

WHAT THE CULTS BELIEVE

Sunday School Notes Tabernacle Baptist Church, Ithaca, NY 14850, Summer 1999.

Introduction to the Study of Cults

Let me begin with a quote from **1.Timothy 4:1-2**

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.

The bible explicitly warns us that in our time there will be an increase of false religions which depart from the true faith and try to seduce believers and nonbelievers into following false doctrines that have nothing to do with the God that we know from the bible. ``Cult" or ``Sect" is a modern name for these false religions.

What is a cult?

Let us begin by trying to define what cult is. We call the Mormons and Jehovas Witnesses a cult. But we wouldn't use the same expression for Catholics, Pentecostals, Unitarians, Greek Orthodox, Jews, Muslims, etc., although their teachings are often quite different from ours.

So, what do you think is a cult? Let me read the definition that you find in Webster's dictionary

A cult is a system of religious beliefs and rituals that is regarded as unorthodox or spurious, with a great devotion to a person, idea, or thing.

So a cult is a religious group which differs significantly from the churches that are considered as the normative expressions of religion in our culture. A cult often has - or had in the past - a charismatic leader who is or was strong authority for the believers and has or had a strong influence on the religious teachings of that group. Cults often have very strong doctrines that make it very difficult for a cult member to leave.

All cults have in common that they deny the fact that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Some are very explicit about this and are thus easy to recognize - they are what we call ``*Non-Christian Cults*". Others seem to believe almost the same as we do but if we look closer we see that their teachings are in fact quite different from what we know as the true word of God - that's why we call them ``*Pseudo-Christian Cults*".

Although still a minority in today's society, cults seem to offer something that the mainstream religions cannot provide. Essentially, they ensnare people in two ways.

1. One way is to appeal to the pride of human beings through a rationalistic philosophy. Their doctrines sound modern and give their followers the feeling that through following them they will become ``someone important". They offer *higher or secret knowledge* that is supposed to make their followers special and to give them powers beyond the usual human capabilities.

2. The other way is to stimulate the superstitions that many people already carry in themselves. In fact, only a few unsaved people really believe that what they see in this world is all there is. Instead they assume that there must be some supernatural force or being which is there to either help or threaten them. Many cults appeal to that kind of belief and offer a religious system based on all kinds of superstitions which they call ``faith".

If you are not saved, it is quite easy to fall into either of the two traps. Even Christians sometimes have difficulties to find out whether a religious group is a truly Christian Church that just emphasizes some aspects stronger than we do or whether it is in fact a false religion.

How do we know?

What is the best way to find out whether we're dealing with a cult or not?

The best way to detect a counterfeit is to know the original very well. It has been said that this is the way cashiers in banks are trained to recognize fake money. They just deal so much with "the real thing" that they immediately know when they have a counterfeit bill in their hands.

It is the same when we deal with cults. We have to know the word of God very well to avoid falling into the traps of a cult. That is, we shouldn't just know the terminology of the bible, we shouldn't just be able to cite bible verses - we must have a clear understanding they mean. Yes, it is extremely important that you know your bible well - but that is what many cults do as well. In fact the Mormons and Jehova's Witnesses can probably cite more verses than most Baptists. But that is not the point - they mean something entirely different when they use the same words as you. So you must be able to express in your own words what certain passages mean and how they relate to the rest of the word. Otherwise you can get easily confused.

Of course, even among Christians there may be minor differences where we may argue whether the bible teaches that or not. Issues such as denying the command of baptism, a different attitude towards alcohol etc. do not characterize a cult and we shouldn't view those who share our basic doctrines but have different opinions on "just these aspects" as anti-christian but as brothers and sisters in Christ which may have to be convinced by scripture - and have the right to try to convince us that we see some things wrong. Disputing with them will give both of us more faith - and it is not important that we "win" here.

But it is different when central doctrines are concerned that mark the basis of our faith. Here we should not waver and this means we better know precisely what the word of God says. In fact, that is the best way to avoid traps. You don't have to learn much about a cult - you need to know the truth and this not just on the surface. So, when we study cults, we want to have three things in mind

1. *Protection:* We want to be able to see the subtle twists of the word of God, so that we are not fooled by a cult or fall into the traps of its teachings
2. *Understanding:* By analyzing a deviation from the doctrines of "orthodox Christianity" we will get a better understanding of what the word of God really says.

We all interpret what we read and hear - we cannot avoid this, because we all have a different understanding of how the words of our language are used and we assign meaning to them in our own way. Besides, the bible was written in a language of a different culture, 2000 years and more ago. When we read an English translation, we cannot expect that the words chosen in that translation are able to catch the intended meaning 100%. Besides, we use translations that are between 20 and 350 years old. Do we expect that we understand the English language in the same way as the translators did it then.

By looking at the word of God from various perspectives we make sure that our interpretation is close to what God wanted to express. Studying misunderstandings, fine twists, and deviations is a good way of getting the right picture.

3. *Witnessing:* By knowing what a specific cult teaches, it is easier for us to reach out to a cultist once we got in contact with them.

The measuring rod: a sound doctrine

So our measuring rod are the basic doctrines of the bible. We all should have the articles of faith of Tabernacle Baptist church which summarize the basic doctrines of the bible and give quite a few bible references. Out of these I will review ``the crucial seven" where we find most of the deviations that clearly mark a cult.

I will make this brief. Studying our articles of faith would take a full summer session by itself, and I only want to remind you of the basic facts that we should all know by heart. But I also recommend that you look up our articles of faith again before we study individual cults, because that makes it easier to identify why they really deviate from God's word.

Sources of Authority (TAB Articles of faith §1)

The Holy Bible, consisting of the 66 books of the Old and New Testament is the word of God. Its original manuscripts were verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit. The bible is infallible and without errors, complete in its revelation, and our absolute authority.

Nothing needs to be added to the Bible. Anything that goes against its teachings is not from God. If we want to clarify a doctrinal question, the Bible is our final authority.

If we say that the bible is complete, that doesn't mean that God doesn't speak to us when we pray. He does so to help us understand his will for a specific situation, but that will always be in accordance to his written word and never be a general revelation that needs to be added to the bible. So, listen to what God says to you in prayer, but be aware that Satan tries to influence your mind as well - so you better check if that what you heard is consistent with the bible.

The doctrine of God (TAB Articles of faith §2.a)

There is one and only one true God, the Creator, Sustainer, and Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth - eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in his being. We believe that God is three persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - and that these three are the same in substance, equal in every divine attribute, executing distinct offices.

Jesus Christ (TAB Articles of faith §2.b)

The person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ is the corner stone of our Christian faith. The answer to the question ``*what do you think of Christ?*" almost always reveals whether a person is a Christian or not.

We believe that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God - perfect in godhood and manhood, one with the father from eternity. He took upon himself the nature of man, was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin as Mary. He was the only man ever to live a sinless life. His death on the cross was a substitutionary and complete sacrifice for our sin. He arose bodily from the dead and ascended into Heaven, sitting at the right hand of the father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead and to set up his kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (TAB Articles of faith §2.c)

God, the Holy Spirit is a person, co-equal with the father and the son, who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He provides believers with gifts for building up the church of Christ.

Man (TAB Articles of faith §4)

Man was created by God, male and female, with living immortal souls. Made in the image of God, in righteousness and holiness, they had the power to fulfill God's law, yet the capability of rejecting it. By their own choice they fell from this sinless state. As a consequence all mankind, descending from them, is now sinful in nature, inclined to evil, and under God's wrath and curse. All men and women are without excuse for their sin and rightfully subject to condemnation to everlasting hell.

Salvation (TAB Articles of faith §6)

Salvation from this condemnation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Those who believe in His substitutionary sacrifice for their sin, repent, and receive Christ by faith have their sins forgiven, become children of God and are made new creatures.

Things to come (TAB Articles of faith §16)

Jesus Christ will come again, personally and visibly. At his appearance, the dead in Christ will rise and - together with the living Christians - receive new glorified bodies and caught up to meet the Lord ``in the air". The great tribulation will follow and culminate by the appearance of the Lord, who will establish his *millennial kingdom*. This period will end with the judgment of the nations, the resurrection, judgment and punishment of the wicked in hell, and the eternal life of the saints in heaven.

Keep in mind, the handout is a short form of our essential doctrines and not a replacement for the word of God itself. There are many other things we should know in order to fill certain ``gaps of understanding". Nevertheless, the above doctrines are foundational in the sense that ``if we can't agree even on those few points then it is useless to discuss other matters of faith". Let us not get distracted by side-effects before clarifying the main issues.

