religious body full of doctrinal error and superstition.

But it is also a church that stands upon the solid foundation of the Apostles Creed. It holds and defends such cardinal Christian doctrines as that of the Trinity, the Deity of our Lord, His resurrection, His second coming to judge the world, and the atonement by His substitutionary blood. Some of the outstanding apologetic work in our day is done by Roman Catholic scholars. Such a body does not come under the heading of unchristian cults as described in the present volume.<sup>1</sup>

In *Kingdom of the Cults*, a leading anti-cult writer Walter Martin uses the following definition:

By the term “cult” I mean nothing derogatory to any group so classified. A cult, as I define it, is any religious group which differs significantly in some one or more respects as to belief or practice, from those religious groups which are regarded as the normative expressions of religion in our total culture. I may add to this that a cult might also be defined as a group of people gathered about a specific person or person’s interpretation of the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

Martin's secondary definition is cancelled, however, when the "person's interpretation of the Bible" conforms to Reformed theology. When Martin and Barnhouse were preparing to write about the Seventh Day Adventists in the 1950's, they talked with SDA leaders. These representative Adventists explained their position in orthodox evangelical terminology, so Martin and Barnhouse concluded that SDA is not a cult. Martin's definition forced him to include the Adventists in his list of legitimate evangelical churches despite the SDA cultic dependence on the prophetic writings of Ellen G. White.<sup>3</sup>

Any definition of cult that does not embrace Roman Catholicism and Seventh Day Adventism will not work. Their respective exclusion (Van Baalen lists SDA among the Cults) is a case of "yesterday's cult, today's church." Antiquity does not sanctify. By this logic classical and Renaissance pornographic essays and statuary become modern literature and art. Sophisticated filth is not cleansed by the calendar and old cults cannot claim acceptance in the evangelical league simply because they have survived and cleaned up their act somewhat. (All cults become more respectable in their second generation.)

Gordon R. Lewis in *Confronting the Cults* screens out the cults with these seven questions:

1. Do you base your teachings on revelation or secret writings other than the Bible?
2. Is your primary task preaching the gospel?
3. Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one of God who has come in the flesh?
4. Do you believe that Christ's shed blood is the only basis for the forgiveness of your sins?
5. Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?
6. Are you personally trusting Jesus Christ as your own redeemer and Lord?
7. Do you depend upon some achievements of your own for your salvation, or is your trust exclusively in the grace of God?<sup>4</sup>

Again, the standard is mainstream evangelical theology.

In *Carnival of Souls*, a recent monograph on cultism, Joel A. MacCollam tries to define cult in terms of methodology rather than doctrine. The writer is an Episcopal priest from California who has been a consultant on religious cults to the National Episcopal Church. MacCollam believes that a group's claim to be a legitimate religion should be questioned if:

1. It shows itself strongly interested in real estate, commercial ventures, and politics, perhaps at the expense of its religious work.
2. It stresses the break-up of the family.
3. It uses deceptive recruiting and conversion techniques.
4. It has a leader who is a strong central authority without whose guidance the group as individual members are incapable of functioning.
5. It requires blind obedience on the part of members.
6. It sidesteps obligations to society.

<sup>1</sup> J. K. Van Baalen, *The Chaos of the Cults* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1970), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> See discussion in Jack Cottrell, "Will the Real Seventh Day Adventist Please Stand Up?" *The Lookout* (August 20, 1978): 3-5; 13.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon R. Lewis, *Confronting the Cults* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Joel A. MacCollam, *Carnival of Souls* (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 7ff

America is running scared before the cults. The American Family Foundation, based in Massachusetts, publishes the *Advisor*, a newsletter designed to inform the government on cult issues. Organizations of this kind often look to the legislatures and courts for protection from the cults. This is dangerous and we must not lend our support to those who want to make cults illegal. It is almost certain that any legal definition of cults would cause us trouble. New York's Governor Hugh Carey recently vetoed a bill to legalize the deprogramming of cult victims. In the analysis of the bill, it was pointed out that the phrase "abrupt and drastic alteration of basic values and lifestyle" could describe every conversion to religion and that "isolation from family and friends," "sleep deprivation," and "performance of repetitious tasks" might

apply to certain Roman Catholic monasteries.<sup>6</sup> (A recent issue of The Wittenburg Door offers staffer Winfield Tutte as a professional deprogrammer of Amway distributors.)

The definition of cult implicit in the New Testament cuts deeper than any in general use. Jesus promised His soon-to-be-Apostles that they would be His official representatives and that the revelation from Him by the Holy Spirit would enable them to know and deliver the truth (Jo. 16:13). After the Resurrection, Jesus conferred both the Holy Spirit and the corresponding authority on the eleven (Jo. 20:22-23). The Baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was, among other things, His endorsement of them to the Jews as the certified prophet of a new covenant. The Gospel was first known as “the Apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42). Additional verification was available in that “many wonders and signs were taking place through the Apostles” (Acts 2:43). When the time came for non-apostles to preach the apostolic word, they were identified with the primary source of revelation by the laying on of the hands of the Apostles and given the power to work apostolic miracles (Acts 6:6-8; 8:18, 19; 19:6).

The truth was not to emerge from an endlessly progressive revelation, but was “that which was heard at the beginning (I Jo. 2:24). The New Testament declares the end of the revelatory process with the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) and complete (I Cor. 13:19). The divine confirmation of the New Covenant revelation is historically verified, and our only point of contact with the base of doctrinal authority for the Church is the written record.

It will not do to confine a definition of cult to content and method. A biblical definition must include a consistent statement touching the matters of source and authority. The Bible offers itself as the only special revelation available to us, and no gospel is the real one unless it affirms this fundamental proposition. A cult, therefore, is any religious group that finds special revelation outside the Bible in and of itself. The person who is not formally associated with a recognized cult but who finds special revelation outside the Bible is

practicing cultism. Believers must make a clear choice between the Bible as the sole, full, and final special revelation and cult.

Exegetically, we reject the possibility of a latter-day apostle or prophet. Experientially, we affirm that none exists. In the first century, the landscape was dotted with self-announced apostles and prophets. It was a major issue in the apostolic church and is the context of much of the New Testament. The Church at Philadelphia is commended: “you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false” (Rev. 2:2). Paul came into the office of Apostle long after Pentecost, and was therefore classified by his enemies among the come-lately false prophets. He defended his claim to authority on the grounds that he was an eye-witness to the Resurrection (I Cor. 15:8-10) and that he worked “the signs of a true apostle” (II Cor. 12:12). In the early church, one could not maintain (among the orthodox) his claim to prophetic authority simply because his teaching was moral and sober and his behavior respectable. It did not matter that most of their teaching was orthodox. They were false prophets on the ground of their claim to inspiration and authority.

