

CULTS

DENOMINATIONS OR DECEPTION?

G. Michael Cocoris

CULTS

DENOMINATIONS OR DECEPTION?

G. Michael Cocoris

© 2017 G. Michael Cocoris

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced (in whole or in part, edited, or revised) in any way, form, or means, including, but not limited to electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or any kind of storage and retrieval system *for sale*, except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the written permission of G. Michael Cocoris, 2016 Euclid #20, Santa Monica, CA 90405, michaelcocoris@gmail.com, or his appointed representatives. Permission is hereby granted, however, for the reproduction of the whole or parts of the whole without changing the content in any way for *free distribution*, provided all copies contain this copyright notice in its entirety. Permission is also granted to charge for the cost of copying.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version ®, Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	II
HOW TO SPOT A CULTIST A MILE AWAY	3
ARE LATTER DAY SAINTS REALLY SAINTS?	7
ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES TRUE WITNESSES?	15
IS CHRISTIAN SCIENCE REALLY CHRISTIAN?	21
IS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM A CULT?.....	31
REACHING A CULTIST	43
BIBLIOGRAPHY	47

PREFACE

My interest in cults is a result of my involvement in evangelism. In the process of talking to people about the Lord, I have encountered people who were involved in a cult. Those experiences drove me to find out exactly what are the official beliefs of the major cults and to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so.

In the introduction to each chapter on a cult, I have deliberately chosen to be as complimentary as possible. We should give credit where credit is due. Peter instructs us to “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Pet. 2:17). At the time Peter penned those words, the king was not an honorable person! Cultists are not necessarily all wrong. They are sincere in their beliefs and many work hard to perform what their religion demands of them. Sincerity and commitment are honorable traits.

Before delving into the beliefs of a cult, I have explained its historical background. At this point, my objective was to be as factual as possible. With cults, as well as other subjects, I have found understanding the origin and history of an idea or movement are helpful in understanding the current situation.

Next, I have stated the beliefs of each cult under consideration. At this point, my purpose was to be as fair as possible. So I have quoted their *official* statements without criticism or even comment. It is important that we accurately understand their position before we evaluate it biblically. It should also be pointed out that not all cultists necessarily believe everything in the official doctrinal statement of the group to which they belong. When that is the case, it should be pointed out to them.

After considering the historical background and theological beliefs of each cult, a biblical evaluation is given. The evaluations focus on the essential elements of Christianity. A cult may teach peripheral things that are not biblical. Those issues are not addressed. For example, the organizational structure of the Latter Day Saints sounds biblical, but it is not. That type of issue is not addressed because it is possible to know the Lord and be part of an organizational structure that is not exactly biblical. Bible-believing Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists differ on how to organize the church, but people within those denominations know the Lord.

I am deeply indebted to Teresa Rogers for her help. She not only proofread the manuscript, she also made many valuable suggestions.

It is my prayer that this material may not only help you to better understand the cults, but also to enable you to present biblical truth to them.

G. Michael Cocoris
Santa Monica, CA

HOW TO SPOT A CULTIST A MILE AWAY

It seems as if religious cults are multiplying like rabbits and growing like weeds. There are literally hundreds of cults and maybe thousands. If the number of cults is growing, and they are growing in number, we ought to know something about them, at least the major ones.

The place to begin is with a definition. What is a cult? In some of the written material on this subject, that question is not answered. To make matters worse, from a biblical point of view, many definitions of a cult are wide of the mark. For example, in a magazine article, a professor gave twelve characteristics of a cult: 1) a dynamic leader, 2) new revelation, 3) one true church, 4) last days belief, 5) zealous evangelism, 6) separation from the world, 7) total commitment, 8) intensive indoctrination, 9) authoritative government, 10) persecution complex, 11) works righteousness, and 12) defective Christology. The list sounds impressive, but what's wrong with a dynamic leader or even a last days belief?

What is the biblical definition or concept of a cult? For starters, consider that the Apostle John speaks of the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 Jn. 4:6). It is obvious from the context that "the truth" is a body of doctrine or teaching that is either believed or denied.

The Truth

Actually, the New Testament uses several different terms to refer to a body of doctrine that is believed among Christians.

The Truth What is "the truth?" John defines the "spirit of truth" (1 Jn. 4:6) when he says, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 Jn. 4:2). Confessing that Jesus has come in the flesh is acknowledging that He is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22), the Son of God (Jn. 20:31), Who gives eternal life to those who trust Him for it (Jn. 11:25-27). Those who acknowledge the Son have the Father (1 Jn. 2:23). In other words, the "truth" includes the deity/humanity of Christ, which involves the Trinity and salvation by faith.

The Doctrine of Christ John also speaks of the "doctrine of Christ." Second John 9 says, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." The doctrine of Christ is the teaching about Christ. It is clear from the context that the teaching concerning Christ includes the deity/humanity of Christ (2 Jn. 7), which involves the Trinity (2 Jn. 9) and salvation (2 Jn. 9).

The Faith The Apostle Paul talks about "the faith" (Gal. 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:2, 1:20, 3:9, 4:1, 5:8, 6:10, 6:21; 2 Tim. 2:18, 3:8, 4:7; Titus 1:4, 13, 3:15; see also Jude 3). What is "the faith"? The word "faith" is used subjectively as a reference to personal faith and it is also used objectively as a reference to the things believed. *The faith* is a body of doctrine.

Paul never defines what he means by "the faith," but he does talk about "another Jesus," "another spirit," and "another gospel." In 2 Corinthians 11:4, he says, "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may

well put up with it!” The doctrines (“the things believed”) here are the things believed about Jesus, the Trinity (“spirit”), and salvation by faith (“gospel”).

If by the expression “the faith,” Paul means “the things believed” about Jesus, the Trinity, and salvation, “the faith” is identical to John’s “the truth” and “the doctrine of Christ.”

The Depository The New Testament not only talks about the truth, the doctrine of Christ, and the faith, but it also teaches that God has deposited these doctrines in a group of people called the church. First Timothy 3:15 says, “But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The Greek word translated “church” means “called out ones, assembly.” In the New Testament, this word sometimes refers to the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23), that is, a spiritual organism composed of all saved people from the beginning of the church until Christ comes to rapture the church. Theologians call that the universal church. Obviously, that assembly has not yet been assembled.

On other occasions, the New Testament uses the word “church” to refer to a body of believers, that is, an organized group of baptized believers. Theologians call that the local church. God intended that the universal church, as manifested by the local church, be the pillar and the ground of *truth*. God has deposited His truth in the church.

Throughout the centuries, various tags and titles have been attached to the church. One of the oldest words is “orthodox.” Webster defines “orthodox” as “sound in doctrine,” “holding the Christian faith as formulated in the great church creeds and confessions,” “maintaining the doctrine of the Trinity.”

Another word attached to the church is “evangelical.” This word comes from the Greek word “gospel” and was popularized during the Protestant Reformation. Again, Webster says it means (third definition) “pertaining to or designating any school of Protestants which holds that the essence of the gospel consists mainly in its doctrines of man’s sinful condition and need of salvation, the revelation of God’s grace in Christ, the necessity of spiritual renovation, and participation in the experience of redemption through faith.”

One other word has been appended to the church. That word is “fundamental,” which means “basic, essential.” In the 19th Century, German rationalism produced American liberalism. Some of the Christians in America reemphasized some of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity in order to counter liberalism. They became known as “fundamentalists.” Webster defines “fundamentalism” as “a recent movement in American Protestantism reemphasizing as fundamental to Christianity belief in the inerrancy of the Scriptures, biblical miracles, especially the virgin birth and physical resurrection of Christ, etc.”

In his book *Neo-Evangelicalism*, Lightner says that fundamentalism “was born in the early part of the twentieth century in opposition to and as a reaction against liberalism.” He adds that it strongly reemphasizes the fundamentals of historic Christianity, such as: 1) the inerrancy of the Scripture, 2) the deity of Christ, 3) the virgin birth of Christ, 4) the substitutionary atonement of Christ and 5) the physical resurrection and bodily return of Christ (Lightner, p. 17).

These titles and tags have been attempts to identify the *true church* as the church which teaches the truth about Jesus, the Trinity, and salvation. If that is all people knew, they should be able to discern what is the truth and what is error. I once heard a lecture on the subject of “error.” The speaker, a good ol’ boy type, said, “If you know what a straight

stick is, you can spot a crooked one every time.” If you clearly understand the basic doctrine of Christ, you will be able to spot a cultist a mile away.

I am told that there was a time when bank tellers were taught that the way to spot a counterfeit dollar was by having them study the real thing. (Technology has changed that.) The real thing is the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and salvation by faith. Those doctrines are the touchstone of the Christian faith.

Error

Error Well, then, what is a cult? Technically, the New Testament does not define a cult. It does not even use the word! What it does say is that there is truth and there is error (1 Jn. 4:6). Obviously, error is the opposite of the truth.

As was pointed out, John defines the “spirit of truth (1 Jn. 4:6) when he says, “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God” (1 Jn. 4:2). Confessing that Jesus is come in the flesh is acknowledging that He is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22), the Son of God (Jn. 20:31), who gives eternal life to those who trust Him for it (Jn. 11:25-27). Those who acknowledge the Son have the Father (1 Jn. 2:23). In other words, the “truth” includes the deity/humanity of Christ, which involves the Trinity and salvation by faith. If that is the truth, error is the denial of the deity/humanity of Christ, the Trinity, and salvation by faith.

As was pointed out, Paul speaks about another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel (2 Cor. 11:4), which includes the doctrines of Jesus, the Trinity, and salvation (gospel). There is God, the Good Shepherd and the gospel, and there is a false god, a false shepherd and a false gospel.

Cult Instead of the word “error, the word that is used today is “cult.” What does it mean? The late Dr. Walter Martin, an authority on the cults, says cults are religious groups holding “to doctrines which are pointedly contradictory to orthodox Christianity and which yet claim the distinction of tracing their origin to orthodox sources” (Martin, *The Rise of the Cults*, p. 12). Later he condenses his definition to a religious group, which represents “a major deviation from historic orthodox Christianity relative to the cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith” (Martin, *The Rise of the Cults*, p. 12).

There is a difference, then, between a religion and a cult. A religion is an error that grew up outside of Christianity, for example, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islamism, etc. On the other hand, a cult is an error that has its origin within Christianity but denies the cardinal doctrines of Christianity. It is a group claiming to be Christian but denying the very essence of Christianity. Any group, no matter what they call themselves, what they claim, or what they contend, is a cult if it presents itself as Christian and yet denies the deity of Christ, the Trinity, or salvation by faith.

Since the cults are claiming to be the true form of Christianity, Christians must defend the faith (Jude 3).

Many of the cults not only sprung up within Christianity, they have also arisen within the borders of the United States. In an article on cults in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Witmer says, “Although heresy has been a part of the history of the Christian faith from its beginning, the modern cults are almost exclusively the product of the American ecclesiastical scene. A few of the cults are British in origin—British Israelism, for example—and some have another national origin, but the vast majority developed in the United States. Although new

cults are springing up constantly, the major ones have had their birth during the nineteenth century. Their growth nationally and their worldwide expansion have come in the twentieth century, especially since World War II; the major cults began in the nineteenth century” (Witmer, p. 250).

Witmer goes on to suggest two reasons for this phenomenon. In the first place, America has had freedom of religion. The Old World contained state religion and even state churches. As Witmer points out, “The established or state church system, even when softened by modern religious toleration laws, is not conducive to the origin and growth of the independent movements whether orthodox or heretical.” The New World was founded on the principle of separation of church and state and the freedom of religion. In such a garden, weeds can grow.

The second reason Witmer suggests for the growth of cults in the United States is our frontier spirit. He says, “The fierce independence of the frontier mentality fostered proliferation, not only of heretical cults but also of orthodox Christian groups” (Witmer, pp. 250-51).

Summary: A true church is a group that teaches the deity/humanity of Christ, Trinity, and salvation by faith; a false church, a cult, is a group that denies the deity/humanity of Christ, Trinity, and salvation by faith.

You need to know the nature of truth and the nature of error. The issue is not the name of a group; the issue is its nature. Some think, “If I know the name, I’ll know if it’s okay.” That’s dangerous. For one thing, it can make you exclude some you should include. If you’ve decided you’re a Baptist, a Methodist, or a Presbyterian and that’s all you’ll have fellowship with, you’ll exclude other believers who happen to be called by another name.

It can also make you include some you should exclude. A heretic can adopt a good name. Many Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians are liberal. A cultist can adopt a biblical, Bible-sounding name, such as the Children of God.

So it’s not the name, it’s the nature of the stuff. A bottle of medicine in the bathroom medicine cabinet may have the right label on it, but the wrong contents. To take it could be deadly, so you’d better check the contents, not just the label.

ARE LATTER DAY SAINTS REALLY SAINTS?

As a general rule, Latter Day Saints (Mormons) are sincere, hardworking, moral people. I have personally been impressed with the laymen and the leaders with whom I have interacted, with their historical sites in Palmyra, New York and Salt Lake City that I have visited and with their temple just outside of Washington, D.C., which I was able to tour. (Before they dedicate a temple, non-Mormons are allowed to take a tour through it.)

My personal opinion, however, is not the issue. Mormon teaching must be examined in the light of biblical teaching.