Typical doctrinal deviations

Also, be aware that repeating the words of these basic doctrines does not yet make sure that you know what they mean. In fact, the Mormons and Jehova's witnesses use almost the same terminology when they talk to us. But still they mean something quite different from what we mean. For instance

1. *Mormons* believe in the authority of the bible, but they say ``as far as it is translated correctly" - which means that they can always argue that a certain passage was translated wrong if it contradicts their teaching. Besides, they believe that the word of God is more than just the ... canonical books. For them, the Book of Mormon is also from God.

But as we they say: ``the bible is our final authority"

2. *Jehova's Witnesses* believe that Jesus is God, but for them that doesn't actually mean much. In their eyes Jesus is ``**a god**" like many other, although created first. So they deny that Jesus was there from the beginning or is equal with God, the father.

3. The *Moonies* believe in the authority of the bible but they make it subject to the interpretation given by Sun Myung Moon.

At least four of the fundamental doctrines are taught falsely by most cults, that is they are either opposed openly or twisted severely. These are the trinity of God, the deity of Christ, the personality of the Holy

Spirit, and the immortality of the soul. It is therefore important that you know *exactly* what they say and how the bible supports them. I will just briefly sketch this.

The trinity of God is vehemently rejected by most cults as unscriptural and absurd. While we have to admit that it is not mentioned explicitly in the bible, we find it implicitly present in both the Old and New Testament. The Hebrew Text of the Old Testament uses the plural word *Elohim* right at the beginning and over and over again. By the way - the Hebrew has a singular, dual, and plural form of words, so a plural means at least three. This is most striking to observe in **Deutoronomy 6:4**:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD

That doesn't reveal much in the English. But literally translated you would have to say *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our (at least three) Gods are one (composed) LORD*. The Hebrew for "one" at this point is "echad" - meaning a composed unity - although the Hebrew language also provides a word for an unseparable, absolute unity, namely "yachid", which the bible does not use at this point. What astonishes me most, is that even the Jews fail to see this.

We also find God conversing with himself in the Old Testament. In the New Testament we see that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are seen as co-equal with God, the father. This, of course is denied by many cults as well, so let us look at this a bit more.

The deity of Christ The whole Gospel of John was written to prove that Jesus was the Christ, the son of God (**John 20:31**). Jesus himself made this claim several times. The Jews understood this very well and wanted to kill him for that (**John 5:17-18**). **John 1:1** says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

There is no dispute that "the word" is referring to Jesus. Jehova's Witnesses say, that this verse only says that Jesus is "a" God - notice the fine twist in the meaning of the word "God" - but I checked the Greek and that clearly says that "*and God was the Word*" is the only correct translation. Similarly **Hebrews 1:8**, **John 20:38**, etc. cannot be translated differently.

There are many more verses that clearly support the deity of Christ in the original manuscript: **Philippians 2:6**, **Colossians 1:15**, **Hebrews 1:3**. **John 1:3** points out that *all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made* - so Jesus himself was not created by God, as many cultists argue when they interpret the phrases "begotten son" or "first begotten of all creation". The word *begotten* has nothing to do with creation.

The personality of the Holy Spirit

Most cults reduce the Holy Spirit to something like a divine influence or the power of God. As such it cannot be a person, they argue. But beginning in **Genesis 1:2** we see the Holy Spirit actively working together with God, the father, and God, the son. In **John 14:16-17** he is characterized as "the helper" who is supposed to continue the work of Jesus on earth. He speaks to us (**Acts 13:2**), teaches, guides, convicts, can be grieved (**Ephesians 4:30**) - and thus shows all the characteristics that we expect from an independent personality.

The immortality of the soul is denied by all who fear the possibility of judgment and eternal punishment. Some cults - citing **Genesis 2:7** "*and man became a living soul*" - teach that man does not have a soul but *is* a soul and that this soul will die with the person. They go through great complications to explain what happens after the physical death and how people are resurrected. But they insist on the fact that those who do not enter the heavenly kingdom will be annihilated, which means that there is no eternal punishment.

Luke 16:23, Matthew 25:41, Revelation 20:10 clearly point at eternal punishment - and this is not just a metaphor. Our souls were created immortal when God breathed the breath of life into man, and a "soul sleep" - the unconscious phase after physical death - is a purely fictional idea without any biblical support.

Teachings about the last things

The eschatological teachings of Pseudo-Christian Cults have similar elements as those of orthodox Christianity. They is a millenium, judgment, and eternal life for the faithful, But details vary greatly and have little to do with what the Bible.

Dealing with Cultists

Witnessing to someone who has been thoroughly indoctrinated by false teaching seems to be a fruitless attempt, in particular when you have to deal with pseudo-Christian cults. But this is only the case if we let the cultists steer the discussion. Mormons and Jehovas Witnesses come prepared to convince you of *your false beliefs*. They quickly move to the topics where they are well versed and that often have little to do with the essential message of the Bible, that is salvation through Jesus Christ.

If you want to have more than just a long discussion that leads nowhere, you need to move into command of the conversation quickly. *You* should be the one who asks questions about their beliefs about the topics that are really important. If you can steer the discussion into a direction where the cultist is not prepared to support his point of view by memorized verses then you have a chance to reach the lost soul behind the wall of indoctrination.

But, in order to really reach than person, you should keep a few things in mind.

1. *Do not argue*. Avoid anything that even sounds like you're attacking the person. He has a right to have his beliefs - even if they are severely wrong.
2. For the same reason, *do not ridicule the cultist* even if what he says is really absurd. His beliefs have eternal significance to him and he won't listen to you if you don't take him seriously. How would you feel if you were ridiculed? Besides, most cultists are much more committed to their cause than we are to ours. Their moral standards and religious efforts are often higher than ours - I think that most Baptists could learn quite a lot from Mormons and Jehovas Witnesses in this respect. But unfortunately their beliefs are very wrong.

So, instead of looking down to them, you should love the one who is so seriously deceived. He is a lost soul that needs your help.

3. The gravest *mistake* you can make is to *denigrate the character of the cult's founder*. This will only raise a barrier between you and the cultist and make the discussion very difficult. *These were the "don't"s*. Now what is it that you should do.
4. *Use the word of God* - the word itself is quick and powerful (**Hebrews 4:12**) and more effective than anything else. But keep in mind that just citing single verses does not lead you very far, particularly when you want to disprove an argument that the cultist already brought up and supported by *his* verses. You need to know the context of verses used by the cultist if you want to show him, that his false doctrines do not have a biblical support.
5. This, of course, requires some preparation on your side. You need to *know what the cultist believes* and how he usually supports his view. Then you can use the word of God effectively to "demolish strongholds" - as **2.Cor 10:4** says - which seem to be impossible to conquer otherwise. But the plan is not only to silence the cultist, but to win him over to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. A very effective way to lead the discussion into a different direction is to *give your own testimony*. There is nothing more convincing than a clear testimony about what Christ has done for you. One can easily deny your interpretation of the Bible, but it is hard to deny a ``real-life" testimony. But make clear that Christ wants to do the same for the cultist, that is to save him from eternal punishment and to give him instead eternal life.

7. *Exalt the Lord Jesus Christ* in all you say. **Philippians 2:9-11** says

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Make clear that salvation is through Christ alone and that he is Lord of all.

8. In all you do, you should *consciously depend upon the Holy Spirit*. Under his guidance you will be able to reach out to the cultist. He will tell you what to say, what to emphasize, and which argument not to bring up right now. If you try it out of your own wisdom, you may win an argument but lose the person.

Of course, there is no guarantee that you will be able to rescue a deceived soul. Sometimes you just have to let them go and pray that the word of God will continue to work in his life.

Overview

We obviously cannot cover all the cults, so I picked the most dominant ones. We will look at three kinds of cults

1. *Pseudo-Christian Cults*. These are the cults that claim to be the true Christian church, which has recovered a long-lost truth taught already by the early church or given directly to their founder. They provide the only way to salvation, which means you cannot be saved unless you join them.

We will look at [Mormonism](#), [Jehova's Witnesses](#), [The Way International](#), [Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God](#), and [Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church](#).

2. *Cults influenced by Hinduism* or other Eastern Religions have greatly increased over the past 50 years. They usually acknowledge the Bible as one of the holy scriptures. But they pay little attention to it or re-interpret it according to Hindu teaching. They hold up ideas like reincarnation and the ultimate absorption into the global ``deity" that is all and in all.

We will study [Christian Science](#) and [Scientology](#), and maybe find some time to touch on Transcendental Metitation and similar things.