A cult is created when a latter day self-anointed prophet claims special revelation and doctrinal authority. Because they cannot defend their calling exegetically (the Bible does not tell us to expect prophets to complete an incomplete revelation) and because they cannot work the miracles of a true apostle, their claim must be based on something else, i.e., their own testimony and little else.

Could Joseph Smith, Ellen White, and Mary Baker Eddy heal instantaneously, completely, an infinite variety of diseases, without failure, and not require faith from the person being healed? Could they raise the dead? No. Would intelligent people accept them on the basis of their own testimony? Many do. Why? Why, indeed! Because they were persuasive. If the cult disciples cannot base their faith in the cult leader on objective, divine testimony, they must be - and are - won by the personality of the leader and ability of the leader to talk people into believing something. If Sun Moon

could raise the dead the way he can raise money, he would not need to resort to mental intimidation. I once asked a Mormon elder if his twelve apostles in Salt Lake could raise the dead, and if they could, why did they not do so. He answered that the LDS apostles could raise the dead but refrained from doing it because they were not the kind to show off. This is cult. Why do so many accept these self-certified prophets and their overwhelming claims on such underwhelming evidence? This problem is the subject of the next lecture in the series, "The Cult Mind."

In the battle of church vs. cult, we have tried to fight on too many fronts and church is losing. Contemporary anti-cultists hack away at content and methodology, when the stand-or-fall issue is special revelation and authority. Perhaps the primary reason

<sup>6</sup> "News" *Christianity Today* (August 7, 1981): 32-34

why both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars focus on content and method and flounder in ambiguity and contradiction on the question of latter-day special revelation is that both Catholicism and Protestantism make their own claims to latter-day special revelation. Their claims, logically, are as presumptuous and unsubstantiated as those of the cults. Both Sun Moon and the Roman Pope offer themselves as fountainheads of special revelation. Since they share the inability to accredit their claims with signs and wonders, there is no objective reason to accept one claim over the other. It is a matter of taste.

The Protestant version of latter-day special revelation is more subtle. It cannot be denied, however, that if the Augustinian-Calvinian-Lutheran concept of Holy Spirit illumination is followed all the way home, the Spirit-guided interpretation of the Scriptures constitutes a special revelation. As a rule, only the piously ignorant enthusiasts and the charismatics systematically invoke illumination. California fundamentalist C. S. Lovett edits and publishes the small periodical *Personal Christianity*. Some years back a reader took him to task for his post-tribulation dispensationalism. Lovett sympathized that he had himself been raised a pre-tribulationist, but that further Bible study had forced him to change his position. He wrote:

I was thrilled with the view [pre-tribulation]. And I can understand why it is so popular. But in the process of doing my commentaries on I & II Thessalonians, I could NOT reconcile that position with clear statements made by the apostle Paul. So I did what you or any honest Bible student would do -- let my earlier training bow to the authority of God's Word. We certainly allow each other the right to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit, don't we? Yes, even when we disagree.<sup>7</sup>

This is on the order of Luther's explanation to Erasmus of why Erasmus did not agree with the German reformer and why so many were following Erasmus in the matter of the freedom of the will:

It is true, as first thoughts told me, that our cause is such that external instruction is not enough, but over and above him who plants and waters without there is need of the Spirit of God within, the living Teacher whose teaching is life, to give the increase...yet since the Spirit is free, and blows, not where we will, but where He wills, I ought to have observed Paul's rule, "Be instant in season, and out of season" ... for we know not at what hour the Lord comes. Granted there are some who have not yet felt the teaching of the Spirit in my writings and have been overthrown by your Diatribe; perhaps their hour had not yet come.<sup>8</sup>

The Roman Pontiff claims no greater illumination, and the claim to divine authority for the interpretation of Scripture is implicit in the case of Lovett and explicit with both Luther and the Pope. Much of the New Testament is, in character, a Spirit-authorized and certified interpretation of the Old Testament. A modern Spirit-directed interpretation of Scripture would be, logically, of superior authority to the New Testament. Only the Roman papacy takes the doctrine of illumination so far.

The more sober and scholarly Protestant exegetes affirm the doctrine of illumination but they know it does not work. They usually give the conventional obeisance to illumination and then proceed to qualify it into subjection and give direct literary analysis of the text precedence over the Spirit. Bernard Ramm, for

example, follows the hermeneutical procedure of affirm, qualify, and ignore. He affirms: “It was Calvin who noted that the Word of God is spiritual and therefore could only be spiritually perceived.”<sup>9</sup> He qualified: “Relying on the Spirit is no substitute for learning. It must be conceded that an ignorant Christian is no match for a learned unbeliever.”<sup>10</sup> “That the Holy Spirit might significantly effect the subjective disposition {emphasis mine} of the exegete and thereby his exegesis, cannot be ruled out of court, even though it is not possible to give criteria for the Spirit’s action.”<sup>11</sup> He ignores: “Reliance upon the Spirit must always be in conjunction with the best possible procedures in exegesis.”<sup>12</sup> Ramm agrees that:

No man has a right to say, as some are in the habit of saying, The spirit tells me that such or such is the meaning of such a passage. How is he assured that it is the Holy Spirit, and that is not a spirit of delusion, except from the evidence that the interpretation is the legitimate meaning of the words?<sup>13</sup>

Question: if the illumination of the Holy Spirit is subjectively indistinguishable from human whim or demonic hunch, of what value is it? If the “leading of the Spirit” must be evaluated by scientific exegesis, what advantage does the regenerate exegete hold over the unbelieving scholar? It is no good to invoke Holy Spirit illumination and then downgrade the process to the point that the Bible student is exactly where he would be if the Spirit were absent. This is an unacceptably low view of the Holy Spirit.

Both Catholicism and Protestantism subscribe the concept of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the corporate church and the resultant progressive revelation of truth through the church. This doctrine logically and in application sanctifies whatever the church happens to doing at any time.

In the introductory section of his work, Martin approaches the question of special revelation and authority. He notes that “cult systems tend to invest with the authority of the supernatural whatever pronouncements are deemed necessary to condition and

<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lovett, “Are You Ready for the Rapture” *Personal Christianity* 15. 5 (May 1975).