Their Background

Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, was born in Sharon, Vermont on December 23, 1805. Later, his family moved to Palmyra, New York, which is near Rochester.

Joseph Smith claimed that in 1820 God the Father and God the Son appeared to him. He was told that all churches were an abomination to God and that he was being charged as a prophet to restore the true gospel to the world.

In 1823, Smith said an angel named Moroni appeared to him. According to Moroni, about 600 BC, there were migrations from Palestine to North America. These people formed the Nephites and the Lamanites. Mormon was the last of the Nephites which were crushed out by the Lamanites. Moroni was the son of Mormon. The whole story was written on golden plates, which were hidden in a hill near modern-day Palmyra, New York. According to Joseph Smith, when he was informed of all of this by the angel Moroni, he desired to see the plates but was told that he could not have them for four more years.

In 1827, Smith said he was permitted to take the plates home. They were inscribed with “reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics,” which Smith was able to translate by means of a huge pair of spectacles called the urim and the thummin. In 1830, he published the results as the *Book of Mormon*.

On April 6, 1830, the first 100% American church was formed by six people at Fayette, New York. In 1831, Joseph Smith and his followers moved to Cortland, Ohio. From there, they went to Zion, Missouri, where, according to them, the Garden of Eden once existed. In 1839, they were required to leave Missouri by order of Governor Boggs.

Smith led the Mormons to Illinois, where they built a city named Nauvoo. There he instituted the practice of polygamy. When a local newspaper took a stand against the Mormons, Smith ordered the newspaper destroyed. As a result, he was arrested and placed in jail in Carthage, Illinois. On June 27, 1844, an angry mob of 200 stormed the jail and shot Smith.

Brigham Young then led the Mormons on a strenuous journey toward the west until they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley of Utah in July of 1847. He guided the church as the first President until his death in 1877. He had considerable influence on Mormon theology. He also encouraged polygamy and took twenty-five wives for himself. His house, with a room for each wife, still stands in Salt Lake City.

There are at least six different Mormon denominations. The largest by far is the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which accepts Brigham Young as the

true successor of Joseph Smith. The second largest group is the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, with headquarters in Independence, Missouri. They claim the President of the church must be a descendant of Joseph Smith.

Today, the LDS Church, based in Salt Lake City, Utah, has extensive business holdings. One book on the cults says, “Mormon Church holdings include the Bonneville International Corporation, the Beneficial Life Insurance Company, the Elberta Form Corporation, the Hawaiian Polynesian Cultural Center, and the Management System Corporation. The church invests in many corporate enterprises, including 28 million dollars worth of stock in the Times Mirror Corporation, publishers of the *Los Angeles Times*.” Two of the Mormon church’s largest contributors are J. Willard Marriott (billionaire hotel and restaurant owner) and the Osmond family of entertainers” (Passantino, p. 90, published in 1981). A 2013 Reuters news story reported that among the LDS Church’s biggest donors are former presidential candidate Mitt Romney and entertainer Donny Osmond.

Their Beliefs

Joseph Smith unashamedly claimed to be the restorer of true Christianity. In his book *Pearl of Great Price*, he himself tells of being visited by two “personages” in 1820, who he identified as God the Father and God the Son. They told him all churches were wrong and a restoration of true Christianity was needed. It also said that he had been chosen to launch the new dispensation (*Pearl of Great Price*, 2:1-25). That is putting it mildly. Joseph Smith went on to say is that he was told by God the Father and God the Son that all the creeds of all the churches in all of Christendom were an abomination and all the professors in those churches were corrupt.

If all other forms of Christianity are wrong, what is the correct view, according to Joseph Smith? Smith claimed that he had received the revelation of the “Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints.” It consists of thirteen brief general statements on the main points of Mormon belief, which is, according to them, true Christianity. Their official doctrinal statement reads as follows:

1. We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.
2. We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.
3. We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.
4. We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.
5. We believe that a man must be called of God by prophecy and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.
6. We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.
7. We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.

8. We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.
9. We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.
10. We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.
11. We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.
12. We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.
13. We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul-We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things (www.mormon.org/articles-of-faith).

Beyond the official doctrinal statement, there are other doctrines that Mormons believe. These are not in the official statement, but they are official beliefs. For example, Mormons believe that the Jews came to America about 600 BC. The *Book of Mormon* claims to be a history of two ancient civilizations on the American continent. The first of these two left the Tower of Babel, crossed into Europe, and emigrated into central America. These were the Jaredites who became wicked and killed each other off. Their civilizations were totally destroyed.

The second group left Jerusalem about 600 BC. They crossed the Pacific and landed in what is now called Peru. Lehi, their leader, had two sons, Nephi and Laman. Christ appeared to the Nephites to preach the gospel to them. The Lamanites were wicked, so God cursed them with dark skin. The American Indians are Lamanites, dark-skinned Israelites from the tribe of Manasseh.

Mormon was a Nephite prophet who wrote all this “history” on plates in the 4th century AD. He hid them in a hill in New York and his son, Moroni, hid even more.

Somewhere around 400 AD, the Nephites and the Lamanites assembled for a final battle near the hill Cumorah in modern-day Palmyra, New York. The Lamanites annihilated the Nephites. The golden plates were supposedly hidden in the hills. Joseph Smith claims that he was given these plates fourteen hundred years later.

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints also practices baptism for the dead. They have millions of names in a database in Salt Lake City. They use these records to trace their ancestors as far back as the 15th century. The Mormons are then baptized for each of their ancestors, so they, too, will be saved.

Mormons practice celestial marriage. Those who solemnize their marriage in a Mormon temple believe that they will have their wives with them in the next life. There will be no new marriages in heaven.

Biblical Evaluation

A biblical evaluation of any group should center on the doctrines of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and justification by faith (see chapter 1). Since, however, those doctrines rest on authority, which is the Scripture, a group's view of the Bible should also be considered.

The New Testament is the finality of revelation. Jude 3 says that the faith was once delivered to the saints. Revelation 22:18 says that no one is to add anything to the Scripture. Some argue that this verse in Revelation only applies to the book of Revelation, but isn't it fascinating, to say the least, that the last two books of the Bible say something about finality?

The Scripture The Mormon doctrine of Scripture is defective. Granted, they say they accept the Bible as the Word of God (Article 8), but they add "as far as it is translated correctly." Their official statement says the *Book of Mormon* is also Scripture (Article 8). Furthermore, they believe that further revelation is possible (Articles 7 and 9). Since that original statement, they have added the *Doctrine and Covenants* and *Pearl of Great Price* to the canon of what they call Authorized Scripture. Thus, Mormons have four authoritative books, but the *Book of Mormon* is primary. On top of all of that, the president of the Church can and does receive periodic revelations.

The *Book of Mormon* is not the Word of God. That is evident from such biblical passages as Jude 3 and Revelation 22:18. Beyond that, examine the facts. In his book *Cults, World Religions and You*, Kenneth Boa says, "Here are just a few of the problems with the Book of Mormon:

"1) Joseph Smith allowed only a few 'witnesses' to see the alleged golden plates which were taken into heaven by the angel Moroni. There were two sets of witnesses, a group of three (Oliver Cowdry, David Witmer, and Martin Harris) and a group of eight. The people in the first group were later denounced by Smith as men of low character. Furthermore, their stories did not agree and Harris admitted that he only saw the plates "by the eye of faith." Of the second set of witnesses, four were Witmers, and the fifth was married to a Witmer, and the remaining three were Smith's father and two brothers. The Witmers were later expelled from the church as apostates and repudiated by Smith. This leaves no reliable witnesses on the plates.

"2) Though the *Book of Mormon* was buried in A. D. 428, it contains about 2500 verbatim quotations from the A.D. 1611 King James Version of the Bible! This is a 1200 to 2200 year acronym (depending on what book within the Book of Mormon is being considered). The words of Christ, Peter, Paul, John, and other New Testament writers are indiscriminately placed in the mouths of people who lived centuries before Christ and all copied from the King James Version. This is especially interesting since these plates were allegedly translated by Smith from 'reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics.' In addition to this obvious plagiarism, the *Book of Mormon* is written in a wordy imitation of the biblical style of the early 17th century.

"3) The book is full of historical and factual errors. For instance, the American Indians are of Mongoloid extraction, not Semitic, as the *Book of Mormon* claims. There is no archeological evidence to support the existence of the huge civilizations described in the Book of Mormon. Everything known about the pre-Columbian archeology of the Americas contradicts Mormon claims.

“4) Over 2000 corrections have been made in the *Book of Mormon* since the 1830 edition. Many of these changed the meaning of the text. This is strange since Smith claimed his translation was divinely given. In spite of all these contradictions, the book still abounds with factual and grammatical errors, anachronisms, contradictions, and false prophecies. Smith even copied translation errors of the King James Version as he was plagiarizing verses.

“5) There is no such thing as ‘reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics’ and certainly, this is not the language spoken by the early inhabitants of the Americas.

“6) Most researchers on the subject agree that the *Book of Mormon* is actually Smith’s expression of a romance novel called *Manuscript Found* written by a retired minister named Solomon Spaulding. The story behind Smith’s ‘translation’ of the *Pearl of Great Price* is even more bizarre. (Smith purportedly bought from a traveling showman some mummies, which were wrapped in papyrus sheets containing the writings of Abraham.)”

More, much more, could be added. For example, the Bible says Jesus was born in Bethlehem and the *Book of Mormon* says He was born in Jerusalem (Alma 7:9-10).

Many have claimed the *Book of Mormon* was originally a novel written by New England author Solomon Spaulding, who died in 1816. Many of Spaulding’s relatives and friends claim the work was his. In an 1830 review of it, Alexander Campbell snickered over the way a book, supposedly written 1400 years earlier, provided answers to each and every question that inflamed western New York in the 1820s.

Officially, the LDS Church says both the Bible and the *Book of Mormon* are inspired, but practically, the *Book of Mormon* is their book. Active Mormons know more about it than they do the Bible. When the *Book of Mormon* and the Bible differ, they go with the *Book of Mormon* every time, usually claiming that the Bible was either inaccurately translated or misunderstood. And what determines what is correctly translated? Mormon doctrine, of course.

The Trinity The New Testament teaches the doctrine of the Trinity. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus told the apostles to baptize in the name (singular) and then gave three names: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Such a statement indicates the deity of Christ and the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit.

The Mormon doctrine of God is a departure from New Testament Christianity. Although Article 1 sounds as if their view is sound, and if you were to ask them if they believed in the Trinity, they would say yes; still, an examination of their explanation reveals a departure. Joseph Smith taught that there were many gods: “In the beginning, the head of the gods called a council of the gods and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 6, sermon by prophet Joseph Smith, p. 5). He also taught that God the Father had a body: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also. But the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones but is a personage of spirit” (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 130:22). But the Bible is clear: God the Father does *not* have a body. He is called the invisible God (Col. 1:15). Furthermore, Jesus said God is Spirit (John 4:24), and He Himself said that a spirit, by definition, does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:37-39).

A Mormon elder once challenged Dr. Walter Martin (1928-1989), an authority on the cults, claiming that he could show from the Scripture that God had a body. He reeled off Bible verses such as “underneath the everlasting arms.” He pointed to the fact that Daniel

said the Lord wrote on the wall and that God's hair was white as snow, etc. He concluded that God had eyes, ears, nose, hands, mouth, feet, and fingers.

In response, Dr. Martin pointed the elder to Psalm 91:4, which says, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings, thou shalt trust." Sarcastically, Martin suggested that God was a chicken! He also pointed out that the same verse that says God's hair is as white as snow says that out of His mouth goes a two-edged sword. Again, he sarcastically asked if this Mormon elder believed that God had a sword for a tongue.

Obviously, the Bible uses metaphors to describe God. His power is pictured as an arm that protects us, as an eye that never closes, and an ear that never stops listening. By no stretch of the imagination do these references mean that God has a body. The Christian doctrine of the incarnation is the belief which says that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, for the first time permanently took on a body. The Greek word "incarnation" means "in flesh." It is Jesus Christ who has a body and who is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). God the Father and God the Holy Spirit do not have a body.

The Deity of Christ In that the Mormons claim that they believe in the Trinity, they claim that they believe in the deity of Christ. However, in reality, they deny the deity of Christ because they teach that He was the natural offspring of Adam and Mary. They also teach that Jesus Christ was a polygamist who married two Marys and Martha, and He had children.

After studying Mormonism for years, Dr. Walter Martin said, "The difference between Christianity and Mormonism is the difference between polytheism and monotheism. You can't have both at the same time any more than you can have a light-dark, wet-dry day."

The Doctrine of Salvation The New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ died to pay for all sin (Col. 2:13) and that salvation is by faith alone (Eph. 2:8). Mormonism rejects the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. Article 3 of their official doctrinal statement says, "We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel." What do they mean by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel? Article 4 answers: "We believe that the first principles and oracles of the gospel are: faith, repentance, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, the laying on of hands." In short, Mormonism teaches baptismal regeneration (III Nephi 11:31-34; Ether 4:17-18).

In one of my visits to the LDS Church Visitors Center in Salt Lake City, I saw a statue of Abel before an altar. On the altar was grain, not a lamb. Perhaps they have an explanation for this, but it seems to me that that statue was symbolic of all Mormonism. They are not trusting in the Lamb of God; they are trusting in the work of their own hands (on a subsequent visit, this statue was not there).