3. *The [New Age Movement](#)* is somewhat different. Although clearly under the influence of Hinduism, it is not as much a separate religious organization, with a spelled out doctrine, but rather a very dangerous deception that began to make its way into society and even the Christian churches about 15 years ago. It hasn't become as dangerous as people believed 10 years ago, but managed to seduce quite a few fine Christians to accept half-truths and heathen beliefs as consistent with their Christian faith - and thus made them ineffective.

It should be noted that there are also *personality cults* that gather around a single authoritative figure. But these seldomly present a new, distinctive teaching and often fade away with the death of the leader.

Mormonism

The *Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints*, whose members have been nicknamed *Mormons* claims to be the restoration of the true church established by Jesus Christ. It has no relation with the Catholic or Protestant Churches but differs from them in theology, organization, and religious practices. In its numerous publication it emphasizes that the Christian Church established by Jesus Christ has become corrupt over the century and needed to be re-established again. Because of this, there is no salvation outside the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints.

These are strong claims, but they carry some truth. The Christian Churches have always be in danger of being corrupted. Some, like the Catholic Church, have fallen pretty badly during the middle age and were never restored. The reformation in the 1500's started new churches which were theologically correct again, but today they suffer from a serious lack of commitment. Even many Baptist Churches do not preach the whole word of God anymore.

But is the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints in fact a restoration of the true church of Jesus Christ? Let's have a look at what they believe.

- *We believe the Bible to be the word of God*
- *We believe in God the Eternal Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost*
- *We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Jehova, the promised Messiah, Redeemer and Savior, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*
- *We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved*

These are original citations from the Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. That sounds pretty much like what we believe, doesn't it? So - why do we say that Mormonism is a cult? Where are the differences?

Well, the differences show up when you dive deeper into Mormon theology and find out that the above articles of faith have a different meaning for them than for us. The bible is not the only source of authority they accept, their interpretation of the word "God" is quite different from ours and the same holds for the words "redemption" and "salvation". To understand what the Mormons believe we need to know a little bit about the early history of Mormonism.

History

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints was founded by its first prophet Joseph Smith in 1830 in Fayette, New York - no further than 40 miles from here. According to his own reports he had his first heavenly vision in 1820 which were followed by numerous visitations by a "resurrected person" named Moroni. In 1827 Moroni delivered to Smith the "golden plates", whose translation is now the *Book of Mormon*. In May 1829 John the Baptist appeared and ordained Smith to the Aaronic Priesthood. Shortly after that Peter, James, and John came to ordain him to the Melchizedek Priesthood. This established the authority of the church, because without the Melchizedek Priesthood there could be no salvation for men on earth.

It is difficult to understand how Smith found his first followers, but the Finger Lakes Region has always been an easy prey for new religions and probably still is. As far as I know, Mormonism wasn't the only cult that started here. But because of its great emphasis on missions, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints has now grown into a church that has more than 3 million members, most of them in the state of Utah, and sends out as many as 14,000 missionaries. A few organizations separated from the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints when Brigham Young took the Mormons to Utah, but compared to the main church they are rather insignificant.

Major Doctrines - where are the differences?

Many bad things have been said about the Mormons, most of them being not true. In fact, as far as commitment and moral standards are concerned, the accomplishments of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints are astonishing and probably far beyond what Baptist Churches have achieved with their own members. In that respect, we can only learn from them.

But what about their beliefs? The claims of Joseph Smith about his visions may seem a little strange - but that alone doesn't mean that Mormonism is a cult. So, is the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints really a Church of Jesus Christ or not? Let's look at our measuring rod - our own articles of faith - and compare.

Sources of Authority - anything but the Bible?

Let me give a more complete citation from the Mormon's articles of faith

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. We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and that he will reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God

So while the Mormons believe that the Bible is the word of God, it is only one of the many possible sources of authority. They strongly emphasize that the Bible is not complete and that there will always be additions to the current canon. It is taught, for instance, that Jesus repealed the law of Moses in the sermon on the mount **Matthew 5:21-48** although he explicitly says in **Matthew 5:17** that he will not change it.

The Mormons rely on the King James Version of the Bible, but the restriction "as far as it is translated correctly" suggests errors in the translation which make corrections by subsequent revelations and prophecies necessary.

The book of Mormon is considered to be an equally inspired record of the ancient people who inhabited the American continent before and after the time of Christ. The book tells the epic story of two waves of immigration, the first after the destruction of the tower of Babel with no survivors after a deadly battle 1500 years later, and the second about 600 B.C. under Levi from the tribe of Manasseh. Two nations, the Nephite and the Lamanite, came out of this. The Nephites were well advanced in civilization and became Christians after the resurrected Christ came to the Americas to organize his church. The Lamanites fell under the curse, became dark in skin, and degenerated. In a final struggle 1000 years later the Nephites were eliminated. Their last survivor, Moroni, completed the book of Mormon on Golden Plates and hid them until he reappeared to give them to Joseph Smith. The surviving "degenerated nation" is identified with the American Indians.

In contrast to the Bible, which is confirmed by thousands of historical evidences, the book of Mormon must be viewed as purely fictional. There is no external evidence for any of its claims. It also overemphasizes the role of America as "blessed land of God" and attempts to give it a "godly justification" for the prevalent racism of the 1800's.

So altogether the Mormons know three sources of authority - the Bible, as long as it fits ("is translated correctly") - the Book of Mormon - and revelations to their prophets. The role of the Bible is inferior for them and it is by no means the final authority anymore. Apart from using a similar terminology the Mormons have little in common with true Christianity.

God *We believe in God the Eternal Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost*

At a first glance Mormons seem to have the same concept of God as we have. But Mormon theology clearly teaches that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate Gods ``*composing the great presiding council of the universe*". They deny the doctrine of the trinity, because they view the blending of personalities as unnatural and impossible.

If something cannot be explained in human terms, it cannot be true. This argument, which seems to dominate the Mormon theology, leads to a belief system that appears to have a very limited view of God and consequently relies on complicated and often somewhat strange concepts.

Mormons believe in an *eternal progression*. God has once been as we are and is just much further ahead of us. In fact, every man can eventually become a God if he is faithful enough. Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have already entered the state of exaltation and become Gods.

Mormon theology denies the possibility of immaterial bodies and thus believe that God must have a body of flesh and bones - a direct contradiction to **John 4:24** or **1. Timothy 1:17** and even their own teaching about the Holy Spirit.

Because of God being a material, Mormons have to re-interpret the meaning of *omnipresence*, *omniscience*, and *omnipotence* -- doctrines that they seem to share with orthodox Christianity. For them, God can only have a limited extension in space, but his senses and powers are infinite. So he can transfer himself to any place and is thus omnipresence. He is *omniscient*, and *omnipotent* only because of the support of angels and ministering servants.

It is also taught that the Gods have wives in heaven and through them, God is literally our father. We see a progression of Gods evolving from the human spirits who have once been fathered by some other Gods and now themselves create new human spirits. Mormonism calls this doctrine ``celestial parentage".

So, a closer look reveals that the concept of God taught by Mormonism is quite different from the God of the Bible.

Man

The Mormon doctrine of man is very different from that of orthodox Christianity and is the key to an understanding of all the other doctrines. According to Mormonism, all life begins at the time of *spirit creation*. However, for a Mormon creation does not mean that God brought man into being, but only that he organized the elements which are co-eternal with him and thus turned them into *spirit children*.

Man's advance in the scheme of *Eternal Progression* involves at least four stages: (1) a premortal or *spirit existence*, (2) *mortal life* on earth with spirit and body temporarily joined, (3) the *spirit world* for the disembodied spirits after death, and (4) *immortality* after the resurrection with spirit and body inseparably connected.

Already in the premortal stage the spirit children have the freedom to choose good or evil. Their choices determine to a degree their later stage. Satan and one third rebelled at this stage and were excluded from eternal progression but became *sons of perdition* (we'll come back to that when we discuss the things to come). The rest stood with Christ, but some were less ``valiant" and therefore had to live an inferior life as humans. This is the explanation for the ``*millions of insane and afflicted people on earth and those living in filth, poverty, and degradation*". For the Mormons until 1978, black skin was one of the signs of this degradation and for this reason Black People were denied any spiritual rank.

This is a pretty unbiblical view of humans. The bible nowhere teaches that sickness and poverty are the result of one individual's sin, nor does it tell us that people with a different skin color are to be viewed as spiritually inferior.

But Mormonism also has quite a different understanding of the fall of mankind. For them, Adam was the archangel Michael in his premortal state. Together with *one of* his preincarnate wives (note the ``one of"), Eve, he was placed in the Garden of Eden, which the Mormons of course locate in America (Jackson County, MO). Both had immortal bodies but Eve sinned and became mortal. This created a dilemma for Adam, because he had to follow two conflicting commands: to *multiply and replenish the earth* and *not to eat from the tree*. He deliberately and wisely chose to stand by the first and greater command and took of the fruit. So *he fell that men may be*.