<sup>8</sup> *Martin Luther, Bondage of the Will, tr. J. O. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood: Revell, 1957), p. 64.*

<sup>9</sup> *Bernard Ramm et al., Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 18.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid., p. 19.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid., p. 18.*

<sup>13</sup> *B. Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. XI. .*

control the minds of the faithful.”<sup>14</sup> He has already affirmed, however, that cults do not have the right to pervert “an absolute standard or criterion of truth ... revealed by God in his Word and through the true witness of His Spirit.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, Martin, a Calvinist, invests the churches of mainline evangelicalism and traditional Protestant doctrine with “the authority of the supernatural” but denies that privilege to the cults. A Jehovah’s Witness might well ask Martin why Watchtower hermeneutics is heresy and Genevan hermeneutics orthodoxy when both enjoy the “true witness of His Spirit.”

Mainline evangelical Leighton Ford relegates objective evidence and argument to a secondary, mundane role and affirms that “In saving experience, it is the illumination of the Holy Spirit which will verify the truth of the word.”<sup>16</sup> What can Ford say to the Mormon whose ultimate apologetic for the Book of Mormon is also the inner witness of the Holy Spirit? There is no objective way to say that one is real and the other delusion. Subjective testimony is helpless in confrontation with opposing subjective testimony. One mystic can never refute another.

In the nineteenth century, the leaders of the Restoration Movement fought their way out of Calvinism. The foundational issue was not baptism. No problem was more significant than the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Word of God. In the 1843 debate with Alexander Campbell, Presbyterian N.L. Rice systematically expounded Calvinian illumination:

There were wonderful things in God’s Word; but because of his [David] comparative blindness, he did not see them in all their divine excellency. These passages

clearly teach the doctrine of the agency of The Holy Spirit in enlightening the minds of men.<sup>17</sup>

Campbell's reply included the following observation:

*Many years since I read of a singular outpouring of the Spirit in New York. In a certain neighborhood, there were a thousand converts reported, as the result of a great outpouring of the Spirit. Of these thousand converts about one-third went to each of the three leading denominations in that neighborhood -- Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists. The first impression was -- Did the Spirit of God thus at one outpouring make three hundred Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists!!*

*Strange operation! In old times he made them all Christians. . .*

.....  
*In one word, if a spiritual illumination makes a Methodist, and a spiritual illumination makes a Baptist and a Congregationalist, it is not only a new light, a modern illumination, but it makes these parties of divine authority; and thus the Spirit is at war with itself in these different denominations. Here is A preaching against the Baptists by divine illumination, and here is B preaching against the Methodists by divine illumination, and here is C preaching against them both, and in favor of old-fashioned Presbyterianism, by the same divine illumination. Well, there are different ways to London,*

*they say; and so there are to heaven, they argue!<sup>18</sup>*

It was the Reformers of the Campbell-Stone tradition who moved the apologetic and exegetic center from subjectivism and testimony to reason and contextual analysis of the Scriptures. For this and other reasons the Protestant denominations were forced, to a considerable extent, to look to the Reformers for champions against the cults of the day, just as they depended on Campbell and others to withstand Romanism and atheism.

In 1884 Clark Braden met E. L. Kelly, a Mormon elder, in Kirtland, Ohio -- the town that had been Mormon headquarters in

the 1830's. Braden virtually exterminated Mormonism in Ohio.<sup>19</sup> (After a few more debates with Reformers, the Mormons were rescued by a revelation proscribing public controversy.) In his opening speech, Kelley cited the proof of the inner witness of the Spirit declared in Moroni 10 of the Book of Mormon. He challenged Braden and the audience, "If you are in doubt, simply go aside and pray, with a sincere heart and honest purpose." He assured them that "the first honest heart" would detect any deception.<sup>20</sup>

Braden's response was a systematic presentation of the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He affirmed what no Calvinist could, and in so doing cut the ground from under Mormonism:

*My opponent believes that the Holy Spirit inspired Joe Smith, and others who have accepted him as a true prophet of God, and that he inspires men now.*

.....  
*My first and cardinal objection to my opponent's position is that the Bible teaches that the work of inspiration, miracles and revelation, was completed in the revelations of the Son of God, that he gave in person, and through his apostles, in the New Testament, in which there is given to mankind a system of eternal truths, universally applicable principles which man cannot outgrow, for which there can be no substitute, and to which there can be no additions.<sup>21</sup>*

<sup>14</sup> Martin, *Kingdoms*, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Leighton Ford, *The Christian Persuader* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 98.

<sup>17</sup> *Campbell-Rice Debate* (Rosemead, California: Old Paths, n.d.), p. 692.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 696-697.

<sup>19</sup> James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1962), p. 195.

<sup>20</sup> *Braden-Kelley Debate (Rosemead, California: Old Paths, 1955), p. 6.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid., pp. 9-10.*

There it is. No additions. None! Not one! All other questions aside; whatever the doctrine, however it might be taught, special revelation ended with the Bible and cult begins with the earliest suggestion of latter-day special revelations.

My working list of cults is more or less the standard one. I must remember, however, that although Protestant and Roman Catholic sects may not be on the agenda, the difference is one of degree, not of kind. Augustine and Mary Baker Eddy were at different posts on the same road. Calvin and Charles Taze Russell were theologically rooted in the same ground. Pope Gregory VII and Sun Moon are two chapters of one story. I must also admit that we are all “culty” in our thinking. Calvinistic subjectivism is insinuating itself into the fabric of our movement and, as a brotherhood, we have abandoned ground that our Restoration forefathers fought so bitterly to win. We are culty at the practical level. It is so hard to pay the desperately high price that must be paid for firm possession of the faith once delivered. It is so easy to invest our confidence in winsome ecclesiastical heroes and skip along with our sanctified notions and impulses in the lead. How proud we are of our faith. But is it the faith? And how do we know that we worship God in truth as well as in spirit? Our answer determines whether we are church or cult.