Paul said, "Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). Joseph Smith claimed that an angel appeared to him and that he was commissioned to preach a gospel that is another gospel. If an angel did appear to Joseph Smith, it was one of hell's angels. There is a doctrine of demons (1 Tim. 4:1). The doctrines of Mormonism are clearly demonic.

Summary: Mormonism is a cult because it does not teach the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and salvation by faith alone in Christ alone.

That is not to negate the fact that the Latter Day Saints are moral, sincere, hardworking people, but they are not “saints” in the New Testament sense of the term. They deny, in essence, the Trinity and teach baptismal regeneration.

Does the New Testament teach that one must be baptized in order to be saved? Is there a clear case in the New Testament where a person was saved before he was baptized? And if there is, what do the Mormons say about it?

When I was a student in seminary, I pastored a small, rural Baptist church in northeast Texas. A woman in the congregation had an unsaved husband who, shortly after I became the pastor, trusted Jesus Christ as his savior. The couple began to grow spiritually. Then one day, they announced that two Mormon missionaries had moved next door to them and wanted to have a Bible study with them.

Wanting to protect these young believers in the faith and also wanting to learn about Mormonism myself, I asked if I could attend the eight studies. The missionaries agreed, so I came. At the end of the first study, they gave us a homework assignment. We were to pray and ask God to reveal to us whether or not Joseph Smith was a prophet.

The next week, the Mormon missionaries began the second lesson by asking, “Have you asked God to reveal to you if Joseph Smith is a prophet?”

We all said, “No.”

They said, “Well, would you?”

And we said, “No.”

Then they asked why. I replied, “Because you have it backward. You want me to determine that Joseph Smith is a prophet and then accept all that he says as an accurate prophecy. The Bible teaches it is the other way around. You test a prophet by his prophecy. If what he says is true, he is a true prophet. If he is once wrong, he is not a prophet.”

The two young lady missionaries teaching the class didn’t know how to handle that, so they asked if they could bring two elders to the next session. We agreed.

The next week, the two Mormon elders started by asking, “Will you pray and ask God to show you if Joseph Smith is a prophet?” Again, we replied in the negative. They pressed us on the issue, but we maintained our position. They responded by suggesting that we were not going to receive what they had to say, so we might as well not continue with the lesson. I insisted that they promised us eight lessons on Mormonism. We wanted to hear what they had to say.

“Why don’t you just give us the lessons and we will determine whether or not it is the truth?” I reasoned.

Their response was, “Your heart has been hardened and you will not receive the truth.”

I pressed them for the eight lessons. After a bit more discussion, one of them said, “You must feel that there is some doctrine of Mormonism that isn’t correct. What would you like to discuss?”

I then asked, “What does the *Book of Mormon* teach about baptism?”

Knowing my position, they gave me an answer they knew I would accept. They said the *Book of Mormon* teaches that babies should not be baptized and that baptism is by immersion. They read me a passage or two to support what they had said.

My response was, “That’s great. So far, so good, but what else does the *Book of Mormon* say about baptism?” After I urged them to give me an answer, they admitted that the *Book of Mormon* taught that one had to be baptized in order to be saved.

I informed them that that was at variance with what the Scriptures taught. I read them Acts 10 from the King James Version. In that passage, Paul says, “Whosoever believeth in him shall receive the remission of sins.” Several verses later, Luke adds, “While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all of them which heard the word.” Still later in the passage, Peter said, “Can anyone forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” (Acts 10:47). I pointed out that they received the Holy Spirit before they were baptized and that receiving the Holy Spirit is tantamount to salvation (Rom. 8:9).

The two Mormon elders looked at me and said, “There is no sense in us giving you our answer. Your heart is hardened and you will not receive the truth.”

Again, I pressed them to discuss this with me, reminding them that they had promised us eight lessons on Mormonism. I told them that I would love to hear their answer. It was then that they told me there was a difference between the Holy Spirit and the Holy Ghost.

I was shocked! I had never heard of such a thing. With the palm of my hand, I hit my forehead and said, “Oh, no!” and turned, for by that time, we were standing by the door, to reach for my Greek text in my briefcase. When I looked up again, they were gone.

ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES TRUE WITNESSES?

Jehovah's Witnesses are sincere people. They genuinely believe that what they teach is right and they have the right to believe it and teach it.

Jehovah's Witnesses are studious people. One of the most dedicated lay Bible students I've known was a Jehovah's Witness. If members of my church studied their Bible as much as the Jehovah's Witnesses studied theirs, I'd have a congregation of very knowledgeable believers.

Jehovah's Witnesses are hard-working people. They canvass one neighborhood after another until they've covered a town. Then they start all over. I've admired their zeal. Their plan is to visit every home in the United States three times every year.

My personal opinion of them is not the issue. The issue is their teaching. Does it agree with the Bible? In order to take a peek inside the Watchtower and understand them as a group, we need to first understand their background and their beliefs. Then we can give a proper biblical evaluation.

Their Background

What is known today as the Watchtower Society, popularly called the Jehovah's Witnesses, was started by Charles Taze Russell. Russell was born on February 16, 1852 and reared in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, where he was indoctrinated in the Reformed Christian faith. He was reared in a Congregational church that evidently preached hellfire and damnation. As a boy, he spent Saturday evenings writing with chalk on fences warning people to attend church on the following Sunday that they might escape the torments of everlasting fire.

Later, an encounter with a skeptic moved him from this fiery orthodoxy to rigid unbelief. It was then that he met a Seventh-day Adventist and his faith in Christianity, especially the Second Coming, was restored.

In 1870, at the age of 18, Russell organized a Bible class in Pittsburgh which in 1876 elected him pastor though he was never ordained. When he began to disagree with the Adventists on several points, especially the atonement, he launched his own magazine. In 1879, it was called the *Herald of Morning*. In 1884, "Pastor" Russell incorporated the Zion Watchtower Tract Society in Pittsburg, New York and began the publication called *Zion Watchtower*. In 1886, the society published the first in a series of seven books, six of which were written by Russell, entitled *Studies in the Scripture*. The headquarters of the movement was transferred to Brooklyn, New York, in 1908. Russell continued his teaching until his death on October 31, 1916, aboard a transcontinental train in Texas.

During his lifetime, Russell wrote voluminously. It is claimed that his explanatory writings of the Bible were far more extensive than the combined writings of Paul, John, Arius, Waldo, Wycliffe, and Martin Luther, "the six messengers of the church who preceded him," and that "the place next to Saint Paul in the Gallery of Fame as expositors of the gospel of the Great Master will be occupied by Charles Taze Russell." He also spoke incessantly, often six and eight hours a day. It is claimed that he traveled as much as Bishop

Asbury [an English-born Methodist who crisscrossed the US for 45 years, racking up a reported 300,000 miles on foot and on horseback] and the apostle Paul combined, averaging, according to one author, thirty thousand miles per year. Appropriately, Russell, the zealot who became increasingly frail and ill as he compassed land and sea to make proselytes, died while traveling from Texas to New York in 1916.

When Pastor Russell died, Judge Rutherford was elected president of the Society. Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869-1942) was a lawyer and an assistant judge in Booneville, Illinois, before moving to New York. Rutherford was conspicuously different from his predecessor in his lack of public ministry. Russell was always among the people; Rutherford was secretive and unavailable. At conventions, he appeared mysteriously and disappeared as soon as he had spoken. Yet, like his predecessor, he was a voluminous author. His literary output was even greater. He died in 1942 at age 72. Rutherford's doctrinal differences with Russell were very slight, but in 1931 Rutherford decided to call his organization Jehovah's Witnesses from Isaiah 43:10 in an attempt to eliminate any connection with Pastor Russell.

Mormonism is built on Smith and Young. The Watchtower Society is built on Russell and Rutherford. Mormons know and promote their founders. Jehovah's Witnesses do not. The third president, Nathan Homer Knorr (1905-1977), ignored Rutherford just as Rutherford had ignored Russell before him. In fact, many modern Witnesses do not even recognize the names of these pillars of their faith.

Their Beliefs

The Watchtower Society claims that all denominations are apostates from the Word of God and they are the only true witnesses of God on the earth. Russell likened Christian churches to the Antichrist of the book of Revelation and declared that because they were so evil, the true believer must come out from among them and be clean. Rutherford regarded all religions as of the devil. He declared, "The greatest racket ever invented and practiced is that of religion . . . There are numerous systems of religion, but the most subtle, flagrant, and injurious to mankind is that which is generally labeled the Christian religion" (Rutherford, cited by Gerstner, p. 38).

Using Matthew 24:45-47, Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the Master only uses "one organization and not a multitude of diverse and conflicting sects to distribute His message." According to them, the "faithful and discreet slave" is the Watchtower Society. They also claim that 144,000 "anointed" Christians will go to heaven as spirits, while the rest of saved humanity will live on the earth.

Although they have no official doctrinal statement, their beliefs can be summarized in the following ten statements:

1. There is one solitary being from all eternity, Jehovah God, the creator and preserver of the universe and of all things visible and invisible.
2. The Word or Logos is "a god," a mighty god, the beginning in the creation of Jehovah, and His active agent in the creation of all things.
3. The Bible is the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God as it was originally given.
4. Man was created in the image of Jehovah but willfully sinned. Hence, all men are born sinners.

5. The atonement is a ransom paid to Jehovah God by Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus removed the effects of Adam's sin and laid the foundation of the New World of Righteousness.

6. The second coming of Christ has already taken place in three stages: In 1874, Christ came to the upper air and later caught up the apostles and dead members of the 144,000. In 1914, Christ ended the time of the Gentiles and began to reign. In 1918, He came to the spiritual temple and began the judgment of the nations.

7. At the Battle of Armageddon, Christ will lead Jehovah's forces to victory over evil.

8. After Armageddon, the Millennium will start. Everyone who was annihilated [which is their concept of death] will be recreated and given a second chance to believe and obey Jehovah.

9. Those who succeed will enjoy a perfect earth forever. The 144,000 will remain in heaven with Christ.

10. Those who fail will be permanently destroyed [there is no hell].

Thus, the purpose of creation and the goal of history will be reached, that is, the vindication of the name Jehovah.

Of course, the Watchtower Society has other doctrines. For example, they do not participate in earthly governments. They believe that Witnesses are ambassadors of God's kingdom and as such are free from any obligation to earthly governments. They do not salute the flag of any nation, nor enlist in any army, nor participate in elections or politics. They also refuse blood transfusions, contending that a blood transfusion is eating blood, which is forbidden in Scripture. Nor do they observe any holidays. Christmas and Easter are, in their view, of pagan origin and therefore displeasing to God. Birthdays exalt the creature, making him the center of attention rather than the creator.

Biblical Evaluation

The Scripture The Watchtower Society believes in the inspiration and even in the infallibility of the Scriptures. However, even though they believe the Bible is the Word of God, there are still two issues that must be noted. In the first place, they have their own translation of the Bible, which is faulty. The translators of the *New World Translation* were anonymous. There is really no way of knowing the credentials of the men who did the translation work. One author says, "It is clearly not a competent piece of work. It often distorts passages in order to make them conform to the erroneous doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses" (Boa, p. 76).

When the *New World Translation* was first released in 1950, Dr. Walter Martin formulated a list of questions based on the Greek text and sent them to the Watchtower Society by registered mail. He received a letter that informed him that all the answers to his questions were found in the appendix of the book. Upon investigation, he discovered that there was nothing in the appendix that had "anything remotely to do with the questions which I'd asked."

So, Dr. Martin sent them a second letter and suggested that they answer his questions point by point and if they couldn't to at least give him the names of the Greek scholars who translated their Bible so that he could come and talk with them. He was then informed that the Watchtower Society does not identify any of its Greek scholars publicly for the sake of preserving humility.

Martin then challenged their Greek scholars to a debate on national radio, coast to coast, on ABC and offered them four hours of prime time to debate what their translation said and whether it was true. He has made that offer on radio and television, and from hundreds of pulpits, and even at Watchtower conventions. Martin sent them many registered letters and never received a reply.

One of his early challenges to them concerned John 8:58. In their first edition, a footnote on that verse said, "Should be translated, 'I have being,' not 'I am' as in Exodus 3:14. This is due to the usage of the perfect indefinite tense of the Greek verse." The problem with that is that there is no such thing as the "perfect indefinite tense" in the Greek language. Dr. Walter Martin informed them of that. They deleted it from subsequent editions. Unfortunately, they have not corrected other serious errors in their translation.

In the second place, their attitude is that they are infallible interpreters of the infallible Word. In one of his books, entitled *Studies in the Scriptures*, Russell goes so far as to say that it would be better to leave the Bible unread and read his studies than to read the Bible and ignore his studies. Rutherford adopted a similar attitude toward his own pronouncements. Anyone who knows anything at all about Jehovah's Witnesses knows that their notion of an infallible interpreter is entrenched. The organization is utterly authoritarian. Differences of opinion are simply not tolerated. Defectors from the party line are excommunicated from membership.

The Trinity The Watchtower Society categorically rejects the doctrine of the Trinity. They claim that such a doctrine is not of God, but rather originated with Satan. They call the God of the Trinity a complicated, freakish, three-headed God. To them, the doctrine is unscriptural and unreasonable. "There are," says H. E. Pennock, "some clergymen no doubt who are really sincere in thinking that Jesus was his own father and the Almighty as the son of himself and that each one of these is a third person who is the same as the other two and yet different from them."