Mormonism thus completely *denies the original sin*. What God has declared sinful is now declared as one of the great advances toward eternal exaltation, because it opened the door for billions of pre-existing spirits to become mortal and further proceed in the scheme of eternal progression. For the Mormon, Adam did not sin at all: only Eve did, while the man - apparently viewed as ethically superior to women - had a good excuse for his transgression.

Consequently we don't inherit sinfulness from Adam and Eve but are innocent until we reach the *age of accountability*, which Mormons determine to be eight. Again, this is not what the Bible teaches. Although I am not quite sure what will happen to children who die before they can distinguish good and evil, the Bible clearly says that the heart of man is evil from childhood - there is no innocent stage.

Jesus Christ *Jesus Christ is the eternal Jehova, the promised Messiah, Redeemer and Savior, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.* Although this statement seems to be in keeping with Bible teaching, the Mormon's beliefs about Jesus Christ differ a lot from that of orthodox Christianity.

Mormons make a distinction between *Elohim*, the exalted name reserved for the father, and *Jehova*, which they see as Jesus Christ. To them Jesus Christ is the first-born of all the *spirit children of God*, a term that includes angels, demons, and human beings. The difference between Christ and them is not one of kind but only of position. Any thought of Christ's distinctive deity is rejected. In fact, it is said that by obedience and devotion to the truth he *earned the rank as God* while yet in his pre-existing state. He was already God before he became mortal, but this is the only distinction from normal humans who can attain godhood only after their mortal life.

As first-born child of Elohim, he was the executive of the Father in the creation, being aided in his work by angels and many humans.

His earthly life began with the virgin birth of Mary, which assures his *unique status*. But Mormons emphasize that Elohim is literally the father of both the spirit and the human body of Christ. Mormon's agree with orthodox Christianity that Christ was the only person to live a sinless life, that he died on the cross for the redemption of mankind, and arose in the body on the third day. But in addition to his appearances recorded in the Bible the book of Mormon also claims that he came to the Americas as resurrected being and organized his church among the Nephite people.

The Holy Spirit For the Mormon, the Holy Spirit is an entirely spiritual person without flesh and bones and thus different in nature from the father and the son. He emanates from the deity and is everywhere present, although only in one place at a time.

This again is superficially identical with what the bible says, but contradicts both the Mormon teaching about persons and the biblical teaching that father, son, and spirit are the same in every divine aspect.

Salvation *We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.*

Again, Mormonism uses a formulation of an article of faith that is very close to orthodox Christianity. But as before, the Mormon understanding of the atonement is different from ours. For Mormons, there are two aspects of salvation.

1. The first aspect is the *unconditional salvation* for all of mankind. Weakness, disease, and death came upon all men because of the transgression of Adam. Through the atonement of Christ physical resurrection - or immortality - is guaranteed for all living beings. This kind of salvation doesn't require faith in Christ but includes everyone. The only exception are the sons of perdition.

2. The second aspect is *conditional salvation*. It determines the course of eternal progression for the individual soul and depends entirely on obedience, works, and choices made during the mortal life. While all men become immortal, only the faithful and obedient are allowed to enter the highest sphere of existence in eternity. Faith alone is not sufficient for such an "exaltation". The *celestial kingdom* can only be entered through obedience to the laws and ordinances, devotion, and faithfulness. In other words, individual salvation is by works, not by faith.

Faith in Jesus Christ thus does not play an important role in the Mormon doctrine of salvation. It is not necessary to escape eternal punishment and it does not help to enter the exalted eternal life. The biblical understanding of salvation is quite different from that. You cannot escape eternal punishment if you don't turn to Christ and your right to enter the heavenly kingdom does not depend on works (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). Salvation is based on faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Mormonism also puts a very strong emphasis on baptism. Without baptism, your sins cannot be forgiven and you cannot enter the celestial kingdom. To redeem those who believed but died without being baptized properly, Mormons practice baptisms for the dead and keep meticulous records about the life of millions of people. Again, it must be said that although baptism is an important act of obedience, the Bible nowhere teaches that it is necessary for salvation.

Things to come The Mormon doctrines about the last things use similar elements as we know from the Bible but differ severely from orthodox Christianity. It would lead too far to discuss them in detail so I will focus on a few important aspects. The book of Mormon teaches that Israel will literally gather, which today is interpreted as joining the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, and that Zion will be built in the American continent. Afterwards Christ will return, and those who made it into the celestial kingdom will be resurrected to meet him in the air, to reign together with him. The other believers will be resurrected next and live on earth during the millennial reign. The wicked will be destroyed and sent into a "the prison house" for cleansing. Satan will be bound during the 1000 years. The second resurrection will then separate those destined for eternity from the sons of perdition.

There will be three eternal kingdoms of widely differing glories and one place for the sons of perdition.

The sphere of exaltation in the celestial kingdom is reserved for the faithful and obedient. They will be gods and shall dwell in the presence of God, the father, and His Christ forever.

The terrestrial kingdom is for the lukewarm believers and those who accepted the gospel only while in the spirit world, that is after death. They remain without exaltation and receive the presence of the Son but not of the father.

The lowest sphere in the celestial world is reserved for the rest who rejected Christ (or the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints) and lived wickedly. They will never experience the presence of God or of Christ, but shall live eternally as servants of God.

Perdition is for those who have no hope of any degree of salvation, that is Satan and the angels who rebelled with him, and all men who committed the unpardonable sin. They are doomed to everlasting fire.

However, eternal punishment is not really eternal, because God has the power to pardon them after an appropriate time. So, in the end, nobody will stay in the state of punishment forever.

So we see that the Mormon doctrine of the last things is filled with phantasies that integrate biblical concepts but have little to do with the word of God. The terminology is often the same as in orthodox Christianity but - as we have seen over and over again - Mormonism twists the meaning of this terminology so much, that their doctrines have nothing in common with true Christianity.

Special Aspects

Besides their religious beliefs certain Mormon practices deserve a brief discussion.

Polygamy: was established as a result of a direct revelation to Joseph Smith, which emphasized the eternity of the marriage covenant and the plurality of wives. Mormons believed that the Gods had multiple wives and felt that they were divinely commanded to do the same. However, all marriages had to be duly established and gave a lot of responsibilities to the man who wanted to lead such a large family. Polygamy became a controversial issue later and the practice was discontinued in 1890 in order to remove obstacles that kept Utah from joining the United States. Polygamy is a severe misuse of the word of God. The fact that God permitted polygamy in ancient times does not mean that he sanctified it. In a time where many men were killed in wars and women could not survive alone except by prostitution this was the lesser evil, but by no means good.

Racism: The book of Mormon and its interpretation in Mormon doctrines clearly identifies Black and Native Americans as spiritually inferior beings, which is in strong contradiction to the word of God. It appears that the Mormon doctrines tried to give a "godly justification" for the racism and sexism that was so common in the time of Joseph Smith and his followers. The Bible, however, nowhere teaches that certain people are superior to others just because of their race, skin color, sex, or other physical differences.

Jehova's Witnesses define themselves to be *servants of Jehova, the Almighty God, and active witnesses to his sovereign supremacy*. They reject any association with organized Christendom, which they view as religious hypocrisy. For them, the central issue is *vindication of the name and sovereignty of Jehova* - far more important than the salvation of men.

Jehova's Witnesses are known for their amazing publication and witnessing activity. In every major city you will notice Jehova's Witnesses displaying the *Awake* and *The Watchtower* magazine while enduring the ridicule of the secular population. Almost every household is visited by Jehova's Witnesses at least once a year. Each issue of their *Awake* and *The Watchtower* magazines is printed more than ten million times in more than 80 languages and there is an apparently endless production of books - all written in an authoritative tone, very convincing to the uninformed reader.

Their current booklet *Knowledge that leads to Everlasting Life*, for instance, presents an excellent, easy to understand introduction into the foundations of what seems to be genuine Christianity. It contains, for example, a very good exposition about the uniqueness and the trustworthiness of the Bible. On the surface, they have very much in common with faithful believers. So to the unsuspecting observer they only seem to be a bit extreme because they are so eager to stand up for God in an ungodly world.

History This exactly is the claimed purpose of the *Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society* - the organization which we know today as Jehova's Witnesses. It was founded in 1884 by Charles Taze Russell who viewed most of orthodox Christianity as corrupted and began to build his own system of Bible interpretation. His ideas were widely circulated through a seven volume book called *Studies in the Scripture* which has been distributed about 15 million times.