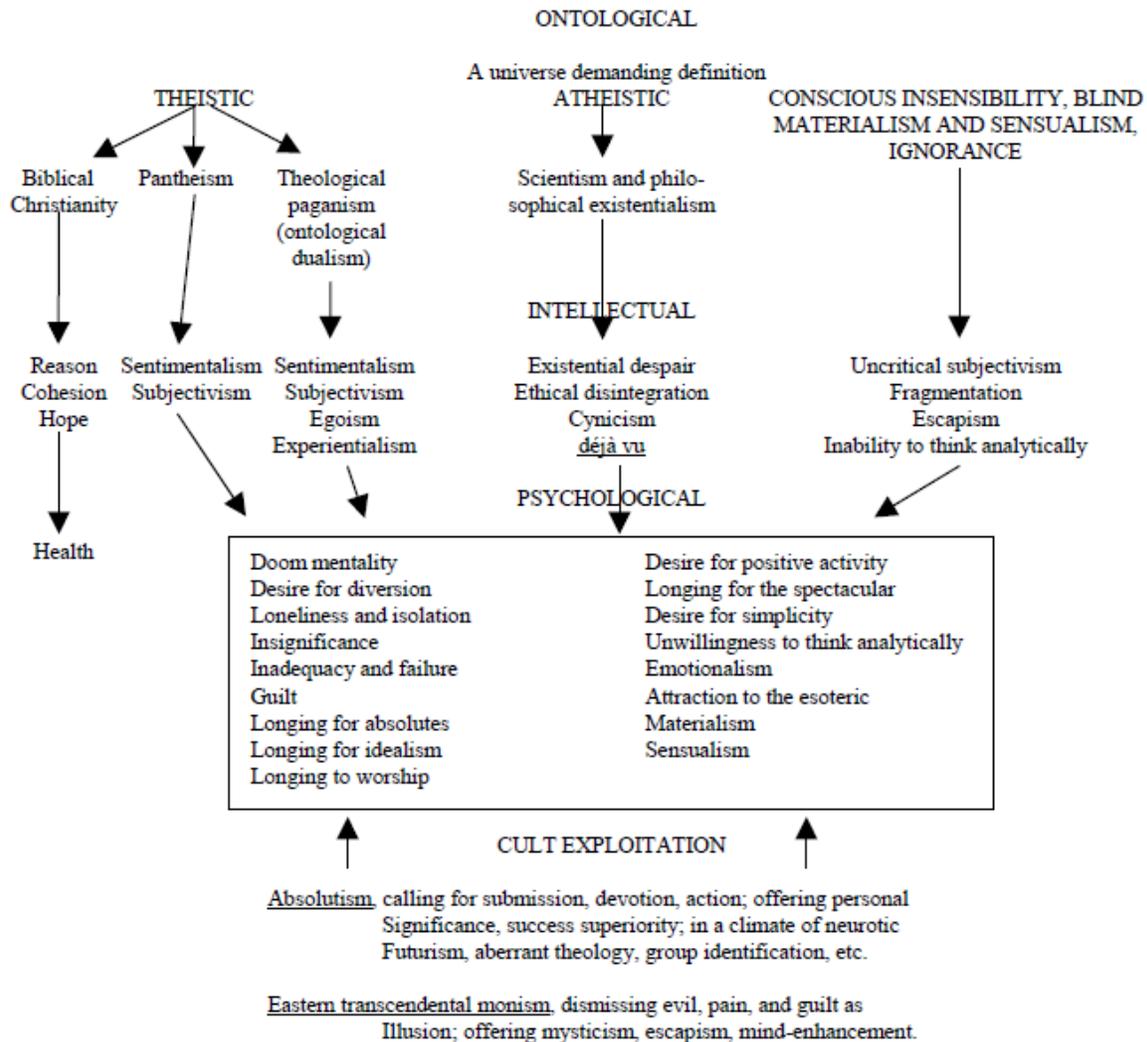
May we understand our unique theological heritage and the special opportunity that is ours to minister to the cult world.

## **THE CULT MIND**

The cult is the sideshow of religion. Cult leaders are the snake oil and patent medicine salesmen, cashing in on human trust and vulnerability. How can such ridiculous themes as Armstrong's "wonderful world of tomorrow" with Noah in charge of resegregation and Job directing urban renewal be taken seriously in our sophisticated and technological age? Is it not astounding that

intelligent and accomplished people accept Joseph Smith's scenario of Mr. and Mrs. three-dimensional God having sexual intercourse and generating a universe full of godlings? By what strange mind-set can thousands of Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science devotees call a woman Mother who refused to take responsibility for her own son? How is it that thousands of educated and respectable Adventists can be comfortable with the concept of Jesus sitting in the "sanctuary" surrounded by stacks of ledgers, hard at work in a time continuum ( since October 22, 1844), painfully investigating chronologically the written record of each member of the human race in succession? (Since the second coming of Jesus awaits the completion of the audit, it may not be irreverent to suggest that a computer be installed to hurry things along. ( Exactly why do so many people, who seemingly ought to know better, subscribe the unsubstantiated absurdities of cult theology?

The following paradigm is a simplified guide to the study of psychological vulnerability and cult exploitation.



Analysis of the paradigm yields the following summary:

1. Western culture creates unhappy children and sophisticated fools.

Definitions:

- a. Child: a person unable to intellectually control his world.
  - b. Fool: a person who consciously accepts any world view as comprehensive when, in fact, it falls short of reality.
2. Traditional Christianity creates sentimental children and pious fools.
3. A cult is Satan's trap for children and fools.

A favorite metaphor for lostness in the Bible is the straying sheep. Foolish animal! A common admonition in the New Testament is that we quit being children (e. g. Eph. 4:14). The

Christian ethic calls for knowledge and perception as well as for high morals. It is a sin to be unnecessarily stupid and gullible. When a foolish child or a childish fool confronts a cult, he is vulnerable. The wonder is not that cults thrive, but that they do not grow faster.

Joyce Carey has said that all of us "are in a jam, a special incurable difficulty from which there is no escape. It continues all our lives and affects every aspect of our existence." The co-religions, scientism and secular humanism, teach that man is a chance collection of molecules and nothing more; an autonomous machine. Ultimately it means nothing that man is here, and a man's personal significance is only that which he can compose within, with the understanding that it is private and that he is not ultimately significant. A man who chooses to stay alive is nothing more than an animal playing self-satisfying games. Modern secular man is lonely and frightened, a fool and a child.