One of their objections to the doctrine of the Trinity is that the word "trinity" is not in the Bible. That's true. The word is not there, but the idea is. Perhaps they should be reminded that the term "theocratic kingdom" is not in the Bible either, a phrase they use all the time.

The Deity of Christ Jehovah's Witnesses also reject the true and full deity of Jesus Christ. In their view, Jesus is "a" god, a mighty god, the beginning of the creation of Jehovah and the active agent in the creation of all things. In their book *Let God Be True*, they say, "Who ran the universe during the three days that Jesus was dead in the grave? If Jesus was God, then during Jesus' death, God was dead and in the grave If Jesus was the immortal God, he could not have died" (*Let God Be True*, p. 109).

Furthermore, they believe that Jesus Christ was really just Michael the Archangel. The virgin birth was simply a change of nature from spirit to human. Christ did live a sinless life, but He was only raised in spirit; His body dissolved in gases.

In contrast to the Watchtower Society, the Bible teaches the deity of Jesus Christ. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Granted, there is no article before the word "God" in John 1:1, but that does not mean that Jesus was a god. The absence of the article in Greek emphasizes quality. That verse should be translated, "and the Word was deity"! A few verses later, John said, "And the Word [that is, deity] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). Later, in the

Gospel of John, the apostle Thomas, talking to Jesus Christ, exclaimed, “My Lord and My God!” (Jn. 20:28). Jesus did not rebuke him for referring to Him as God. Rather, He said, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (Jn. 20:29). Although these and many other verses clearly teach the deity of Christ, Jehovah’s Witnesses reject the use of these verses as support of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Since Jehovah’s Witnesses do accept the fact that Jehovah is God, one method of demonstrating the deity of Christ to them that is sometimes effective, is to show that “Jesus” is the same as “Jehovah.” For example, when Moses asked Jehovah what His name was, He replied, “I am who I am.” He told Moses to tell the children of Israel, “I am has sent me to you” (Ex. 3:13-14). Jehovah, then, is “I am.” Jesus claimed that He was “I am” when He said, “Most assuredly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM (John 8:28).”

Jehovah of the Old Testament is called the first and the last (Isa. 44:6). Revelation 22 identifies the first and the last as Jesus Christ (Rev. 22:12-16). By the way, Revelation 1:8 calls the Lord, that is, God, the Almighty, the Alpha and the Omega. Jehovah’s Witnesses agree that Revelation 1:8 is a reference to Jehovah, yet Revelation 22:13 calls Jesus the Alpha and the Omega.

The verse, which is the cornerstone of all Jehovah’s Witness doctrine, demonstrates the contradiction and inconsistency in their view of Jesus. Isaiah 43:10 says, “‘You are My witnesses,’ says the Lord, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I *am* He. Before Me there was no god formed, nor shall there be after Me.’” That verse emphatically declares that there were no gods formed before or after Jehovah. Then how can, according to Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus be a god? That is a contradiction within their own system. The truth is they have two gods: Jehovah and Jesus, who is a god.

Walter Martin tells of a converted Jehovah’s Witness who says that what bothered him was Hebrews 1:6, which teaches that the angels worshipped Jesus, but Jesus Himself said, “You shall worship the Lord your God. and Him only shall you serve” (Lk. 4:8).

The Doctrine of Salvation Whereas the New Testament teaches that Christ died to pay for all sin and thus salvation is by faith and faith alone (Col. 2:13; Eph. 2:8,9), the Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that Christ’s death removed the effects of Adam’s sin and put man in the position to work for his own salvation. According to their doctrine, forgiveness is only the beginning. People must actively pursue sanctification throughout their life. If they should lose forgiveness only once, there is no coming back. Their destiny thereafter becomes eternal annihilation.

Summary: Jehovah’s Witness is a cult because it rejects and denies the Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, and salvation by faith.

This is much more serious than one group, us, disagreeing with another group, them. If their view is right, we have no Savior.

When I was a pastor in rural Texas, there was a non-Christian named Melvin who lived across the street from the church. He once told me that he frequently sat on his front porch in a rocking chair, looking at all the hypocrites going in and out of our church. One day Melvin had a heart attack. When he woke up in the hospital, I was literally sitting on the side of his bed. To make a long story short, I had the opportunity to lead Melvin to Christ. He grew in the faith rapidly.

One day as I passed his house, I saw two Jehovah's Witnesses standing at his door. I immediately decided to visit Melvin. As I stepped onto the porch, I discovered that his wife was talking to them and was greatly relieved to see me arrive. As I engaged the two visitors in conversation, I said, "Oh, you don't believe in the deity of Christ? What about John 1:1?"

They said, "Oh, the Greek text says..."

My response to them was, "My name is Cocoris, which is Greek and I have my Greek New Testament in the car. If I get it, will you please show me that in the Greek text?"

It was then that they embarrassingly admitted that they didn't know Greek. (By the way, neither did Russell and, furthermore, he was forced to admit that in court under oath.) I then assured them that I did know Greek and that there was no doubt in my mind that that and other passages taught the deity of Christ.

I went on to explain why the deity of Christ is so critically important. The way I put it to them years ago is this: If Jesus Christ were not God, His death for our sins was of no more value than the death of a dog.

IS CHRISTIAN SCIENCE REALLY CHRISTIAN?

What could be more appealing to a modern American mind? Imagine an organization called “Christian Science.” Ah, that must incorporate all that is Christian and all that is science. At last, someone has combined the moral and spiritual with the mental and intellectual. That has got to be a winning combination.

Look at that “church.” They have “reading rooms.” They publish the respected newspaper *The Christian Science Monitor*. They have attracted the educated and the wealthy. Surely this is the group for the modern American.

Furthermore, they claim to heal the sick. Healing is the hallmark of Christian Science. What could be more attractive than teaching that includes moral values, scientific data, and compassion?

Is Christian Science Christian? Is it Christian in the truest sense of the term?

Their Background

Mary Ann Morse Baker was born in 1821 in Bow, New Hampshire. Strict Congregational parents reared her. At the age of twelve, Mary denied predestination and other truths while being admitted to the Congregational church. Her youth was marred by various sicknesses and spinal problems.

In 1843, she married a businessman named George Washington Glover. He died of yellow fever in 1844. Their son George was born a few months later, in 1845. This traumatic event, coupled with her illness, seriously affected her emotionally and mentally.

In 1853, she married a dentist named Daniel M. Patterson. This was an unhappy marriage partly because of her physical and emotional difficulties. After thirteen years, he left her, and after seven more, she got a divorce.

In 1863, she went to Portland, Maine to be healed of her spinal illness by Dr. P. P. Quimby, who had developed a system of mental healing he called “the science of healing” or “Christian science.” She was cured through his technique and became a dedicated disciple. She spent hours compiling notes from his teachings and manuscripts. Many feel that her book, *Science and Health*, contains much of Quimby’s material.

In 1866, she claimed she fell on an icy sidewalk and was pronounced incurable. She was given three days to live. On the third day, February 1, she read Matthew 9:2 (the story of Jesus healing a paralytic) and suddenly found herself miraculously healed. This, she says, was her discovery of Christian Science.

From 1866 to 1882, she taught the principles of Christian Science in Lynn, Massachusetts. In 1875, she published the first edition of *Science and Health*. In 1877, at the age of 56, she married Asa Gilbert Eddy, a sewing machine salesman. In 1879, the Church of Christ, Scientist was incorporated.

She later moved to Boston and established the Massachusetts Metaphysical College, where she taught from 1881 to 1889. She died in 1910 at the age of 89.

Mary Baker Eddy was a disciple of P. P. Quimby. He developed a pantheistic metaphysical system that emphasized mental healing. Actually, several groups were founded on his basic ideas. One was Christian Science. Mary Baker Eddy denied that her

theories came from him, but many contend that she was heavily dependent on him. Julius Dresser and Warren Evans were disciples of Quimby, who developed the New Thought cult. Charles and Myrtle Fillmore built the Unity School of Christianity on the same idea.

Their Beliefs

I once walked into a Christian Science reading room and asked for a statement of their basic beliefs. I was given, free of charge, a small booklet entitled “Questions and Answers on Christian Science.” On page 2, it said, “4. When did your church start—and why? In 1879 fifteen people living in the Boston area met together and voted to form an organization to be called the Church of Christ, Scientist. They were all students of Mary Baker Eddy, and it was on motion of Mrs. Eddy that they voted to ‘organize a church designed to commemorate the word and works of our Master, which should reinstate primitive Christianity and its lost element of healing.’ That’s the reason our church came into existence.”

Note Christian Science claims to be the reinstitution of Christianity.

Christian Science has a magazine called *The Science Sentinel*. In the fall of 1980, they ran a series of articles entitled “Why Christian Science is not a Cult.” In the last article, it said, “Christian Scientists are Christians and love true Christianity wherever it is found. They recognize and can respond deeply to the Christian spirit expressed by fundamentalists, evangelicals, Roman Catholics, or those of no formal religious persuasion.

“At the same time, however, Christian Scientists know the validity and depth of their own Christian roots. It was the purpose of Mary Baker Eddy, who discovered and founded Christian Science, to free thought to respond to the ever-present Christ that made the life of Jesus unique in the history of mankind. She was appalled at the overlay of centuries of so-called orthodoxy that smothered the freshness and power of the actual Christian message and claimed exclusively to represent Christianity. Christian Science came out from legalism and pietism and broke with superficial religiosity.

“It is, of course, the lives of Christian Scientists that must bear ultimate witness to the fresh vision of Christianity that Christian Science represents. Our Master himself said, ‘By their fruits, ye shall know them.’ That is the sacred test of discipleship.”

So, while in one breath, they seem to acknowledge Christianity in other groups, in the next breath, they seem to deny it.

What is their official doctrinal statement? Christian Science does not have an official doctrinal statement as such. The closest thing to it is on pages 496-7 in *Science and Health*, which reads as follows:

Question. Have Christian Scientists any religious creed?

Answer. They have not, if by that term is meant doctrinal beliefs. The following is a brief exposition of the important points, or religious tenets, or Christian Science:

1. As adherents of Truth, we take the inspired Word of the Bible as our sufficient guide to eternal Life.

2 We acknowledge and adore one supreme and infinite God. We acknowledge His Son, one Christ; the Holy Ghost or divine Comforter; and man in God's image and likeness.

3. We acknowledge God's forgiveness of sin in the destruction of sin and the spiritual understanding that casts out evil as unreal. But the belief in sin is punished so long as the belief lasts.

4. We acknowledge Jesus' atonement as the evidence of divine, efficacious Love, unfolding man's unity with God through Christ Jesus the Way-shower; and we acknowledge that man is saved through Christ, through Truth, Life, and Love as demonstrated by the Galilean Prophet in healing the sick and overcoming sin and death.

5. We acknowledge that the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection served to uplift faith to understand eternal Life, even the allness of Soul, Spirit, and the nothingness of matter.

6. And we solemnly promise to watch and pray for that Mind to be in us which was also in Christ Jesus; to do unto others as we would have them do unto us; and to be merciful, just, and pure.

Beyond that statement by Mary Baker Eddy, the basic premises of Christian Science looks something like this:

1. God is all; all is God.
2. God is spiritual and good.
3. Therefore, since all is spiritual and good, nothing material or evil exists. Matter, sin, sickness and suffering are an illusion.

One author explained it like this: "Precisely because the good God is all, and all is God, therefore all is good, and therefore there could not possibly be evil. So evil could not be. Evil is all illusion; or, another way the Scientists put it: 'All sin is insanity in different degrees....'"

"If God, who is spiritual, is all, then nothing unspiritual can exist. Matter, therefore, cannot exist, and if matter cannot exist, certainly an aberration of matter, called sickness, cannot exist...."

"Christian Science finds both of these equally easy. It heals men by assuring them that they are not sick, and it saves men by assuring them that they have never sinned" (Gerstner, pp. 78-79).

That's the foundation. There are other ideas built into the structure. For example, they frown on hospitals to the extent that if one relies on medical treatment, he is not relying fully on Christian Science. They also despise poverty. Poverty is a false belief in material lack or material limitations. Furthermore, they reject the belief that hell is a future place. To them, heaven and hell are states of thought, not places. In "Questions and Answers on Christian Science," they say,

10. Do you believe in heaven and hell?

To us, heaven and hell are states of thought, not places. People experience their own heaven or hell right here in proportion as they draw

closer to the love of God or fall into the confusion and torment of dead-end materialism.

A Biblical Evaluation

The Scripture Christian Science says it believes in the inspiration of the Bible. Mrs. Eddy's brief exposition of important points of Christian Science says, "We take the inspired Word of the Bible as our sufficient guide to eternal Life." That's their "official" position, but several observations need to be made.

Mrs. Eddy discredits the Bible by claiming that thousands of "mistakes" have crept into the text, including lies. For example, Mrs. Eddy says, "The manifest mistakes in the ancient versions; the thirty thousand different readings in the Old Testament, and the three hundred thousand in the New—these facts show how a mortal and material sense stole into the divine record, darkening to some extent, the inspired pages with its own hue" (Eddy, *Science and Health*, p. 33).