Major Doctrines - where are the differences?

In contrast to most other cults, Jehova's Witnesses focus on the Bible as their sole source of authority. But their interpretation of the Bible differs from orthodox Christianity in many essential points. They reject the doctrine of the trinity as unscriptural, deny the deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit. Any assurance of salvation is virtually impossible because it depends on faithfulness, which is the reason why each Jehova's Witness spends hundreds of hours of witnessing per year.

In most other aspects Jehova's Witnesses share the orthodox beliefs. This makes it extremely difficult to detect the deception in their teachings, particularly because it has improved over the years. Only a few years ago, their foundational booklet openly attacked the doctrine of the trinity and other orthodox doctrines. But their more recent publications are much smoother. They just tell the story as *they* see it, which means that they describe Jesus as the Messiah, but simply never say that he is also co-equal with God the Father. An uninformed reader will hardly notice that something essential is missing here.

Most of the differences between the teachings of Jehova's Witnesses and orthodox Christianity are of that nature: a few words here, half a sentence there - that is all you may notice. But if you sum up all these tiny little differences they lead to a belief system that has little to do with the true Word of God.

How do we know? What is it that shows us that Jehova's Witnesses actually deviate from the word of God while claiming to be the only faithful followers? Let's look at our measuring rod - our own articles of faith - and compare.

Sources of Authority - anything but the Bible?

Jehova's Witnesses strongly emphasize that for them the Bible is the ultimate source of authority. It is "*Jehova God's written word to mankind, revealing himself and expressing his purpose*". With such a strong devotion to the Word of God it appears strange that the doctrines of Jehova's Witnesses are so different from those of orthodox Christianity. Is the Word of God so ambiguous that it allows such different interpretations?

It is not. Actually, the ultimate source of authority for Jehova's Witnesses is not the pure Word of God, but the bible as translated and interpreted by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Russell's *Studies in the Scripture* and the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, which appeared in 1961, differ from the conventional translations whenever this is necessary to verify specific doctrines. Many of the peculiar teachings of Jehova's Witnesses are smuggled into the text of their Bible itself. The differences are not very obvious: a few words here, a different sentence structure there - that is all you see. But the consequences of these modifications are severe.

At this point one might say that Jehova's Witnesses have a right to create their own translation if they think that their choice of words would make certain aspects clearer to today's society. This is certainly true. But if you compare the translation with the original Greek and Hebrew, you will find that it is not just a bit biased, but plain wrong. If you look up Bible dictionaries or were fortunate enough to have studied Hebrew or Greek for a few years, you will notice that the modifications of critical passages may appear acceptable in the English language, but are not warranted by the original text. **John 1:1**, for instance is translated:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a God. and **Colossians 1:16-17** reads

For by him were all other things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all other things, and by him all other things consist. By inserting the indefinite article into John 1:1 and the word *other* into Colossians 1:16-17, the *New World Translation of the Holy*

Scriptures supports the Witnesses' doctrine that Jesus Christ is not co-equal with God the Father. In the translation of **Luke 23:43**: *Verily I say unto you today, you shall be with me in paradise* the comma has been shifted after the word *today*, which gives the whole sentence an entirely different meaning and allows a different teaching about paradise. In all three cases the Greek original does not allow the translations chosen by Jehova's Witnesses. In Colossians the word "other" does not occur at all. Luke 23:43 is a bit more tricky, because there are no commas in the original text. But the Greek grammar of the text does not allow to consider the word *today* as linked to the word *say*, so the traditional translation is correct. I will say more about John 1:1 and other false translations when we go into the specific doctrines.

So you have to be careful. Don't let a Jehova's Witness cite from his own Bible but ask him to open a conventional one and study the Word there. That may lead to a few disputes about the accuracy of the translation but most Witnesses are not even aware of that fact or will turn out to be unable to defend their translation. But very likely you will not run into this discussion and can focus on the pure Word of God instead. Maybe this will open their minds and make them able to see themselves that their doctrines are wrong.

God For Jehova's Witnesses, God the Father is the only true God who *"is now working out his purpose of vindicating his name, Jehova, and sovereignty, and blessing all faithful mankind through his kingdom"*. Jehova is *one* person, self-contained and never lonely, omniscient, but not omnipresent - although his power extends everywhere. Jehova God is the supreme sovereign of the universe.

This description is close to how orthodox Christianity would characterize God the father. However, Jehova's Witnesses vehemently deny the doctrine of the trinity. They view it as a *"false, unbiblical doctrine that would deny His almighty supremacy"*. They consistently deny the deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit.

In our first session we have discussed the trinity of God, the deity of Christ, and the personality of the Holy Spirit. There is plenty of biblical evidence for these doctrines although they are never spelled out explicitly in a single verse. But Jehova's Witnesses ignore these evidences or translate them away in their *New World Translation*. For them, the doctrine of the trinity is originated in ancient Babylonish paganism, and the central issue is to stand up for the vindication of the *name "Jehova"*, which they sometimes view as a requirement for salvation.

Creation Almost all of Jehova's Witnesses' doctrines are built around an elaborate view of creation: Jehova God brought into being all that exists, both the material and the spiritual. Jesus Christ was God's first creation (thus his *son*) and was given *"priority and preeminence among all God's creatures"*. The Son then became the co-worker of Jehova through whom all else came into existence. Angels were created next, with Lucifer being the first of them - a prince almost equal to the only-begotten son, but later falling away. Finally, the heavens and the earth were created at God's command. Jehova's Witnesses like to calculate: since the *sabbath rest* began some 6000 years ago, the Battle of Armageddon is near and *"Christ's reign of 1000 years will begin immediately after it"*, each of the creator's workdays was 7000 years long and mankind is 42,000 years old. The world itself may be much older, because the "silence" of Genesis 1:1 *"may allow"* for a period of several billion years.

Jesus Christ *Jesus, the Christ is a created individual, the second greatest Personage of the universe. Jehova God and Jesus together constitute the Superior authorities.*

The vehement denial of the deity of Christ is an outstanding feature of Jehova's Witnesses' doctrinal system. Actually, it is just a revival of an old heresy known as *Arianism*. To the Witness, Jesus Christ is the Messiah, but not Jehova God. He is the first-born son of God and lesser than Jehova. He was born as a Human (in the October of 2 B.C.) and did not possess immortality. But he *became* the Messiah when he was baptized by John (in Fall 29 A.D.) and acknowledged by God, died on a *stake* (not a cross) as ransom for our sin (in Spring 33 A.D.), and was resurrected immortal as a *spirit* (not a physical body) on the third

day. There is no bodily resurrection and consequently there can be no second coming in the scriptural sense of that term.

To support these doctrines, many key passages of the bible are twisted in the *New World Translation*. **Philippians 2:6**, for instance, is translated as

who .. gave no consideration to a seizure, namely that he should be equal to God.

which seems to say that Jesus never claimed to be equal to God. Quite the opposite is true if you look at the actual text.

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

Reference is also made to **John 1:1-3**, which says *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* We think this is pretty plain. Jesus is *the Word* -- Jehova's Witnesses agree to that -- Jesus was there from the beginning, Jesus was with God, Jesus was identical with God, and He was the Creator of everything. But the Witnesses say that this is not so. For them, Jesus is a created being - the "firstborn of creation", so he was present since the beginning of creation but not earlier. They say he cannot be identical with God the Father, because the Bible says that the Word was *with* God. And since two persons cannot be identical, Jesus cannot be God. He was created by God as the very first there was and from then on he created all of the material world.

Sounds plausible - doesn't it? But there is a contradiction with the end of verse 1, which says that *the Word was God*. If you point that out to them, you will hear that the correct translation would be *the Word is a God*, which means exalted, but not identical with Jehova. Well, they are right in saying that the Greek doesn't use the definite article here, but the Greek sentence actually says *God was the Word*, so it is a statement about God the father. In English (and German as well), we can change the order of words without changing the meaning of the sentence, so *the Word was God* is also a correct translation while *the Word is a God* cannot be justified.

Jesus cannot be a created being because verse 3 clearly says that *without him nothing was created that was created*. So nobody else created him. The Greek term here is absolute and not restricted to material things. *Nothing* is more than just *no thing*. The English translation is a bit ambiguous here because there is no word in the English language to express this appropriately. The same holds for *in the beginning*, which in the Greek has a connotation of "always" and not of a starting moment. So Jesus was there not just since the beginning of creation but always.