Jonestown called forth a thousand theories why such a thing could happen in our enlightened age. California psychologist Norman Egger said that the appeal of a man like Jim Jones is a silent call to many who are "seeking an escape from freedom. They are people in search of a return to the comfort of childhood, escape from adult responsibility, a search for security in an individual who relieves them of making decisions. They seek a charismatic leader who can make cosmos out of chaos."<sup>22</sup> There were M.A.'s and Ph.D's at Jonestown. Many of these admitted that they could not believe some of Jones's more extravagant claims, nevertheless they supported him utterly. They knew that in an ontologically chaotic world one pseudo-absolute is as good as another, and Jones was doing something "significant." Jones worked his chicken-liver cancer cures to convince the fundamentalists and charismatics in his congregation, but he also carried the intellectuals. In 1964 the Disciples of Christ ordained Jones. He had no seminary training, was an avowed spiritualist and charismatic, practiced bogus faith-healing, and was beginning to suggest that he was God. Despite this, the investigating committee, according to regional executive minister John Harms, chose to recommend him for ordination. The justification was, "He [Jones] was groping for a more rational

approach to religion [Jones denied the Virgin Birth and espoused evolution] and because he was an effective leader of the poor and oppressed."<sup>23</sup> Dictators always fool the intellectuals first.

Traditional Christianity, dominated by Augustinian epistemology, is essentially helpless in the face of strong testimony of divine illumination and direction. Modern believers find it hard to resist a religious movement that is growing and is, therefore, "being blessed and used by God." If the ground of our knowledge of God is his voice within, the most glowing testimony wins out. The modern evangelical and fundamentalist has been taught to distrust reason and objective analysis. Praying has precedence over thinking. "Listening for the voice of God " over exegesis of Scripture. Media cultists win thousands with superficial God-talk and their attempts to periodically "get into the Word" are pitiful. With a few notable exceptions in the evangelical world, ignorance is on the throne (disguised as the Holy Spirit) and learning is on the cross. Our pews are occupied week after week by children who are subject to every wind of doctrine. The physical appearance and comparative congeniality of the preacher outvotes his ability to teach (or lack thereof). Religious demagogues wave the name of Jesus like a flag and few have the confidence and fortitude to brand them as the false prophets they are. We preach topically, superficially, sentimentally, subjectively, and often cowardly. Little wonder that we lose church members to the better show when it comes along. We have confused spirituality with activism, sacrificed theology to methodology, and created a generation of sentimental, anxious children and pious fools, and the cults are putting them in the bank. We have believed that love is first in Christianity. It is not. Truth is first, love follows. It is the truth that makes us and keeps us free -- from Satan's trap, the cult. All the love, feeling, concern, sincerity, prayerfulness, and devotion in the world will not make up for the lack of actual knowledge of what the Bible actually teaches and the firm conviction that the Bible, not our heart, is the final court of appeals. Ignorant, sentimental, devout children -- made to order for the cults.

For many reasons, most Americans are without intellectual absolutes. Unbelievers face total existential despair. The houses of

the land are filled with men and women who seldom think beyond food, beer, sex, or money. It is horrifying to know that the only source of education for millions of Americans is the television set. Intellectual and emotional forces radiating from cultural and religious phenomena converge on people and create a fundamental dissatisfaction, a longing to get off the hook even though we don't know what the hook is or how or why we're on it.

So Jim Jones screams into the microphone "I am the living God!" and more than 900 Americans, from illiterate housemaids to licensed psychologists, drink cyanide at his command. The Krishnas and the Moonies can claim the mind of a Midwestern college student before a single substantive doctrine is even mentioned. He only need be convinced, perhaps for the first time in his life, that he can belong to a strong, warm accepting circle of love.

Millions seek inner assurance of forgiveness, but cannot free themselves of the terrible weight of guilt. Their preacher has taught them that every real and important spiritual transaction takes place within, so they are at the mercy of their own contradictory emotions. Cults trap them and take care of their problems. Vacant-eyed Moonies hawk peanuts and pansies on the street corners, Watchtower slaves meet their quotas of doors hammered and literature placed, and the mindless treadmill of activity

<sup>22</sup> "Horror's Why Lies in Jungle of the Mind," *Sentinel Star*, 26 November 1978, sec. D, pp. 104.

<sup>23</sup> "Jonestown," *Christianity Today* (Dec. 14, 1978): 39.

creates the assurance, verified by the charts, graphs, and reports, that they are earning their way to whatever heaven the cult has reserved for them.

David (Moses) Berg assures his 10,000 disciples that they need not worry about the will of God. He has been commissioned to do their thinking and what they are to think is contained in the most recent "Mo Letter." It is just as well. His children are of a generation that has been conditioned by philosophical nonreason and their minds are a vast wasteland, full of the noisy emptiness of a rock concert.

They come to believe that they know the answers when, in fact, they have never heard the questions. So Mo takes nice upper middleclass girls and turns them into his temple prostitutes. Victor Wierwill affirms that he is God's apostle for the latter days, that Jesus was not God, and that sexual intercourse among disciples is acceptable as long as one is in a spiritual frame of mind. He makes perfect sense to the offspring of an overwhelmingly sensual society.

If your mind is clogged, L. Ron Hubbard will hook you to an E-meter and clear it of its negative engrams. The enhancement of your mind will initiate you into the "brotherhood of the Universe" and you will be one with God. It costs a few thousand dollars, but you cannot expect to become God for nothing. Salvation is not by grace, you know. This science fiction cult is ideally designed for a generation whose theological sophistication is limited to the script of Star Wars and whose prophets are Edgar Cayce and Erich Von Daniken.

Our materialistic culture is anxious to know that godliness and wealth go together. Herbert Armstrong will assure us that wealth is a sign of godness, and no one will ever accuse him of not practicing what he preaches! The God-wants-you-rich theme is seconded by God-wants-you-well. If you're sick, take your choice: Mary Baker Eddy, Oral Roberts, Herbert W. Armstrong, Lord Krishna, Sun Moon. All it takes is faith (and some "seed" money). Americans refuse to be sick. We want instant relief, and we'll take either a pill or a prophet.

The stranger the doctrine the better. Children love a circus and fools believe anything, as long as it defies history, logic, and tradition. Who would believe that Sun Moon has the wherewithal to impregnate enough women to accomplish the physical salvation of the whole world? (He's giving it his best shot.) Did Oral Roberts really see a 900-foot Jesus commanding believers to send money for the City of Faith hospital? Who can buy Armstrong's convoluted history that makes Anglo-Saxons into Israelites and his juggling of scripture to transform a silk-suited millionaire into John the Baptist?

The foolish, fearful child is drawn as a magnet to the paranoid theologies of the cults, to the speculations of neurotic futurists, to the colorful preachments of religion's clown princes. By becoming "in" on a set of teachings that no one in the past could ever have thought of, fools become mystic sages and children become kings. They are removed from the mass of ordinary people and elevated to a spiritual aristocracy, the elite who alone grasp the deeper things of the spirit. They are reluctant to relinquish the doctrines that have conferred such rank on them. The feeling of being special is intoxicating. They are above and beyond "the churches." (You may be educated, secure, accepted, and happy, but I know the true meaning of the Mark of the Beast and the 1290 days of Daniel twelve. So there!)