Referring to Genesis 2:7, she says, "Is this addition to His creation real or unreal? Is it the truth? Or is it a lie concerning man and God? It must be the latter" (Eddy, *Science and Health*, p. 517). Who determines what is a mistake or a lie? You guessed it. Mrs. Eddy does.

She not only discredits the Bible by claiming it contains error, she also spiritualizes the Bible, that is, but she also interprets it allegorically.

The official pronouncement may be that the Bible only is inspired, but the practical reality is that within Christian Science, *Science and Health* becomes the inspired interpretation of the inspired Bible. *Science and Health* is called the key. Both the Bible and the key to the Bible are read alternately by two readers in their worship services. They dogmatically deny that *Science and Health* is their second Bible, but the practical effect is that's the way they treat it. In the article "Why Christian Science is not a Cult," they say,

Question: It's sometimes said that Christian Scientists see *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* as a second Bible, superseding or even superior to the Scriptures.

Answer: This is an important point to clear up because, for Christian Scientists, no book can take the place of the Bible. They don't see *Science and Health* as a "second Bible" or as a substitute for biblical revelation at all. A key doesn't replace the door; it's intended to unlock—it opens it. Just so, Christian Scientists see Mrs. Eddy's teachings as opening their understanding of the Bible's meaning, depth, and transforming power. They study the Bible daily (basically in the King James Version when studying it in English), and on the whole, have probably as deep a familiarity with it as any other group of Christians.

Actually, the Mother Church is the key to the key. Gerstner puts it like this: "What is the source of authority in Christian Science? The Bible alone? Clearly not, because Mary Baker Eddy had to provide the key to the Bible. Is her Key to the Scriptures the source of authority? Clearly not, because there are different keys to the Key. Mrs. Stetson [Augusta Emma Stetson, one of Eddy's co-workers who was eventually excommunicated] thought

she had the key to the Key and Mrs. Bill [Annie C. Bill, who helped form a competing church] was sure she had it, and a number of others have said that they had it. But the corporation founded by Mary Baker Eddy claims to have the Key—the only Key to the Key. And most Christian Scientists agree with this claim. So by Christian Science, is usually meant those who recognize the Mother Church and its hierarchy. There is your source of authority” (Gerstner, p. 76).

The Trinity Christian Science sometimes sounds like its Christian. For example, in the *Science and Health* list of important points, number 2 says, “We acknowledge and adore one supreme and infinite God. We acknowledge His Son, one Christ; the Holy Ghost or divine Comforter; and man in God’s image and likeness.” Is not that the Trinity? It certainly sounds like it.

The truth of the matter is that Christian Science teaches God is impersonal. In *Science and Health*, the question is asked, “What is God?” The answer is, “God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite, Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love.” The next question is, “Are these terms synonymous?” The answer is, “They are. They refer to one absolute God. They are also intended to express the nature, essence, and wholeness of deity” (Eddy, *Science and Health*, p. 465).

Question number 3 in the booklet, “Why Christian Science is Not a Cult,” says,

Question: Some people say that Christian Science isn’t really Christian because it holds a philosophic and abstract view of God as a cold, impersonal principle whom one cannot really love, trust, or turn to for comfort.

Answer: Could there be a less cold or abstract concept of God than that expressed in Mrs. Eddy’s communion address to The Mother Church in 1896: ‘For who is so great a God as our God!’ unchangeable, all-wise, all-just, all-merciful; the ever-loving, ever-living Life, Truth, Love: comforting such as mourn, opening the prison doors to the captive, marking the unwinged bird, pitying with more than a father’s pity; healing the sick, cleansing the leper, raising the dead, saving sinners”?

Yes, Christian Science does break sharply with the old anthropomorphic view of God as a changeable being who loves, hates, and inflicts terrible suffering on His creatures. And Christian Scientists feel nothing but gratitude for being liberated from such a circumscribed view of Him as less than wholly good—a view that neither comforts, heals, nor redeems. They do indeed see Him as the infinite, divine Principle, Love, and at the same time as the Father and Mother of the universe.

Christian Science also teaches pantheism. Again, quoting from *Science and Health*:

To grasp the reality and order of being in its Science, you must begin by reckoning God as the divine Principle of all that really is. Spirit, Life, Truth, and Love combine as one and are the Scriptural names for God. All substance, intelligence, wisdom, being, immortality, cause, and effect belong to God. These are His attributes, the eternal manifestations of the infinite divine Principle, Love (Eddy, *Science and Health*, p. 275).

Question number 3 in “Why Christian Science is Not a Cult”:

Question: Christian Scientists speak of God as All-in-all. Doesn't this support the claim that Christian Science is really a form of pantheism akin to Hinduism?

Answer: Not for anyone who has given careful attention to what it really teaches on this point. Christian Science maintains a clear and consistent distinction between God as creator or Father and man and the universe as His creation. Speaking of God as All signifies His all-embracing infinitude and underscores the essential point in Christian Science that there can be no real entity or power opposed to Him. But it does not eliminate the essential point summed up in the words of *Science and Health*: “Man is not God, and God is not man.” Nor does it support the contention that Christian Science is akin to Hinduism. Readers of the *King James Version* of the New Testament will recognize a source much closer to home in St. Paul's recognition that “in him [God] we live, and move, and have our being.” Neither in the New Testament nor in Christian Science is there any suggestion that individual being is absorbed in “the fullness of him that filleth all in all.” Instead, both point to the variety of ways in which individuality is expressed, “but it is the same God which worketh all in all.”

While Mary Baker Eddy's statement sounds like she accepts the doctrine of the Trinity, the truth is she rejects it. She states, “The theory of three persons in one God (that is, a personal Trinity or Triunity) suggests heathen gods, rather than the one ever-present I Am” (Eddy, *Science and Health*, p. 152). Furthermore, she says, “The Christian who believes in the First Commandment is a monotheist. Thus he virtually unites with the Jews' belief in one God and recognizes that Jesus Christ is not God as Jesus Himself declared but is the Son of God” (Eddy, *Science and Health*, p. 361).

The Deity of Christ Thus, it is clear that Christian Science rejects the deity of Christ. They do believe in the virgin birth, but they reject His deity. In “Questions and Answers on Christian Science,” they say:

9. Do you believe in the virgin birth?

Yes, we believe that Jesus was born of a virgin. As we understand it, Mary's pure concept of God as the Father of man was the avenue or means by which the Christ, Truth, found expression in the human Jesus.

They see Jesus as occupying the highest place in human history. He furnished humanity with the perfect example of what it means to be the son of God. By doing that, He opened the way for all to find spiritual sonship with God, but they draw a distinction between the human Jesus who is no longer here on the earth and the divine nature, which they say is the eternal Christ which is always here. The “Questions and Answers on Christian Science” explains:

8. What place does Jesus Christ have in your teaching?

We see him as occupying the highest place in human history. Jesus has furnished humanity, the perfect example of what it means to be the son of God. By doing that, he has opened the way for all of us to find our spiritual sonship with God. He is our Exemplar, our Way-shower, and Savior. But Christian Scientists draw a distinction between the human Jesus, who is no longer here on earth, and his divine nature, the eternal Christ which is always here. We see the Christ as the Truth that Jesus lived, taught and demonstrated—the Truth that unites every one of us to God as His beloved child.

The Doctrine of Salvation According to Christian Science, sin is an illusion. Christ didn't really die and He certainly didn't shed His blood for sin. So since sin is an illusion, salvation becomes casting out the *idea* of sin. There will be universal salvation in the future when the idea of sin gradually dies. Mary Baker Eddy herself said:

Jesus' students, not sufficiently advanced to understand fully their Master's triumph, did not perform many wonderful works until they saw Him after His crucifixion and learned that He had not died.... His disciples believed Jesus was dead while He was hidden in the sepulcher, whereas He was alive, demonstrating, within the narrow tomb, the power of the Spirit to destroy human, material sense.... The material blood of Jesus was no more efficacious to cleanse from sin when it was shed upon "the accursed tree," than when it was flowing in His veins, as He went daily about His Father's business (Eddy, *Science and Health*, pp. 350, 51, 349, 330).

Are Christian Scientists Christian? They would say yes, an emphatic yes. They would point out that one of the tenets of Christian Science to which members must sign when they join the church is: "And we solemnly promise to watch, and pray for that Mind to be in us which was also in Christ Jesus; to do unto others as we would have them do unto us; and to be merciful, just, and pure." To them, that proves they are not only Christians but are trying to be Christians seven days a week.

The issue is, what do you mean by "Christian?" As we have seen, Christian Science denies the basic tenets of biblical Christianity. Mary Baker Eddy admitted that! In *Science and Health* she asks:

Question. Are doctrines and creeds a benefit to man?

Answer. The author subscribed to an orthodox creed in early youth and tried to adhere to it until she caught the first gleam of that which interprets God as above mortal sense. This view rebuked human beliefs and gave the spiritual import, expressed through Science, of all that proceeds from the divine Mind. Since then, her highest creed has been divine Science, which, reduced to human apprehension, she has named Christian Science. (Eddy, *Science and Health*, p. 471)

When I first became a Christian, I asked a man, "Are you a Christian?" He said, "Of course! I'm not an African; I was born in America." There is a popular definition of a

Christian, there is a Christian Science definition of a Christian, and there is a biblical definition of a Christian. You may accept any definition that you please, but you need to know that you will be judged by God's definition, not by theirs or yours.

Summary: Christian Science is a cult because it does not teach the Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, and salvation by faith.

Stanley Myers, a businessman and Christian Scientist, was converted. Here is his story in his words. "I was a happy, prosperous, successful, and enthusiastic adherent of the Christian Science religion for thirty years....

"I had definite plans for the future. First, I wanted to be a class-taught student, then a practitioner on a full-time basis, a reader in a local church, first reader in the Mother Church in Boston, a lecturer, and a teacher of Christian Science. I made out a time schedule and set about to reach these goals. I studied twenty to twenty-five hours a week, rising at 5:00 A.M. nearly every day and devoting much time to prayer and research.

"I was elected the first reader of the Second Church of Christ Scientist in Akron, Ohio when I was twenty-five years old.... I served on the board of directors as a vice president and later as president.... I was completely happy and felt no lack in my life. I was not looking for anything else....

"Before long, I discovered that many of the questions that I could answer satisfactorily to myself out of my background in Christian Science were in direct conflict with the answers given from the Bible. While this rankled me, I really believed that I had the greater light on these particular subjects and that sometime these people would come into the light of the truths of the Bible as I had done. After all, I had participated in many wonderful physical healings through prayer and I had known of outstanding healings in others who practiced Christian Science—real miracles that defy explanation....

"I rebelled in my heart when I realized that these men considered Jesus Christ to be God and were, in fact, teaching this very thing.

"However, I wanted very much to know how they came to this conclusion....

"Because of different interpretations of some of His sayings, I settled on a plan: I would search out only those statements of Jesus Christ that were crystal clear, that without an element of controversy declared who He considered Himself to be. My purpose was to disprove the claims of the Bible teachers that Jesus Christ is God....

"When I completed this study and analyzed what I had found, I was astonished. Jesus Christ claimed to be God. I could hardly believe this. I went over the Scriptures again. I could not honestly draw any other conclusion....

"Everywhere I turned, I saw Jesus exalted as Almighty God. Everywhere and in every place, the Bible, the Word of God, bore testimony that Jesus Christ is God. Intellectually I could not argue the fact....

"Now, my heart and mind were prepared to ask God to reveal to me what He would have me to know concerning Jesus Christ.

"An absolute heart conviction overwhelmed me that the Bible is the Word of God....

"Immediately, I cried aloud with great joy and enthusiasm, 'Well, praise the Lord—I'm a sinner!' This so utterly surprised me that I was dumbfounded. Why did I say a thing like that? It was absolutely contrary to thirty years of indoctrination, for Christian Science teaches that there is no sin.... And again, the conviction that no matter how good a life I

could lead under the influence and practice of the high moral concepts of Christian Science, this would not make me worthy to stand before a holy God....

“When I realized my lost condition before a holy God, the Holy Spirit of God again spoke to my heart and said, ‘It’s true, but Jesus Christ of Nazareth went to the cross two thousand years ago and paid the debt for you’....

“I cried out, ‘I accept Jesus and Him crucified as the payment for my sins. I don’t understand it, but I accept this if it’s true.’ Oh, the joy that overflowed me as I met Jesus as my personal Savior! Like Thomas, I bowed my knee and cried out to Jesus, ‘My Lord and my God’ (John 20:28)....

“How I had struggled in earlier days with the Trinity, but in a moment of time, I met the Holy Spirit, the Son, and the Father, and in just that order. I felt as though I had been an orphan and rejected all my life.... Suddenly I was adopted into a royal family and had all the rights and privileges of the most exalted one in the house. Praise God!...

“In resigning from the local church and the Mother Church in Boston, I wrote: ‘I have come to the absolute conviction that Jesus Christ is more than Mary Baker Eddy declares Him to be and that He cannot be anything less than the Bible declares Him to be’” (Myers, *The Alliance Witness*, January 19, 1966).

IS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM A CULT?

Is Seventh-day Adventism a Christian denomination or a non-Christian cult? Bible-believing, Bible-preaching, Bible-defending Christians have debated that question for years.