Now someone may point out that the Bible speaks of Jesus as *the only begotten son of the Father* (**John 1:14**). Doesn't that mean *created*? No it doesn't! The Greek original *monogenos* points at uniqueness in rank and relation and is not related to the word *gennao*, which means *to create*. The translators 300 years ago chose the words *only begotten* because at that time this clearly expressed that Jesus' relation to the Father was special and unique and that as the heir he was equal in rank with the Father. They couldn't use "the only son" because that would contradict the fact that all Christians are children of God. Today's understanding of *only begotten* is a little different, but it is difficult to find an English phrase that expresses the meaning of *monogenos* accurately.

I went into these details to show you how subtle the deception is. At a first glance you would hardly notice that the tiny little differences in the translation have any effect on our interpretation of God's word. But the doctrines derived from these tiny little twists are extremely different from what we believe.

The Holy Spirit The Holy Spirit is not a person but defined as "Jehova's invisible energizing force that produces visible results experienced by men". To support this, the *New World Translation* never

capitalizes references to the Holy Spirit and many passages referring to the Holy Spirit are modified accordingly. **Genesis 1:2**, for instance, is translated as: *And God's active force was moving to and fro over the surface of the waters.*

There are no attempts to explaining the Spirit's activities as helper, guide, advocate, comforter, or person who convicts of sin, which so clearly point out the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Man Man was made by God about 42,000 years ago and given dominion over the earth. For the Witness, a man does not *have* a soul that is separate from the human body and can exist independently, but man *is* a soul. This soul is *not* immortal and thus death is the end of existence. Immortality is given as a reward for faithfulness. This concept is in sharp contrast to the orthodox understanding of **Genesis 2:7** *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

Jehova's Witnesses point out that in this passage man *became* a living soul. But the body, made from the dust of the ground, is mortal and subject to death, while the soul - the breath of life - entered the body and gave it life. The breath of life is God's breath and indestructible. It will leave the body during physical death.

Man sinned and was expelled from the Garden of Eden lest he gain immortality of the *body*, as stated in **Genesis 3:22-23**. Jehova's Witnesses maintain that Adam would have lived forever on earth in his mortal state if he had not sinned. But because of his disobedience, death came into the world.

Since Jehova's Witnesses view body and soul as inseparable, their explanation of death and resurrection becomes quite complicated. For them, the first death is a *soul sleep*, a termination of existence, and resurrection is a re-creation according to the memory of God - not a restoration of the original body and soul.

Salvation *Salvation is the deliverance from the destructive power of sin, a redemption from the ultimate end of sin, which is everlasting death, annihilation.*

For Jehova's Witnesses, Christ's atonement for sin is the ransom that overcame the power of sin and death and gave man a new chance - an *opportunity to receive the gift of immortal life*. Jesus Christ willingly gave up his perfect human life on earth and offset the inherited condemnation for Adam's family. He exchanged his human existence for the spirit existence and secured man an opportunity to live in paradise.

So far this sounds similar to what orthodox Christianity teaches, although we would possibly express it with different words. But salvation is only available for the *faithful ones who endure to the end*. All other will receive a *destruction that lasts forever*, that is annihilation. Jehova's Witnesses also have a very peculiar interpretation of **Revelation 7:4**:

And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. For the Witness this means that only 144,000 will be able to share in heavenly glory with Jesus Christ. We are told that God has set certain requirements and qualifications for this the heavenly class: First, they have to exercise faith in God's provision, the shed blood of Christ. This includes baptism, which symbolizes dedication and brings the Witnesses into the position to be justified and declared righteous before God. God then causes his active force or holy spirit to act upon them and acknowledges them as his sons.

Second, they must demonstrate their dependability by maintaining integrity and carrying out their dedication faithfully until death. The majority of Jehova's Witnesses will not be able to be in that heavenly class. They will enjoy life in paradise on earth, provided that they pass the test of faithfulness during the millennial reign.

So salvation does not come by faith in Jesus Christ alone, but only by being a faithful, obedient, and enduring witness of Jehova God. There is *no assurance* that you can make it, which explains why Jehova's Witnesses are so eager to witness to other people and endure the ridicule of the world. They need to work their way into paradise and even that doesn't guarantee heavenly glory for them. On the other hand, there is no eternal punishment because all the unfaithful ones will be annihilated.

Things to come The doctrine of Things to Come is based on a series of sophisticated calculations by which Jehova's Witnesses were trying to predict the return of Christ and other details of the kingdom of God, like for instance the number of people who would be part of the heavenly kingdom.

At the end of the 19th century Charles Russell calculated the beginning of the heavenly kingdom to be the year 1914, which is 2520 years after Jerusalem was captured by Babylon. The 2520 years arose from a combination of **Daniel 4:16**, **Revelation 12:6**, and **Ezekiel 4:6** which appears to spell out the time until God is acknowledged. Before 1914, this beginning of the heavenly kingdom was understood as the second coming of Christ and as judgment day.

Now that 1914 has passed without any visible event, Jehova's Witnesses had to develop a more elaborate doctrine lest they admit that their prediction was wrong. So they say now that the kingdom of God is *entirely heavenly* and that Christ's second coming already took place in the spirit world. At that time the devil and all his demons were hurled down to earth - World War I is viewed as proof for this claim.

Four years later, in 1918, Jesus entered the spiritual temple and began to cleanse it. This marked the period of judgment: The 144,000 were chosen from among those already dead and those who will die subsequent to 1918. The judgment people living in the world were divided into "sheep and goats" according to their individual attitude toward Jehova's Witnesses and their message. The judgment is still going on as long as people are born into the world.

The battle of Armageddon is the next great event in history. In this battle Jesus Christ and his forces of righteousness will destroy Satan and his demonic and human organizations - such as organized religion and the United Nations - and vindicate Jehova's universal sovereignty. Armageddon's survivors will enter the Millenium on earth. During that time the faithful will be raised, as well as those who tried but died without opportunity to learn. The latter will be taught and then - like the others - go through a thousand year test of faithfulness. Only those who pass this millennial test will later enter paradise. The others will, together with Satan and his followers, be thrown into the lake of fire and annihilated.

Failing predictions caused a lot of trouble for Jehova's Witnesses. Subsequently they put many efforts into re-interpreting the meaning of words in order to support their teachings. Jehova's Witnesses are not willing to admit mistakes in their interpretation of the Bible - they rather elaborate complicated doctrines that are difficult to justify and twist the meaning of words than submitting to the pure Word of God. Because of a deep distrust in all established religions and worldly organizations they often appear extremely stubborn and indoctrinated when confronted with the truth. It does not make much sense to dispute doctrines on an abstract level.

But you have something which they miss - assurance of salvation. Your individual testimony, coupled with questions about their personal beliefs, may help them to see beyond their narrow horizon and understand what the gospel really says.

The Way International The group that we will study today shares many of its fundamental beliefs with Jehova's Witnesses although it gives different justifications for them. It is called *The Way International*, a relatively small cult which attracted a lot of attention in the 1970s as it grew rapidly. According to its own definition *The Way International is a biblical research and teaching organization concerned with setting before men and women of all ages the inherent accuracy of the Word of God so that everyone who so desires may know the power of God in his life. The Way is not a church, nor is it a denomination or a religious sect of any sort. Power for abundant living* - this is what *The Way International* promises its

followers. Capitalizing on the lifelessness of traditional churches who failed to fill the spiritual needs of today's society and the enthusiasm of the younger generation *The Way International* purports to give a new light on the Scriptures. This new light, which is taught in various classes offered by *The Way*, is the result of over thirty years of biblical research and teaching by its founder, Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille. In his many books and videos Wierwille demonstrates an impressive use of Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic - together with appropriate explanations - to interpret Scripture. However, his style is very dogmatic and critical and - unfortunately - often very far away from orthodox Christian doctrines.

History Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille received a Master of Theology degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and served as a minister of the Evangelical and Reformed Church from 1941 to 1957. During that time, he claims, God audibly spoke to him:

He spoke to me just as plainly as I'm talking to you now. He said he would teach me the Word as it had not been known since the first century if I would teach it to others.

God, he testifies, later gave him a sign in confirmation of his voice. He later received "the holy spirit" (*not capitalized!*) and began to speak in tongues. For Wierwille, this was the starting point of his true mission. He started broadcasting radio shows, went back to school to receive a doctorate, and began to teach the new truths that he had "received" from God, among which his "*Power for abundant living*" class has become the most popular one.

The Way, the name was taken from **Acts 9:2**, was officially chartered in 1955 and began to grow rapidly in the sixties and seventies. Videos and long-term training programs were developed and translated into several languages. After the death of Dr. Wierwille in 1986, *The Way* went through a phase of re-organization by its current president and experienced a short period of decline. Recently, however, membership has begun to grow again and *The Way* still needs to be taken seriously.