The Bible becomes a cryptic document full of esoteric truths, and the "hidden" mysteries must be brought to light to inform and explain the self-evident prose in Scripture. Cults traffic in the obscure, the minute, the unusual. Cults flourish because children love to play I-know-something -you-don't-know. Cults prosper because fools are convinced that truth is captured by using the esoteric short-cuts rather than by long years of careful, sober, guided study. Cults throb with the conviction that that which has always been accepted by most believers in the long ages of the church in most places, the basics of Christianity, must be wrong just because so many have believed. A cultist knows that truth is a buried treasure to be discovered only by those special people who have been entrusted with the coded map sent down from heaven.

Cultism exploits the doom mentality of fools and children in a fearful world. Fools demand to know what will happen when, and the cults tell them. Eschatological doom is a growth industry, and the standard, certified cult leaders have no corner on the market. It is not only the Armstrongites, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses that are scheduling the end of things. Hal Lindsey has become wealthy selling books that outline the future. Salem Kirban, president of Second Coming Incorporated (Only in America!) in Huntington Valley, Pennsylvania, advertises "the first toll-free prophecy hotline in the United States." Media prophets Jim Bakker, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell are assuring us that our

time is just about up. Every time somebody important burps in the Middle East the presses roll out the speculations of the seers and the declarations of fulfilled prophecy. A patchwork of scripture passages is surgically removed from contest and pasted with the glue of allegory and ignorance. The result is a futuristic scenario guaranteed to satisfy the most demanding paranoia.

Cults feed on neurotic futurism and date-setting. Seventh-Day Adventists and the Watchtower Society exist because dates were set for the return of Jesus. His refusal to appear on schedule was no deterrent and the failure of past prophecy systems provides no lessons for the present. Prophecy-gone-wrong excites where it should discourage. Armstrong and the Watchtower promised 1975. Hal Lindsey predicts the early 1980's The preacher of the large Assembly of God church in Orlando predicted June 20, 1981. (When the day passed with neither rapture nor rapture, he declared that he did not say what everyone thought he said.) Sign watching has become the favorite indoor sport for thousands of believers. It is a game only fools and children play.

I hold the leaders of modern cultism in absolute contempt. For their victims I have nothing but pity. No sensitive Christian can feel anything but gentle concern for fools and children. No honest Christian can deny that we are all foolish and childish, and vulnerable to cultism. It seems a paradox, but the Church has much to learn from the cults. The next lecture in the series is on cult methodology and what the Church must learn from the cults.

The cult mind is complex and problematic, and this contributes to the larger complexity of cultism as a cultural phenomenon. Cults are difficult to understand. Cult victims are hard to reclaim. We are surprised at how easily cults win people who ought to know better. We must see cultism as a phase of the deadly battle we are in against the prince of the kingdom of darkness. We remain ignorant of cults and cultism at the risk of our own souls. Finally, we must know that the ultimate solution to the problem raised by the cults is positive rather than negative. We will not avoid cultism simply by being informed on the subject. There must be nothing in our lives more important than sanctification; the progressive, intelligent, balanced, conformation to the image of Christ.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects unto Him, who is the head, even Christ...(Eph. 4:14, 15).

## **CULT METHODOLOGY AND WHAT THE CHURCH MUST LEARN FROM THE CULTS**

Separation from God creates children and fools, and the Church has a commission to win and transform those separated from God. All children and fools (including ourselves) are the objects of redemptive love

and it is Jesus who has a claim on them, not the cults. Over three-fourths of those won by the cults come directly from the pews of traditional, mainline churches. The Church must understand why the cults are getting so many of her children. She must also isolate the aspects of cult methodology that can be adapted legitimately to her programs of evangelism and ministry.

With variations and exceptions, cults progressively entrap and exploit their victims in the following way.<sup>24</sup>

1. Warm acceptance. A teen-age girl who joined, then quit the Unification Church of Sun Moon remembered the first "lecture" she attended: "The minute I'm in the door, people swarm over me, college-aged kids mostly, shaking my hand, praising me. I'm 'love-bombed!'" The Jehovah's Witnesses know that behind those doors are lonely people who have no one who cares about them enough to take time to talk.

If we are lonely, discouraged, isolated, and afraid, it is nearly impossible to mistrust someone who seems to care for us. Jeannie Mills, who left Jim Jones's People's Temple in 1975 and blew the whistle on the cult, was asked, "What was so attractive about this bizarre outfit?" "Warmth," she answered, "first, last, and most important."<sup>25</sup> Sentimentality and loneliness constitute a deadly combination. For one thus made vulnerable, it often does not require a sound argument to win -- or any argument at all. A hug and a kiss will do it.

2. The promise of quick answers to hard questions. Cults promise to solve the personal problems of the victims of our fragmented, demoralized society. Are you hooked on drugs, alcohol, sex? Have you lost control of your life? Are you a loser? Is your marriage on the rocks? Is your church helping you to solve your problems or is it making them worse? Does your church know that you are hurting? Does it care?

Cults have a good track record for temporarily transforming behavior -- for a price. Many cults use methods that can produce a radical turn-about. The immediate interruption of negative behavior patterns in a high-pressure context often creates a life style that is comparatively superior to the old way of living. Synanon, Hare Krishna, Moonism, and the Children of God have unhooked many young people from the drug-alcohol-sex culture. The second state is usually worse than the first, however, as old drug addictions are replaced by psychological ones. How much better off is the glassy-eyed posey peddler on the corner now than when he was smoking grass three times a day? Many cults, of course, reintroduce their disciples to sexual immorality in the new context. Cults often create an artificial religious euphoria, announced by endless, mindless God-talk. Noisy nought in Christian words is a dangerous counterfeit of spirituality; dangerous because it is overwhelmingly attractive to the person whose longing for religious contentment is exceeded only by his theological ignorance and vulnerability.

In the early phases of indoctrination, cult victims often find the promise of quick answers to deep problems supported by testimonies of those who have been changed. Testimony of a changed life, a rebirth, is extremely persuasive. Believers raised in the Augustinian-Calvinian tradition have been conditioned to accept the changed life as clear evidence that God has miraculously regenerated an individual or supernaturally sanctioned a religious group. One who accepts the doctrine of miraculous Holy Spirit regeneration has little to say against one who has been radically changed and who loudly and repeatedly speaks his love for God.