Such Christian leaders as Louis T. Talbot, M. R. De Haan, John R. Rice, J. K. Van Baslen and John R. Gerstner have concluded that Seventh-day Adventism is indeed and in fact a cult. Then, in 1957, the SDA leadership felt that they had been misunderstood, that there was prejudice against them based on myth and folklore. So, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists released the first definitive and comprehensive explanation of their faith, an authoritative volume entitled, *Questions on Doctrine*. This was to clarify their position.

Theologian and preacher Donald Grey Barnhouse and cult authority Walter Martin decided that Seventh-day Adventism was not a cult. In a series of articles published in *Eternity*, Martin explained why. In essence, he said that regardless of what any SDA individual has said in the past, their official position has been clarified and based on their official position, it is now clear that they are not a cult. *Eternity* said, "In brief, however, this is Martin's opinion. SDA should be considered as evangelical with several strange, illogical and unBiblical views. Their views should be warned against, but this should not ostracize SDA from evangelical ranks" (see Donald Grey Barnhouse, "Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?" *Eternity*, September 1956, p. 58). No less than E. Schuyler English, of the New Scofield Bible fame, agrees. Others still contain that SDA is a cult.

Who is right? Is Seventh-day Adventism Christian or non-Christian, a denomination or a cult?

Their Background

A number of factors and several people contributed to the birth of Seventh-day Adventism.

William Miller First of all, there was William Miller. He was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on February 15, 1782. Later, he became a resident of Low Hampton, New York. At one point, he was led into Deism by a skeptical friend. In 1816, he became a Baptist and a Bible student.

For two years, this pious farmer with no theological training spent every spare minute poring over the Bible with only the aid of a Cruden's Concordance. He concluded that Jesus Christ was coming in 1843. Walter Martin records, "As Miller himself put it, 'I was thus brought in 1818, at the close of my two-year study of Scripture to the solemn conclusion that about twenty-five years from that time, all the affairs of our present state would be wound up... I believe the time can be known by all who desire to understand and to be ready for His coming, and I am fully convinced that sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation of time, Christ will come and bring all of His saints with Him and that then He will reward every man as to his work shall be'" (Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 361).

How did Miller arrive at such a conclusion? He decided that the 2300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14 were 2300 years. He also concluded that the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 started concurrently with the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 (457 BC, the year of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem). The “sanctuary” in Daniel 8:14, according to Miller, was the earth that would be cleansed by fire at the Second Advent.

Martin explains it this way: “The entire superstructure of the Millerites’ prophetic interpretation was based upon their view of the book of Daniel, chapters 8 and 9, with particular emphasis upon Daniel 8:14 and 9:24-27. The Millerites believed that the prophecy of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 must date from the year 457 B.C., which, as recent archeological evidence confirms, was the exact date of the decree of King Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25). Tracing the seventy weeks of Daniel on the theory that, as the Hebrew indicated, it should be rendered ‘seventy weeks of years’ or 490 years, the Millerites arrived at the date 33 A.D.; i.e., from 457 B.C. to A.D. 33. Since this date reliably refers to Christ’s crucifixion, Millerites then linked it to Daniel 8:14: ‘Unto 2300 days then shall the sanctuary be cleansed’ with the seventy weeks of years prophecy, and the 2300 days became 2300 years. Thus, if you subtract 490 years (adding, of course, A.D. 1 to 33), the figure 1843 is arrived at. Many biblical scholars have historically shown that in Scripture a day frequently symbolizes a year; further, that the seventy weeks and the 2300 days of Daniel should have begun on the same date and that that date, according to the Millerites, was 457 B.C. In *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Dr. Leroy Froom shows that many expositors have embraced the same method of interpretation, which is no argument for accepting it, but a strong argument for the right of the Millerites to do so” (Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 361-62).

Miller began spending his time lecturing. In 1840, a magazine promoted his teaching called *The Signs of the Times* appeared. A number of preachers and lecturers began teaching the same thing. Conferences and camp meetings were held; a movement was born.

March 21, 1843 through March 21, 1844 came and went, but Christ was nowhere to be seen. This came to be known as the Great Disappointment.

On March 12, in a camp meeting at Exeter, New Hampshire, Samuel Snow, a follower of Miller, suggested the Lord would come on October 22, 1844. A new fever and frenzy appeared. A sign in a Philadelphia store window read, “This shop is closed in honor of the King of Kings, who will appear about the 20th of October. Get ready, friends, to crown Him Lord of all.” Two hundred people left “Sodom” (Philadelphia) before the impending doom. Many Millerites gave up their occupations, farmers left their crops in the field. The meetings, however, were surprisingly orderly and free from fanaticism.

Again the announced day came, but the advent of Christ didn’t.

Miller admitted his mistake. He said, “Were I to live my life again with the same evidence that I then had, to be honest with God and man, I would have to do as I have done. Although opposers said it would not come, they produced no weighty arguments; it was evidently guesswork with them and I then thought, and do now, that their denial was based more on an unwillingness for the Lord to come than on any arguments leading to such a conclusion. I confess my error and acknowledge my disappointment; yet I still believe the Day of the Lord is near, even at the door; and I exhort you, my brethren, to be watchful and not let that day come upon you unawares” (Gerstner, p. 21; Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 362).

Miller died on December 20, 1849, at age 68. To the end of his days, he remained a humble and devoted Christian. He and his followers were maligned and ridiculed. They were accused of profiting from their preaching. The truth, however, is that Miller spent more money on spreading his message than he got out of it. He was as disappointed as anyone that the Lord failed to return at the expected time. He remained a Bible-believing Christian and thought to the end that the Lord must return soon.

It should be noted that William Miller was never a Seventh-day Adventist, that is, he never accepted the position of the Sabbatarians, the doctrine of soul sleep, or the doctrine of the final destruction of the wicked.

Hiram Edson Walter Martin explains what happened next: “In order to understand the background, the Seventh-day Adventists’ history, and theology, let us look at three segments of Millerism which eventually united to form the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Each of these groups held a distinctive doctrine. The group headed by Hiram Edson, in western New York, proclaimed the doctrine of the sanctuary ‘as embracing a special or final ministry of Christ in the Holy of Holies in the heavenly sanctuary,’ thus giving new meaning to the message ‘the hour of God’s judgment has come.’ The second group, headed by Joseph Bates, whose main following was in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, advocated the observance of the Seventh Day ‘as involved in the keeping of the commandments of God.’ The third group emphasized the ‘spirit of prophecy,’ or ‘the testimony of Jesus’ which they believed was to be manifest in the ‘remnant’ (Rev. 14:6-12; also Rev. 12:17, 19:10), or ‘the last segment of God’s church of the centuries.’ Between the years of 1844 and 1847, the thinking of these groups crystallized and was actively declared and promulgated in the writings of the respective leaders in Hiram Edson, Owen Russell Lewis (O.R.L.) Crosier, Joseph Bates, James White, and Ellen G. White.

“To summarize, Hiram Edson, from western New York, contributed the doctrine of the sanctuary. Joseph Bates of New England contributed the concept of Saturday as the Sabbath. Ellen G. White of Maine provided the spirit of prophecy. Let’s look at each of these individuals more carefully.

“On October 23, 1844, the morning following the Great Disappointment, Hiram Edson, a devout Adventist and follower of William Miller, was walking toward his home with his friend O.R.L. Crosier. In order to avoid the jeers of their neighbors, they cut across the cornfield. As they walked across the cornfield in silence, Edson suddenly stopped, became deeply immersed in meditation, and received a great spiritual ‘revelation’ on the spot.

“The revelation was that there were two phases to Christ’s ministry in the heaven of heavens, just as in the earthly sanctuary of old. In his own words, an overwhelming conviction came over him ‘that instead of a high priest coming out of the most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month at the end of the 2300 days, He, for the first time entered, on that day, the second apartment of the sanctuary, and that He had a work to perform in the most Holy before coming to this earth.’

“According to the Adventists’ position, Edson found the reason why the Millerites had been disappointed the day before. They had expected Christ to come to the earth to cleanse the sanctuary, but the sanctuary was not the earth; it was located in heaven! Therefore, instead of coming to the earth, Christ passed from one ‘apartment’ of the sanctuary into another to perform a cleansing work now known as ‘the investigative judgment.’

“In 1846, this new interpretation of Daniel was set forth by O.R.L. Crosier, who outlined and defended Edson’s revelation in a lengthy magazine article. In short, this new

view taught that in 1844 Christ entered the ‘second phase of His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and that ever since He has been reviewing the cases of believers to determine their worthiness for eternal life. When He comes forth from the ‘second apartment,’ or finishes the ‘second phase’ of His ministry in the sanctuary, then He will usher in judgment upon the world and His great Second Advent” (Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 263).

Martin concludes, “The Millerites erred in their prophetic chronological interpretation of the book of Daniel, and only the concept of Hiram Edson in the cornfield and the explanatory writings of O.R.L. Crosier bolstered by the ‘revelations’ of Ellen G. White saved the day” (Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 364).

Joseph Bates In 1846, Joseph Bates, a retired sea captain, issued a forty-eight-page pamphlet entitled *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign*. In it, he argued for Saturday as the divine institution, ordained in Eden, prefigured in creation and buttressed at Mt. Sinai. About three years later, Bates wrote a second pamphlet entitled, *A Seal of the Living God*, based largely upon Revelation 14:9-12. His Sabbatarianism exerted a great influence on what later became the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

Bates taught that the message of Revelation 14:9-12 was the foundation of the full advent message: “Fear God and give glory to Him for the hour of His judgment is come.” He maintained that this began to be fulfilled in the preaching of the Millerite movement. According to him, the second angel’s message on the fall of Babylon was initially sounded in 1843 through 1844. The third inseparably in the series to be received and obeyed, was the full obedience of God’s holy commandments, including the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath. The Sabbath was set forth as the “seal of God” based on the sealing work of Revelation 7.

Thus, to the concept of Christ entering the Most Holy Place in the Heavenly Sanctuary on October 22, 1844, was added the Sabbath as involved in the third of this commission series of special “latter-day” messages. The concept of the “seal” was likewise built into the message of the Sabbath as an added prophetic element. This thought was attested by Ellen White, who wrote, “The seal is the Sabbath.” She described the “Most Holy Place” in which the ark, containing the Ten Commandments, had a halo of light surrounding the fourth one. The Sabbath and the sanctuary doctrines became inseparably united together.

Ellen G. White Ellen G. Harmon was born in 1827 and reared in Maine. She and her family were members of the Chestnut Street Methodist Church of Portland. In 1840 and 1842, Miller lectured in Portland on the Second Advent. The Harmon family accepted his views and, as a result, were disfellowshipped from the Methodist Church.

After the Great Disappointment of 1844, Ellen had her first vision. In December of that year, while visiting some other Adventist women at the home of a friend, she saw a vision of the advent believers traveling along a lighted pathway until they reached the shining city of God. Jesus was the guide and leader of the group, which consisted of a great company. Shortly after this, a second vision revealed that though she was bound to encounter disbelief, she must now tell others what God had shown her. Subsequently, she began a life of public witnessing, counseling, teaching, and writing. On August 30, 1846, she married James White, a young Adventist preacher who had been active in the Millerite movement. They had four sons.

According to her husband, Mrs. White had from between 100 and 200 “open visions” in twenty-three years. These “open visions” decreased as the years passed. In her later years, she received messages in her wakened hours or through dreams. Virtually every

aspect of Seventh-day Adventism was either encouraged or inspired by a vision or word from Mrs. White. For example, in February of 1845, she had a vision of Jesus entering into the Holy of Holies of the Heavenly Sanctuary, confirming Hiram Edson's vision. On April 7, 1847, she had a vision in which she was taken into the Holy Place and then into the Holy of Holies of the Heavenly Sanctuary where she saw the ark and the Ten Commandments in the ark with a halo of glory around the fourth commandment. This vision supposedly confirmed Joseph Bates' teaching concerning the Sabbath.

Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination was formed as the result of three groups: 1) a group headed by Hiram Edson in western New York State which emphasized the doctrine of the Heavenly Sanctuary, 2) a group in Washington, New Hampshire which, along with Joseph Bates, advocated the Seventh Day observance, and 3) a group around Portland, Maine, which held that Ellen G. White was a true prophetess. The Sanctuary doctrine, the Sabbath observance and the spirit of prophecy formed the basis for the emergence of the new denomination. The first headquarters was in Battle Creek, Michigan. In 1860, the name Seventh-day Adventist was adopted as the official name of the denomination. In May of 1863, the first general conference was held in Battle Creek. In 1903, both the general conference headquarters and the Review and Herald Publishing Association were moved to Tacoma Park, a suburb of Washington, D. C.

Their Beliefs

Early in their history, the Seventh-day Adventists claimed that churches, even evangelical churches, which did not observe the seventh day as the Sabbath, were false churches. One of their evangelists went so far as to make refusal to observe Saturday the "unpardonable sin" (Gerstner, p. 26).

The Seventh-day Adventists have a doctrinal statement entitled "The Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventists." It has twenty-two items with Scriptural references. Each item is a paragraph. Those twenty-two points can be summarized as follows.