The organizational structure of *The Way International* is likened to a tree. After taking the basic "*Power for abundant living*" classes, new members (viewed as leaves) join a home bible study group - called a twig - where they meet for worshiping and studying the word - usually guided by videos or audio tapes. Branches, limbs (state), trunks (national), and the root (headquarter) are further steps in the hierarchy of *The Way*. As in the catholic church, this structure has also become a doctrinal hierarchy - the views of *The Way's* president are often viewed as the only acceptable interpretation of the Word of God.

Although *The Way* has attracted only a few hundred thousand members and lost many again of them after a few years it has attracted the attention of the media in the 1970's because of its rapid growth and became popular particularly among younger people. Like all new religious groups, *The Way* has become subject of various rumors, including brainwashing techniques for acquiring new members and paramilitary training, most of them not being true. As far as size and religious practices are concerned, *The Way* is not a dangerous cult. However, its teachings are a cause for concern, because they attract the spiritually needy but mislead them at the same time - even if they do not become members.

Major Doctrines - where are the differences? The beliefs of *The Way International* have been characterized as a mixture of evangelical Christianity, pentecostalism, and a few ancient heresies which *The Way* shares with Jehova's Witnesses and other cults. Many of the teachings of Dr. Wierwille can be seen in accordance to orthodox Christianity. But the few deviations - such as the denial of the trinity, of the deity of Christ, or the personality of the Holy Spirit - are essential and should not be considered as acceptable. So let us look at the specific teachings of *The Way* and compare them to our own articles of faith. **Sources of Authority - anything but the Bible?**

The one and only recognized source of authority is the Bible, although it is distinctively re-interpreted by the founder. Wierwille considers the gospels as part of the Old Testament and only the book of Acts and the New Testament epistles addressed to the church are apply to today's believers. The remainder of the

Bible is ``for our learning" but are not as relevant. This is at least an unusual view because traditionally we consider *all* of the Bible as relevant for today's life. **2. Timothy 3:16** says

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness

Wierwille does not brush this verse away, but states that the Word was *originally* God-breathed and has been confused over the centuries by man-made doctrines and traditions. He claims, for instance, that the original text of the New Testament was Aramaic, not Greek, and bases his interpretations on the available Aramaic texts.

He is not entirely wrong with his claims. Churches need to be careful not to confuse the true Word of God with man-made traditions, and parts of the New Testament (the Gospel of Matthew) may have been written originally in Aramaic. But that is exactly what makes the teachings of Wierwille so dangerous. A bit of justified criticism, mixed with partial truths and peculiar interpretations of the Word of God - this catches those who are not already firm in their faith and causes many to view *The Way* as a sound Christian group with a specific mission.

For members of *The Way*, the doctrines taught in the *Power for abundant living* classes have almost the same authority as the Scriptures they are supposed to interpret. Former members report that it was difficult to get justifications for these teachings that are based on scripture alone. The argument ``*it simply is so*" is often used to end a discussion when no consensus could be reached. Wierwille claims to have received his insights directly from God, but many of his teachings were actually inspired by various books that he read in the thirties and forties.

God Like Jehova's Witnesses *The Way* teaches that God the Father is the only true God and Creator of heaven and earth. The doctrine of the trinity is vehemently rejected. The clearest New Testament verse, **1. John 5:7**

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

is viewed as one example where a doctrine made its way into the text of the Bible. This is probably correct, because this verse is not found in any Greek manuscript that is older than 500 years. The use of the plural word *Elohim* in the Old Testament is explained as indicative of supremacy and lordship - a plural of majesty. This is certainly a possible, though not very likely interpretation of the use of the plural word *Elohim* for God. But Wierwille ignores the fact that there are many other biblical evidences for the doctrine of the trinity that cannot be re-interpreted otherwise. Among those are verses that clearly point out the deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit.

We have talked about the doctrine of the trinity several times already but but Wierwille's counter-arguments raise a few new issues that need to be addressed.

Jesus Christ

In 1975 Wierwille wrote a book with the title *Jesus Christ is not God*. This book summarizes the key points in *The Way's* doctrine.

1. *God is eternal while Jesus was born.* Jesus did not coexist with God, neither as spirit nor in any other form, before his human birth. John 1:1 is interpreted as:

In the beginning was the Word (that is God the father), and the revealed Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2. Jesus Christ is the *created Word*, that was with God *in His foreknowledge* from the beginning.

So there are three forms of the Word - the *original Word* (God himself), the *written Word* (the Bible) and the *created Word* (Jesus). The latter two are what Wierwille calls the *revealed Word*, which God gave in order to communicate with mankind.

So Jesus Christ is the Son of God, brought into existence by God in Mary's womb, the perfect man; the promised Messiah, who died as a substitute for our sins and was raised again by God on the third day - but *he is NOT God himself*.

Scriptures like **John 10:30**, where Jesus clearly states "*I and my Father are one*" are brushed aside by re-interpretation. Wierwille holds that this would mean only "*one in purpose*". But this argument completely ignores the violent reaction of the Jews - they certainly took it as much more than one in purpose and Jesus adds to his claim in **John 10:38**, when he says "*the Father is in me, and I in him*".

Other verses like **Hebrews 1:2** or **Ephesians 3:9** which explicitly state that all things were created *by* Jesus Christ are re-interpreted as "*created for Jesus Christ*". While the original text may allow such an interpretation, the immediate context does not justify it. So again we see that Wierwille's arguments for his peculiar doctrines are quite deceiving and not so easy to refute unless you know the context of Bible passages very well.

There are a few other peculiarities in *The Way's* teachings about Jesus Christ. They claim that Jesus Christ died on a Wednesday and was raised exactly 72 hours later on a Saturday. Like Jehova's Witnesses they say that Jesus died on a stake, not a cross. Also there were four men crucified with Christ - two thieves (according to **Matthew 27:38**), and two malefactors (according to **Luke 23:32**). The Aramaic words *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* in **Matthew 27:46**, translated as "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" are re-interpreted as "*My God, my God, for this purpose was I spared, for this purpose was I kept, for this purpose I came into the world*", which takes the unique relation between Jesus and God the father away from this verse.

Neither of these peculiarities have any significance for *The Way's* teachings other than to support Wierwille's claim that he alone is able to accurately interpret God's word. But There is no sound scriptural basis for these teachings and the traditional doctrines are much better supported by the overall context of the Bible.

The Holy Spirit *The Way* strongly rejects the doctrine that the Holy Spirit is an independent person. In his interpretation of the Bible Wierwille distinguishes between the person of the Holy Spirit, which is just another name for God, and *holy spirit* (uncapitalized), which is a gift of God to the believers. The latter is not a person but a manifestation of God's power in a person.

Man *The Way's* doctrine of Man is orthodox: man was created in God's image, sinned and experienced spiritual death. All humans have a sinful nature and need redemption.

Salvation Salvation is by faith in Christ. Any person who confesses Jesus Christ as his Lord and believes that God raised him from the dead is born again and a member of the body of Christ. This is essentially the orthodox doctrine but weakened by the denial of the deity of Christ. In fact, Wierwille goes as far as writing that "*If Jesus Christ is God and not the Son of God, we have not yet been redeemed*", because this would degrade God from his supreme position. But without the deity of Christ, the atonement would not have been the perfect sacrifice and perfect substitute for the sins of all men.

For *The Way* there are two immediate consequences of salvation: the deliverance from the powers of darkness and the gift of holy spirit.

Wierwille teaches that ``when we have salvation, we have wholeness - even physical wholeness if we simply accept it. Complete healing from any sickness or disability is available to all believers. Although this is not a matter of extreme emphasis, it is often pointed out as an additional incentive for those who are searching. Ironically, Dr. Wierwille himself suffered from various diseases in the last years before his death. This fact was well hidden from the public but revealed after his death in 1985. He died after a long and hopeless battle against cancer - apparently not even ``the chosen instrument of God" had not enough faith to become physically whole, but he was too stubborn to admit that he was wrong.

Speaking in tongues is another major issue that *The Way* shares with the pentecostal movement. An individual, so it is taught, receives the gift of holy spirit when he is saved, which comes in all 9 manifestations listed in **1. Corinthians 12** (tongues, interpretation, prophecy, word of wisdom, discerning spirits, faith, miracles, and healing). Speaking in tongues is viewed as the visible sign of salvation and *The Way* encourages every believer to use that gift for his own and the other's edification.