Cults offer quick answers to philosophical and theological questions, especially those created by a deteriorating world system and a morally-anemic society. We are afraid of war, famine, poverty, crime, epidemic, pornography, divorce, and political corruption. We fear for our children. Cults offer simple explanations and a sure way of escape. What are we to do when faced with the threat of international communism and nuclear war?

a. Work night and day to raise money for \_\_\_\_\_ who is the messianic deliverer.

b. Chant, meditate, and encourage everyone else to do the same. This will create universal god-consciousness and evil will wither.

c. Compute the time for the end of the age and throw in with the only society that God will accept

when He destroys this mess. Make survival plans. Hoard food; build a fortified shelter and stock it with guns to protect your family from the ravaging hordes of the nonelect.

<sup>24</sup> *Portions of the following summary depend upon Richard J. Stellway, "Cultic Conversion: Analysis and Response," Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation (Dec. 1979): 218, 219.*

<sup>25</sup> *"Jim Jones: Man Who Would Be God," Christianity Today (Dec. 15, 1978): 39.*

d. Get ready for the secret rapture. (Never ride in an airplane with a Christian pilot at the controls unless you're sure you'll be raptured with him.)

e. Serve \_\_\_\_\_ faithfully and sacrificially so that you will enjoy power and prominence in the world system that will replace this one.

3. The forging of a binding relationship with the group and the systematic isolation of the devotee from former associations. Cults create a fortress mentality. It is we-the-elect in here with God and them-out-there with Satan. Isolation is reinforced by the creation of a persecution complex (They don't understand, they hate you, they are in bondage of the devil and want nothing more than the destruction of your faith). The Watchtower disciple comes to your door to talk to you. You have not talked very long before you

realize that he did not come to listen. Why should he? You are a blind slave of the persecuting world system. You are ignorant of the things of God and ill-motivated.

Victims of the more extreme cults, especially those that focus upon young people, are always led to break with their families.

4. Distinctive doctrines are concealed or denied at first; admitted and taught only when the victim is preconditioned. The Unification Church is introduced to the victim as a youth movement that has a successful drug-abuse program. A few days or weeks later he finds himself kneeling before a photograph of Reverend Moon and he's not quite sure how he got there. Mormon converts have to prove themselves over a long period of time before they are introduced to the more esoteric doctrines of the cult. Watchtower teachers get very upset if their prospect learns too soon that to be a Witness he must deny the resurrection of Jesus.

5. Decisive action is required. The cult devotee is called upon to perform an act or undertake a project that is both radical and sacrificial. This takes such forms as public renunciation of self, one's past, usually involving a detailed confession of sins (real or imagined). An open and sometimes violent break with family and former friends demanded, or a significant gift must be given. Moon requires that his converts openly denounce their parents. Jim Jones demanded that many of his converts, men and women, have sexual relations with him and photographs were taken. Cult leaders often suggest or require that properties, insurance policies, or savings accounts be surrendered.

It is a will-confirmed principle of human behavior that if a person makes a significant and costly commitment to a group, person, or idea, it is very difficult for him to reverse his thinking and deny that which has cost him so much. We find it almost impossible to admit that we could be so desperately wrong about something so important. Acts of humiliation and absolute submission become the point-of-no-return for the disciple. Prodigious amounts of work required by some cults create a psychological commitment that is hard to dissolve.

6. Systematic attention to maintenance. Family attachments continue to be discouraged in some of the cults. Mormonism

carries on a vigorous propaganda campaign promoting the Latter Day Saints as champions of family life. In truth, Mormonism weakens the nuclear family and makes the local church the emotional center of its members. It is not uncommon for the more extreme cult leaders to forbid normal sexual relations between husband and wife, even when both are members of the cult. Reverend Moon claims the right to pick marriage partners for his unmarried disciples. Before marriage they must confess any sexual sins to "Father" and beg his forgiveness. After marriage, sexual intercourse is prohibited for forty days and spouses are usually assigned to different locations. Moonies have few children and more time to raise money.

Rhoda Johnson, a disciple of Jim Jones, testified that she was whipped with a belt three times for such sins as phoning her parents. Jones regularly forbade married couples in his church to have sexual intercourse, at least with one another, while he freely indulged in sex with both men and women. David Berg (Children of God) encourages or commands his disciples to practice extramarital sex, group sex among married couples, and seduction as a method of proselyting. In MO letter (Little Fishy, March 1974) Berg pictured a mermaid making love to a naked man. The caption read, "Hooker for Jesus." Joseph Smith was married to more than 60 women, sealed to at least 229 others. With many of these he had a very earthy kind of relationship at one time or another. Brigham Young was even more active than his predecessor on this count.<sup>26</sup> Radical cults resort to open intimidation and terroristic threats against defectors.

Those cult leaders who have used such extreme methods of maintaining the loyalty of their followers have found that their victims suffer the loss of self-esteem and confidence in their own ability to make moral decisions. They become dependent on a "fatherly" authority figure.

Some of the more respectable cults maintain their members by strictly regimenting and censored reading programs. Others have tight social systems that keep the devotees bushed "following the rules." Hyper-activity serves to keep the disciple too

26 *J. and S. Tanner, Mormonism, Shadow or Reality? (Salt Lake: Modern Microfilm, 1972), pp. 211, 212.*

weary and distracted to think for himself. If this is prolonged and intensified by various kinds of psychological intimidation, the cult victim becomes increasingly dependent. A Unification Church escapee remembers the hyper-activity of her cult days:

Like thousands of Moonies across the country, I work all day, every day, selling carnations to raise money for the movement. Up at 4:00 A.M. Rattling through the streets with other teams in a seatless van by 5:00, heading for shopping centers or business districts. Breakfast is Chinese rice balls or cereal and candy served in the van, milk spilling all over.

Team captains whip us into an evangelical frenzy with songs, Bible verses, prayers, chants. We each call our own "determination" -- the amount we vow we'll personally raise that day. No one shouts out an amount less than \$100. Some, caught up in the movement, scream "\$1000!"

On the streets until the money is made, no matter how long it takes. Rarely back before midnight or 1:00 A.M. Dinner -- vegetables, starches, no meat. Often too beat to eat. Testimonials about interesting experiences of the day, with emphasis on visions and mystical revelations of Rev. Moon. More Bible, more drumming about Moon as Messiah, more singing to "drive away evil spirits." Collapse in sleep until the next day begins before dawn.