1. The Holy Scriptures (Old Testament and New Testament) are inspired.
2. The Godhead consists of a Trinity.
3. Jesus Christ is God, who became a man.
4. In order to obtain salvation, every person must experience the new birth through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. Baptism is an ordinance that should follow forgiveness.
6. The Ten Commandments are binding on all men in every age.
7. The fourth commandment requires the observance of the seventh day Sabbath.
8. One is justified, not by obedience to the Law, but by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
9. Only God has immortality. Immortality is bestowed upon the righteous at the Second Coming of Christ.
10. Men are unconscious in death.
11. The just and unjust will be resurrected.
12. Sinners and Satan will be reduced to a state of nonexistence by the fires of the last days.
13. Christ cleansed the sanctuary in 1844.
14. The cleansing of the sanctuary (which began in 1844) is a work of judgment.

15. God will send a Proclamation before the Second Coming to prepare a people for His coming. The three-fold message of reform is symbolized in Revelation 14.

16. The time of the cleansing of the sanctuary (which synchronized with the period of Proclamation of Revelation 14) is a time of investigative judgment. The investigative judgment determines who of the dead are worthy of a part in the first resurrection and who of the living are worthy of translation.

17. Followers of Christ should be godly (modest apparel, abstinence from all intoxicating drinks, tobacco, and other narcotics).

18. Tithes and offerings are an acknowledgment of God's ownership.

19. God has placed the gifts of the Spirit in the church. The gift of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church. The remnant church recognizes that this gift was manifest in the life and ministry of Ellen G. White.

20. The literal personal and visible Second Coming of Christ is the hope of the church.

21. The saints of all ages will live with Christ in heaven during the Millennium. At the end of the Millennium, the Holy City with all the saints will descend to the earth.

22. The new earth will be the eternal abode of the saints.

A Biblical Evaluation

The Scripture Officially, the Seventh-day Adventists claim that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and the sole authority for faith and practice, but article 19 says that Mrs. White had the gift of prophecy. This produces a practical problem. Even though they officially say that the Bible is the sole authority, practically they put Ellen White's writings on par with Scripture.

Hoekema has said, "Although Seventh-day Adventism claims that they test Mrs. White's writings by the Bible, they assert on another page of the same volume that the instructions which she gave the church are in harmony with the Word of God. The latter statement is not qualified in any way; they do not say that most of her instructions are in harmony with the Bible or that her instructions were generally in harmony with God's Word—they simply state that: 'These instructions and our understanding are in harmony with the Word of God.' This latter assertion, however, actually nullifies the former. How can one honestly claim to test the writings of a person by the Word of God when one already assumes, as a foregone conclusion, that these writings are in harmony with the Word?" Hoekema, p. 103).

Later, Hoekema points out, "Though Seventh-day Adventism claims to test Mrs. White's writings by the Bible, their actual usage of her writing nullifies this claim. Instead of testing her writing by the Bible, they use statements from her writing to substantiate their interpretation of the Scripture. Typical of this method, e.g., is their treatment of the investigative judgment, one of the key doctrines of their faith. Under the heading 'Investigative Judgment as Part of the Program of God,' the necessity for this investigative judgment (made by Christ before the end of the world) is 'proved' by a reference to two passages of Scripture which are ordinarily taken to refer to the final judgment at the end of time (Dan. 7:10 and Rev. 20:12). No attempt is made to explain these passages; they are, in fact, not even quoted—a simple reference is considered sufficient. Soon, however, a passage from Mrs. White is quoted, in full, to prove that there must be an 'investigative judgment' prior to the final judgment: 'There must be an examination of the books of

record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary, therefore, involves a work of investigation—a work of judgment. This work must be performed prior to the coming of Christ to redeem His people; for when He comes, His reward is with Him to give every man according to his works” (Hoekema, pp. 104-05).

The official Seventh-day Adventists commentary has a section entitled “Ellen G. White Comments” at the conclusion of every chapter!

Years ago, while living in Tennessee near a Seventh-day Adventist college, I picked up a teenage hitchhiker. As we rode along together, I engaged him in spiritual conversation. His response to me was, “Oh, I read the Bible and I find the writings of Ellen G. White helpful in understanding it.”

The Trinity Officially, the Seventh-day Adventists believe in the Trinity and the deity of Christ (see statements 2 and 3 in their official doctrinal statement). However, they have made some statements concerning the person of Christ, which has raised some legitimate concerns.

The Deity of Christ They affirm the incarnation, the substitutionary death, the resurrection, ascension, and intercession of Christ, but they apply the biblical name “Michael,” who was a created angel, to the Son of God in His preincarnate state. Some earlier Adventist writers even contended that the Son was not wholly equal with the Father, although the denomination today officially affirms Christ’s complete equality with the Father and the preexistence of the Son.

More serious is the charge that Seventh-day Adventists teach that Christ assumed a polluted human nature. In his book *Theology of the Major Sects*, John H. Gerstner makes such an allegation (Gerstner, p. 127). He documents his contention. Walter Martin, however, claims that more recent Seventh-day Adventists have repudiated this position.

Hoekema studied the question in their official book *Questions on Doctrine* and concluded, “In spite of the laudable attempts on the part of the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* to eliminate all ambiguity on this matter, there remain some real difficulties on the question of the sinlessness of Christ’s human nature. One of these difficulties is that Mrs. White’s teaching was not consistent on this point. Both on page 61 and on page 64, the following statement of Mrs. White is quoted with approval: ‘He [Christ] took upon his sinless nature our sinful nature.’ If we analyze this statement, we conclude that according to Mrs. White, Christ assumed, in addition to His divine sinless nature, a human nature that was sinful. Yet this is precisely what Mrs. White has said not to have taught. Would it not be far better for Seventh-day Adventists to admit that Mrs. White was in error when she made this statement?

“A further difficulty is that there exist a number of statements by Seventh-day Adventist authors clearly asserting that Christ inherited tendencies to sin. One of the best known is the statement by L. A. Wilcox to the effect that Christ conquered over sin ‘in spite of bad blood and an inherited meanness.’ Although the discussion on this matter in *Questions on Doctrine* implies that the denomination would now repudiate this statement, nowhere in the book are we definitely told that this has been done. Further, in 1950, William Henry Brandson, who served from 1950-1954 as President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, published a book entitled *Drama of the Ages*. In it he says, “The Catholic doctrine of the ‘immaculate conception’ is that Mary, the mother of our Lord, was preserved from original sin. If this be true, then Jesus did not partake of

man's sinful nature (Brandson, p. 101). The author clearly indicates that he does not mean this Catholic doctrine to be true. It then follows that in his judgment, Jesus did partake of man's sinful nature. We find no indication in *Questions on Doctrine* that this recent statement has been repudiated by the denomination. On the question, therefore, of the sinfulness of Christ's human nature, we conclude that there is still much ambiguity in Seventh-day Adventist's teaching" (Hoekema, p. 112).

There are also questions about their teaching concerning the finished work of Christ. Article 8 of their official doctrinal statement clearly declares the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Yet there has been and still is, a problem with their view of the atonement. The essence of this is the sanctuary doctrine. Without it, Seventh-day Adventism would be like Seventh-day Baptists. The sanctuary doctrine says that Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 to begin the investigative judgment. An article in *Christianity Today* put it like this: "Through her writings, Ellen White expanded her vision into the doctrine of the investigative judgment of Christ. This says that although man's sins are forgiven at the cross, they must be blotted out by Christ before man can enter heaven. This blotting out of sin is what Christ has been doing in the heavenly sanctuary since 1844. But He blots out the sin record only after evaluating the life of each professing believer to see how well he has kept God's commandments. Some will pass judgment; some will fail. According to the teaching, salvation is never secure. Ellen White wrote prolifically on these matters and all aspects of the Christian life. Although Adventists officially teach the Bible as their final standard, many, in practice, regard Mrs. White's book as at least equal" ("The Adventist Showdown," *Christianity Today*, October 10, 1980, p. 76).

Well, was the atonement finished on the cross, or was it not? Hoekema says, "Was the atonement finished on the cross? When one reads Seventh-day Adventist literature, one frequently comes across statements to the effect that the atonement was not complete on the cross, that the atonement is still going on, or that there will be a final atonement after Christ's work on the cross. Note, e.g., the following quotations from Mrs. White: 'Today he [Christ] is making an atonement for us before the Father.' 'Now, while our great high priest is making atonement for us, we should seek to be perfect in Christ.' The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the Law, it was not to cancel the sin. It would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement...' 'Attended by the heavenly angels, our great high priest enters the Holy of Holies and there appears in the presence of God to engage in the last acts of his administration in behalf of man—to perform the work of investigative judgment and to make an atonement for all who are shown to be entitled to its benefits'" (Hoekema, p. 116).

That was Ellen G. White. What about today? Hoekema continues, "Authors of *Questions on Doctrine* attribute this way of speaking about the atonement to the fact that earlier Adventist writers had a wider conception of the word atonement than do most Christian theologians today. These earlier writers, so it is said, wish to understand the word atonement as applying not just to the sacrifice Christ made on the cross but also to the application of that atonement to sinners. It is in the latter sense that we are to understand expressions like those cited above. When, therefore, one hears an Adventist say or reads an Adventist literature—even in the writings of Ellen G. White—that Christ is making atonement now, it should be understood that we mean simply that Christ is now making application of the benefits of the sacrificial atonement he made on the cross, that he is making it efficacious for us individually according to our needs and requests. The difficulty

with the above explanation, however, is that Mrs. White had a sufficiently adequate command of the English language to be able to say, ‘applying atonement,’ instead of ‘making atonement.’ Seventh-day Adventists, by an explanation like the one reproduced above, are only introducing confusion into theological terminology. In the statement about the atonement on page 22 of *Questions on Doctrine*, it is said that the vicarious atoning death of Christ is sufficient for the redemption of a lost race. Here the word atoning obviously does not mean what Christ did after His death on the cross but refers to what He did on the cross. Why confuse the issue by suggesting that this word may have an additional meaning?” (Hoekema, p. 116-17).

In 1980, the Seventh-day Adventists stripped Desmond Ford, one of their Australian theologians, of his ministerial credentials. He claimed to be an Adventist from the top of his head to his toes. He is in complete accord with Saturday worship, yet he was defrocked because he rejected the doctrine of the investigative judgment. In reporting on this incident, *Christianity Today* said, “Regarding the investigative judgment, which is the fundamental belief of Adventists, Ford said, ‘You can’t find the investigative judgment in the Bible. You can get it out of Ellen White. The fact is, she got it out of Uriah Smith [an early Adventist writer and editor].’

“Traditionally, Adventists are taught they can’t be sure of heaven until they have lived lives good enough to have their sins blotted out during the investigative judgment. That, in many cases, has spawned an attitude of ‘perfectionism,’ always striving to be good enough, but never sure just how good that is. The reason Ford has grown so popular among some Adventists is that he is throwing all that out the window, telling Adventists that they can indeed be happy and sure of salvation because Christ finished His work on the cross where their sins were forgiven and eternal punishment due them erased.

“‘I’ve always thought I was a Christian until I heard Dr. Ford speak and then I found the real peace of Jesus,’ said an Adventist medical doctor on the west coast. He continued: ‘There is a vast youth movement in the church identifying with the evangelistic gospel (as a result of Ford). There is a renewed excitement about the cross’” (“The Adventist Showdown,” *Christianity Today*, October 10, 1980, p. 76).

Then, in the summer of 1981, Smuts Van Rooyen lost his job at a Seventh-day Adventist college because he believed in the finished work of Christ. *Christianity Today*, reporting on that, said, “Adventists believe that in 1844, in the words of church founder and prophetess Ellen White, Christ entered ‘the most holy place of the Holy Sanctuary.’ At that time, Christ began evaluating the lives of believers and blotting out the sins of those who are worthy and, therefore, salvation can be assured in this life. Said Van Rooyen: ‘I believe Christ made all the provisions necessary for salvation in A.D. 31’ at His death on the cross and thus salvation for believers is certain” (“Another Adventist Professor is Ejected for His Views,” *Christianity Today*, June 12, 1981, p. 35).

The Doctrine of Salvation There have even been questions raised concerning their teaching of justification by grace through faith. Article 4 of their official doctrinal statement says that every person must experience the new birth through faith in Christ. Article 8 states that the Law cannot save ... one is justified by grace. Sounds like John and Paul, Calvin and Luther. Yet they have been challenged on this point.

Hoekema says, “Harold Lindsell has contended that the Seventh-day Adventists are guilty of the error of ‘Galatianism’—that is, that man is saved partly by the work of Christ and partly by the keeping of the Law. He bases his conclusion partly upon his teaching

about the keeping of the Sabbath Day. He supports his contention by quoting the following statement from page 449 of Mrs. White's Great Controversy: 'In the last days the Sabbath test will be made plain. When this time comes, anyone who has not kept the Sabbath will receive the mark of the beast and will be kept from heaven.' After making further quotations from Seventh-day Adventist writers, including questions on doctrine, Lindsell summarizes as follows: 'If men now or later must keep the Sabbath to demonstrate their salvation or to prevent their being lost, then grace is no more grace. Rather, we are saved by grace and kept by the Law.'

"Mr. Lindsell's charge, therefore, is that Seventh-day Adventists are guilty of a kind of legalism—not the extreme kind in which one would claim to be saved wholly by the keeping of the Law, but a mixed kind in which one teaches that he is saved by grace and kept by Law" (Hoekema, p. 117).