All emotions -- everything -- is handled by the center director. If I sing too loud, he tells me how to sing. If I want to eat or sit with different people, he says no. If I feel like crying, he snaps, "Don't cry tears for yourself."

There are no newspapers, no TV, no talk of the outside world.<sup>27</sup>

To one degree or another, cults work to produce uncritical loyalty by effecting the psychological disintegration of the victim. A cult takes a child and makes him more of a child, a dependent, obedient, profitable child.

What can the Church learn from cult methodology, especially from those cults that have become more respectable and sober with the passing of a generation or two? Many of the more objectionable methods used by cults are perversions of wise and acceptable methods, good principles of church growth taken to an extreme. Some of the methods used by such cults as the Watchtower Society and the Seventh Day Adventists are worthy of imitation by the Church. I submit that the relative success of

cultism suggests that the Church needs to give attention to the following general areas of doctrine, evangelism, and ministry.

1. The Church must disconnect herself in the mind of the public from intuitional, subjective, transcendental theology. The Bible in and of itself must be offered as the only source of special revelation and authority, with the understanding that the full and only meaning of Scripture yields to direct literary analysis. We must insist that the meaning of Scripture is restricted to the normal meaning of the words in the historico-grammatical context. This is a negative lesson and the Church must be perceived as generically different from the cults.

2. The Church identified with the tradition of the Restoration Movement must emphasize that it alone, in contrast to Romanism and Protestantism, stands for those basic elements of the Faith that are and have been accepted by most believers through all history in most places. A list of these elements includes belief in the Triune God, the full deity of Jesus, the blood atonement, salvation by grace, the resurrection, eternal reward and punishment, baptism by immersion, the name Christian, and the inerrancy of Scripture. We are the least innovative of all major religious groups in matters of doctrine and we must make this clear. The world must know that it is we who are antipodal to cultism.

3. We must not be afraid of legitimate, biblical absolutism. This is a positive lesson to be learned from the cults. The fastest growing religious bodies have many common characteristics, one of the more important of which is the conviction that they are right in a way that makes all other faiths wrong. The religion of Both-And will never move the world. Is there one Lord, one Faith, one baptism into the one body or is there a legitimate choice among many? Just how many plans of salvation are there? Is the New Testament Church an eternal necessity or simply a delightful option? Is the plan of salvation set forth in the Book of Acts required or simply preferable? If we are not orthodox in our doctrine, let us repent. If we are convinced that in the essentials of the faith we are right, let us say so! If we are not convinced, let us study until we can decide one way or the other. Our generation of the Restoration Movement is suffering from a fundamental and

deadly lack of confidence. We must not close our minds, but neither can we forever be tentative in our convictions. We must land somewhere and take a stand. Thinking people reject narrow bigotry in religion, but they are also impatient with spineless compromise. It is in the nature of things that we must either contend for the Faith or compromise it. The Faith must not forever be kept in committee.

Let's admit that the Sunday Bible school is a failure. How could it succeed in anything beyond organized fellowship? Thin class material presented once a week by an amateur cannot do the job. The Church must begin to take seriously its responsibility to teach and to learn. Somewhere we must find hundreds and thousands of intellectually sharp young men who are willing to pay the terrible price that must be paid for biblical competency. We must challenge them to put a final end to the modern concept of preaching as sacred entertainment. Methodology must once again bow to theology. Cultists know their doctrine; as a rule, better than our outfit. Why? Why not? In thousands of our congregations people sit for years under honored preachers and remain biblically illiterate! We must create a new taste in the people. It's time for meat, and lots of it.

<sup>27</sup> "Why I Quit the Moon Cult," *Seventeen* (July, 1976): 107; 117; 127.

We must bury forever the unscriptural distinction between teaching and preaching. Cute, alliterative outlines, thin analogies, sentimental illustrations, thinly-devotional sermons will not get the job done. Topical talks must surrender to sound, exegetical preaching. The power of the Gospel is in the Gospel itself, and there is no substitute for systematic, genuine teaching.

5. We must not be afraid to require commitment from ourselves and from the Church at large. We place little value on that which costs little or nothing. Cults often attract dedicated, intelligent, sensitive people simply because the cult takes itself seriously enough to require much of its disciples. It must become apparent in the life and work of the Church that the Gospel is true and therefore Christianity is a matter of life and death. I am convinced that the comfortable Christianity of our generation, with its roots

firmly imbedded in sentimental slush, is so far removed from first-century Christianity that we are an embarrassment to them. Too long our congregations have tailored their programs to the segment of the people who are congenitally carnal and cheated those who take Jesus seriously. We have trimmed our sails to the weakest winds. Cults often require too much of their people, the Church usually too little.

6. The Church must meet the legitimate emotional needs of the people. This generation of the Church has fallen for the deadly Either-Or fallacy, i.e., either we take a strict and uncompromising stand for truth or we create a warm, loving, accepting atmosphere of fellowship. We do not have to make this choice; we can have both. Truth does not exclude dynamic love, it creates it. We preach the truth in love. Love without truth is pious sentimentalism. Insensitive orthodoxy saves the soul by embalming it. Both are false religions.

We may as well admit that it is not our preaching that brings visitors back for a second look, rather it is the feeling of warm acceptance. Too long our worship services (a questionable concept) have been conducted by the bulletin and the clock. I am against liturgical worship. We have borrowed from the wrong century. Medieval church pageantry has become the model for our corporate worship just as medieval architecture has been the prototype for our church buildings. The first-day gatherings in the first century were dynamic family events.

This is not a call for the superficial touchy-feely nonsense of the discredited relational theology of the sixties. I do not feel particularly spiritual holding hands with another man or someone else's wife. We must have the real thing. We need to be willing to become other-oriented enough to notice the fellow across the aisle deeply enough to begin to care about him as much as we care about ourselves. Someone besides the preacher needs to be able to express himself in the gathering of the saints. The children of God need to be able to laugh and cry and be honest and do all the other real-life things that families do. Church attendance ought to be something more than a practice run for your funeral service.

The neo-charismatic heresy has not infected and divided our congregations because we are too spontaneous and open, but because we are too formal and cold. A lifeless first-day meeting is an open invitation to emotional extremism. Our orthodoxy will be of no help to a lost world if the world does not see that we love the way Jesus loved.

We are to blame for the success of the cults. They are, indeed, "the unpaid bills of the church." It is hard to evangelize a cult victim, so the time to win him is before he falls into the trap. Nothing but systematic, long-term concern and teaching will rescue the cultist, and we must not write him off or abuse him. We are debtors

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