When I was in college, I attended a Seventh-day Adventist Evangelistic meeting being held in a tent near Chattanooga, Tennessee. As I listened to the evangelist, I was totally convinced that he believed that salvation was by faith plus works. As I departed from the tent, I picked up a printed copy of the message he had preached that night. I still have it. After reading it again years later, I am still left with the same impression. The official position of Seventh-day Adventism may sound like it teaches salvation by grace through faith, but their practical preaching denies the finished work of Christ and adds works to salvation.

Summary: Well, is Seventh-day Adventism a cult? Candidly, it depends on whom you are talking to. According to their "official" position, I would probably have to say, "No," but according to their official and unofficial explanations and especially the practical results in the rank and file, I would say, "Yes."

Let me put it like this. Is it possible for a person to believe in the official doctrinal position of Jehovah's Witnesses, be a member in good standing of a Kingdom Hall and be saved in the New Testament sense of the term? No! Is it possible to believe in the official doctrinal position of Seventh-day Adventism, be a member in good standing in one of their churches and be saved? The answer is "Yes," but it is also possible to believe in their doctrine and be so confused as to be lost.

Several years ago, as I approached a department store, a woman asked me, "Would you like to make a contribution to world missions?" I said, "No," and continued my journey inside the store. When I came out again, another lady asked me the same question. This time I stopped and asked, "What organization do you represent?" After some evasive answers, I finally found out she was a Seventh-day Adventist.

I then asked her, "If you were to die today, do you know for sure that you would go to heaven?" She replied, "No." As I talked with her, it became clear that she believed she had to keep the Sabbath and the Law to get to heaven. I quoted Ephesians 2:8-9, assuring her that salvation was by grace through faith. She was obviously highly threatened and suggested I talk to another lady who was the pastor's wife.

I approached the other lady and asked, "Can you tell me how to get to heaven?" The pastor's wife replied, "Yes. You must trust in Jesus Christ." I then said, "But aren't you a Seventh-day Adventist and don't you believe that you must keep the Law?" She responded, "If you have true faith, you will obey the Law." I told her that I felt like that was spiritual double-talk, but I was at least delighted to know that she believed that justification was by

faith. I then suggested that instead of collecting money for world missions overseas, she should do some missionary work by talking to the lady she had brought with her.

Are the Seventh-day Adventists a cult?

If you take the pastor's wife's answer—no!

If you take the layman's answer—yes!

If you probe those answers—you'll be confused!

REACHING A CULTIST

A cultist can be the most difficult kind of person to evangelize. In his book, *The Chaos of the Cults*, Van Baalen suggests three reasons for that. First, a cultist feels he has something better than Christianity. According to Van Baalen, the average devotee of a cult has left a traditional faith, in which he was more or less reared, and has adopted, in his opinion, “something better.” Secondly, the cultist has not just repudiated Christianity; he is actually hostile to it. After all, as Van Baalen points out, every cult is, in the final analysis, autosoteric (salvation by one’s own works or character). Thus, anyone who has surrendered God’s plan of salvation for some system of self-salvation cannot but resent the gospel of the grace of God. Thirdly, the cultist views the biblical Christian with resentment. The cultist inevitably resents the Christian as an intruder who ventures to come and lecture him, when he has found something so vastly superior. If the cultist is a woman, this feeling of ill-will maybe even more profound since women are led more by intuition and sentiment.

How, then, does a Christian reach, or at least reach out to, a cultist? There are things a Christian ought not to do and there are several things they should not do.

What not to do

Do not attack the founder. Frankly, there are things within the backgrounds of the founders of all the major cults that can be attacked. For example, Joseph Smith’s biographers left the impression that he was unscrupulous and an imposter. Gerstner states, “In 1831, he (Joseph Smith) found it advisable to leave New York for Kirtland, Ohio, from whence, because of various offenses culminating in a large bank fraud, he and the saints found it expedient to move to the American Zion in Missouri where the Gentiles fought him, imprisoned him and finally drove him out to take his refuge in a city of his own making on the banks of the Mississippi, Nauvoo, Illinois. From this place, he was to be driven off the planet altogether, being killed by some lawless militia in a nearby prison in 1844” (Gerstner, p. 43).

Charles Russell, the founder of the Watchtower Society, also had his problems. It has been documented that on one occasion, he was forced to confess openly to falsehood (Gerstner, p. 30). When his wife sued for divorce, one of the grounds was adultery, which at one point, he admitted.

Other tales could be told about these and other founders of the major cults, but assassinating the character of the founder will usually not convince a cultist of the error of the cult. The cultist venerates the founder of his group and will probably simply not believe you.

Do not debate minor matters. Each of the cults contains beliefs that are not Scriptural but, in the final analysis, are of no major consequence. I recall, when in college, encountering a group of Mormons. At the time, I was a desk clerk at the YMCA, and they used the swimming pool as a baptismal pool. As I engaged them in conversation, I quickly discovered we disagreed on the issue of authority. I believed the only authority was the Bible. They believed the Bible and the Book of Mormon were both the word of God. To prove to me the Book of Mormon was inspired, they took me to Ezekiel 37:15-20 where

they said the two sticks were the Bible and the Book of Mormon. I tried to convince them that such was not the case, but I soon discovered that was futile and fruitless. Even if I had convinced them of that passage, they still would have believed that the Book of Mormon was inspired. I finally decided that debating over the interpretation of Ezekiel 37 was of no great consequence.

The same kind of thing can be said for other doctrines. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe in soul sleep. According to them, when people die, their soul sleeps and will not be awakened until the resurrection. If you quote Luke 23:43, you will simply get into a useless and senseless argument over a comma. The King James Version puts the comma before the word "today" and they put it after the word "today," greatly altering the meaning of the passage. Convincing them that their soul will be awake will not keep them out of hell.

The Seventh-day Adventists believe that all should observe the seventh day as the Sabbath. They say the seventh day is the Lord's day. Using Mark 2:28, they reason that since the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath, it means that Jesus is the Lord of Saturday; therefore, Saturday is the Sabbath. By that kind of reasoning, so is Monday, but convincing them that Sunday is the Lord's day and not Saturday will frankly not accomplish a great deal.

A cultist is taught to expect persecution. If you pick a nonessential point and berate and belittle them, you confirm them in their belief because they were taught that they would be persecuted.

What to Do

Love them What can be done in a positive way to reach out to a cultist? First and foremost, believers must love unbelievers.

Biblical Christians tend to be truth centered. As a result, we view cultists as heretics. They are, but we must remember to love sinners while we hate their sin. After all, that is the way God treated us. God loved the world and Christ died for all, including the cultist. We must view them as one for whom Christ died (Jas. 2:1).

One aspect of love is to give credit to who credit is due (Rom. 13:7-8). "Paul praised the ultra-polytheistic people of Athens because in all things they were very religious and from that point on he reasoned" (Baalen, p. 366). Likewise, we could, and should, commend the Mormons for their emphasis on morality and the family, the Jehovah's Witnesses for their zeal, and the Seventh-day Adventists for their dedication. A clock that doesn't work is still correct twice a day!

Another aspect of love is to be courteous. If cultists knock on your door, at least show them some common courtesy, like inviting them into your living room and serving them some refreshments. Listen to them to get a chance for them to listen to you.

Many Christians are afraid of doing that for fear that they will violate 2 John 9-11, which says, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds."

Is inviting a cultist into your living room for a chat a violation of 2 John 9-11? That is doubtful. In John's day, there were few inns, so the itinerant teachers usually looked to

private homes for a place where they could stay and even make their headquarters. In essence, John is saying, “Do not show a heretic the kind of hospitality that would enable him to use your home as a base of operation, for such hospitality would mean cooperating with his work. The phrase “nor greet him” is to be understood as, “Do not welcome him as a brother.” Such is the interpretation of Hoekema in his book *The Four Major Cults*. Frankly, it is doubtful that there is anything in this passage that would prohibit a Christian from inviting a cultist into his living room in order to get a chance to lead him to Christ. That is the loving thing to do.

Understand them Believers should also try to understand cultists. People do not join cults for intellectual or doctrinal reasons alone. In *The Four Major Cults*, Hoekema quotes Boerwinkle’s list of suggested reasons why people join a cult; there are five: 1) they find a warm and brotherly fellowship not found in many churches; 2) they find a center of integration, a place where each member plays an important role and fills a necessary function, a place where one is known and needed; 3) they find a sense of security, that is, a sense of doing God’s will with a group that will never forsake them and will stand with them in a time of trouble; 4) they find an outlet for drive toward greater intensity and radicalness in one’s religious life. We look askance at these radical tendencies; they welcome them; 5) they find instruction for religious and moral practices.

There are two kinds of cultists: those who are members by virtue of the fact that they were born into a family that were members (this group also includes those who are members because of marriage), and those who are members by conversion. Those who are members a cult because of conversion will be much more difficult to reach. Those who were reared in a cult will probably have seen some of the inconsistencies in the lives and teachings of the members and may be more open to the gospel. So be sure to ask why this individual joined the cult.

Make the Gospel the Issue The one thing believers must do, if they are to have an impact on cultists, is make the gospel the issue. Get the cultists to listen to the gospel. It is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Many cultists have never heard a clear presentation of the gospel of the grace of God. You may have to listen to them to get them to listen to you, but if you can succeed in doing that, you will not only done what all the Scripture requires, but you will also, in the power of the Holy Spirit, have the maximum impact on the cultist.

I have personally led cultists to Christ from all of the traditional major groups. In most cases, it was done through preaching rather than personal evangelism. I believe the reason for that is that they had to sit and listen to me clearly present the gospel. If you can get cultists to listen to you clearly present the gospel as they are relaxed, you will have your greatest chance of winning them to Christ.

One of the ways you may be able to effectively present the gospel to cultists is to give them your testimony. A former Jehovah’s Witness reported three types of responses and the impact of each. The first response was a slammed door, which made her feel good because she had been persecuted for her faith. The second type of response was a heated argument, which strengthened her conviction because, from her point of view, she had answers. The third type of response was a personal testimony. It was this type of response that made a lasting impression upon her and made her think about what the other person said when she went to bed at night.

Press the issue of assurance One of the most effective tools I have found in pressing the gospel home to a cultist is to press the issue of assurance. No cultist, no matter what he or she says, can be assured of salvation. The best a Jehovah's Witness can hope for is to be spared Armageddon. Even after that, they must pass the test of obedience in the Millennium to see whether or not they inherit everlasting life on the earth. Since salvation is by works in Mormonism, they cannot be sure of salvation here and now. Whatever forgiveness a Seventh-day Adventist has obtained, it may be canceled out by future deeds. Thus, looking the cultist in the eye, with calm assurance, tell him or her that you know, based on Scripture (1 Jn. 5:13), that you are assured of heaven and that there is no doubt of that fact whatever in your mind.

Deal with the issues as they arise. Of course, the cultist will bring up some other issue, and the believer may be forced to deal with that issue. With a Mormon, it will more than likely be the authenticity of Joseph Smith as a prophet or, in the subject of salvation, baptism for the remission of sins. With a Jehovah's Witness, it will no doubt be the deity of Christ. With a Seventh-day Adventist, it will be the issue of the Law. In dealing with whatever becomes the issue, believers should firmly but graciously press the biblical position home.

Summary: There are things that can be done to reach cultists.

Rather than retreating, believers should do all that they can to reach every cultist they can for Jesus Christ.

In the fall of 1979, a Jehovah's Witness girl from Phoenix, Arizona, came to Los Angeles to attend a fashion school. At the same time, another girl, a Christian from Escondido, California, also came to Los Angeles to attend the same school. In the providence of God, the two became roommates. Within weeks, the young Christian girl from Escondido led the Jehovah's Witness girl to faith in Jesus Christ. The converted Jehovah's Witness, a girl named Karen Haddock, eventually joined our church, attended Moody Bible Institute, and married a graduate of Dallas Seminary who ultimately became youth pastor of our church. The point of the story is that this cultist was led to Christ by a young Christian, not a pastor, not an expert on the cults, but an ordinary Christian just like you.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barnhouse, Donald Grey. "Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?" *Eternity*, September 1956.
- Boa, Kenneth. *Cults, World Religions, and the Occult*. Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press Publishers, 1977.
- Christianity Today. "Another Adventist Professor is Ejected for His Views," June 12, 1981, p. 35.
- _____. "Beset by Critics, Adventist Official cites 'Satanic Influence.'" November 20, 1981.
- _____. "The Adventist Showdown: Will it Trigger a Rash of Defections?" October 10, 1980.
- Eddy, Mary Baker. *Science and Health*. Boston: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1875, reprint.
- Gerstner, John H. *Theology of the Major Sects*. Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1960.
- Guthrie, Donald. *The Pastoral Epistles*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series. London: Tyndale Press, 1964.
- Hendricksen, William. *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*. Reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968.
- Hoekema, Anthony A. *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism*. Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishers, 1963
- Lightner, Robert P. *Neo-Evangelicalism*. Findley, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Company, n. d.
- Martin, Walter. *Kingdom of the Cults*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1965.
- _____. *The Rise of the Cults*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957.
- Moon, Sun Myung. *Divine Principle*. Washington: Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, 1973.
- Myers, Stanley D. "Saved from Christian Science." *The Alliance Witness*, January 19, 1966.
- Passantino, Robert and Gretchen. *Answer to the Cultist at Your Door*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1981.
- Van Baalen, Jan Karel. *The Chaos of the Cults*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1956.
- Witmer, John A. "The Truth about Error." *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 124 no 495, July- September 1967, pp. 248-53.