There are two problematic aspects with this teaching. First, the Bible nowhere teaches that every believer receives the gift of speaking in tongues. **1. Corinthians 12:10** lists it as one possible gift. Members of *The Way* who cannot speak in tongues will always doubt whether they are really saved. Secondly, the speaking in tongues is no unique sign of salvation. In fact, it was practiced by many pagan religions which had nothing to do with the only true God. Accepting tongues as a sign for salvation will give some people a false sense of assurance.

Things to come *The Way's* views of the Things to come is no different from the orthodox doctrines. Jesus Christ will return personally, the just and unjust will rise and be judged, resulting either in eternal life or eternal punishment.

Special Aspects

There are, however, a few peculiarities that deserve a brief discussion. *The Way* shares with the pentecostal movements a strong emphasis on tongues and healing, which usually is very fascinating for unbelievers, and a strong belief in authority and ``church hierarchies". While the Bible does teach us to respect and support our leaders, it nowhere says that we have to believe all they say.

The fact that the strong authoritative structure of *The Way* is merely an issue of ``power" became quite obvious after the death of Dr. Wierwille in 1985. There was a brief struggle for leadership and the current president quickly purged the organization from opponents, apostates, and any connection to the name Wierwille. *The Way* is now the ``kingdom" of Reverend Craig Martindale - concerning both leadership and official teachings.

For a certain time, it was unofficially taught that extra-marital sex is not sinful but could actually be profitable for spiritual growth. This view was based on the old Corinthian belief that bodily practices do not affect the spirit of a person. Although this was never taught publicly, it made adultery an acceptable practice, which again made *The Way* more appealing for today's society than traditional churches who clearly refused any tolerance of sexual misconduct.

The fact that *The Way* deviates from orthodox Christianity only in doctrines that are not immediately important for the spiritually needy, makes it more dangerous than cults that are clearly distinct from Christian beliefs. There are many people in this world who try to get right with God and organizations like *The Way* make it easier for them to find a spiritual home than most of the traditional churches. They notice that the water they drink contains some impurities, but they are so thirsty that they take it anyway.

The success of pseudo-Christian cults should be a lesson for the bible-believing churches. Are we ready to fill the spiritual needs of the unbelievers? Or are we so holy that we don't associate with them before they come into our church and turn to Christ? Paul said it this way (**1. Corinthians 9:20-21**)

And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

There are thousands of people out there in Ithaca alone who need us. Let us reach out to them and give them the pure water before they get the contaminated one.

Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God The *Worldwide Church of God* owes its beginning to Herbert W. Armstrong, who like many cult leaders claims to be the only one capable of correctly interpreting scripture.

History Herbert W. Armstrong's interest in the Bible began in 1927 after his wife brought the particular teachings of her church, the *Church of God - Seventh Day*, to his attention. Trying to prove them wrong he studied their beliefs intensively and finally accepted them. In 1933, he was ordained a minister of that church and shortly afterwards began broadcasting a radio program called *The Radio Church of God* and publishing a magazine called *The Plain Truth*. Because his teachings deviated more and more from that of the *Church of God - Seventh Day* his ordination was later revoked. He continued his ministry by radio and magazine and eventually founded his *Worldwide Church of God*.

While the church itself never grew larger than about 100,000 members, its radio and television programs reached millions of Americans. About 8 million copies of *The Plain Truth* magazines were sold each month in 187 countries. During its peak time the church reported donations of more than 200 million dollars per year, which is due to an extreme emphasis on works and over-tithing as requirement for salvation.

Armstrong's message was a mixture of Seventh Day Adventism, Jewish observances of the law, and specific cultist doctrines which were claimed to be special revelations from God. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote

The prophecies and mysteries of God, sealed until now, are today revealed to those whom God has chosen to carry his last message to the world as a witness and also claims that his *Worldwide Church of God* is the only true church of God while all others are counterfeits. Yet most of his doctrines are very similar to those of Jehova's Witnesses, Mormonism, and British Israelism - thus in no way unique to Armstrong. There was also a major focus on predictive prophesy. For instance, it was predicted that Jesus Christ would return in 1975, which of course did not happen and caused the church to lose many members in the late seventies.

Shortly before his death in 1986, Armstrong passed his authoritarian power as Pastor General to Joseph Tkach, a member of the board who had worked up through the ranks because of his unswerving loyalty to Armstrong. Ironically, Tkach used his power to change the *Worldwide Church of God's* doctrines after Armstrong's death to a more orthodox position, despite a widespread opposition among members. By 1995 the *Worldwide Church of God* had eventually become a bible-believing church, which today (July 1999) is even admitted by the most sceptical anti-cult organizations.

The only criticism is that the church still maintains its authoritarian leadership structure as well as a certain lack of fiscal responsibility, and declares that it really has been "Christian" all the time, which is hard to understand given the radical changes of the past 13 years. However, we can praise God for turning the Church around. It is one of the most striking examples how God uses his Word to "demolish strongholds" - as **2. Corinthians 10:4** says - which by human terms already seemed invincible.

Major Doctrines - where are the differences? In what we will discuss today I will focus on the time before the changes, that is on *Armstrongism*. As I mentioned, Armstrong did reach millions of Americans and certainly influenced many who never joined his church but brought his teachings into other churches. Like the Mormons, Armstrongism denies the Trinity but believes that every man can eventually become God. As Jehova's Witnesses, he sees Jesus Christ as a God, but inferior to God the Father. Like both, it teaches salvation by faith in Jesus Christ and additional obedience to the law. But there are a few new doctrines that we have not discussed so far.

Central to Armstrong's teachings is the belief in *British Israelism*, which strongly influences the way in which the bible is interpreted. The basic theory of British Israelism is that the Anglo-Saxons, that is Britain and its former empire, are the ten lost tribes of Israel. The argument goes roughly as follows.

1. God's promise to Abraham was to be the father of many nations of which the Jews are only one (Judah).
2. God's promise to David was to establish his throne forever (**2. Samuel 7:13**) so it must exist today.
3. Israel lost its identity in 721 B.C., when its people were taken captive and became known as the *ten lost tribes*.
4. According to Jacob's prophecy Ephraim was promised to become a multitude of nations, a commonwealth - which must be today's Great Britain.
5. Manasseh is the United States.

This theory, which came up way before Armstrong's times, is supported by a massive abuse of language. The name Saxon's is supposed to be derived from Isaac-son while British is composed from the Hebrew words *Brit* - meaning *covenant* - and *Ish* - meaning *man*. While composed foreign words did make their way into the English language, this explanation must be viewed as pure fantasy without any evidence.

Nevertheless, there are quite a few British and American cults, Armstrongism included, which hold to that teaching because it gives them a special role as God's chosen people.

Sources of Authority - anything but the Bible?

The only recognized source of authority in the *Worldwide Church of God* is said to be the Bible. However, Armstrong claimed that his church has the only true interpretation of the Word of God, which essentially says that you cannot interpret the Bible yourself. So the final authority for members of the *Worldwide Church of God* were Armstrong's writings and not the text of the Bible.

God *God is the creator, the beginner, the one who caused us to have life, and so is called our father.*

At a first glance, Armstrong seems to have an orthodox concept of God. However, he declares the doctrine of the trinity to be pagan and teaches instead that ``*God is a family, a kingdom, NOT a limited trinity*". This family consists currently only of God the Father and the God of Abraham, who later became Jesus Christ, the son of God. But God's intent, Armstrong teaches, is to reproduce himself. All children of God will eventually become God as well, who ``*will counsel and advise our Creator*".

This is very close to what the *eternal progression* in Mormonism expresses but it goes to an even greater extreme.

Jesus Christ *Christ has existed from all eternity with the Father. He is one with the Father, but he is subordinate to him.*

In contrast to Mormonism, Jehova's Witnesses, or the Way International, Armstrong teaches that Jesus Christ is co-eternal and one with God the Father. In fact *HE* was Jehova, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was *not* the son of God before he was born of the virgin Mary. And in the incarnation, he ceased to be God and became fully man. As a man he developed the perfection of spiritual character that was necessary to become our savior and to pay the penalty for our sin.

Crucified on a Wednesday, he ceased to exist for 3 days and was raised again on Saturday at the end of the Jewish Sabbath. But his body disappeared. He was no longer human but an immortal divine being and again a member of the family of God. In contrast to that the Bible teaches (e.g. **Philippians 2:6**) that Jesus never ceased to be God, although he limited himself to a human form. His body was raised as his disciples could clearly testify. **John 20:20** and **20:27** are very specific about that.

The Holy Spirit Armstrong flatly denies the personality of the Holy Spirit. As for Jehova's witnesses, for him the Holy Spirit is just the *mind and the very power of God, which expresses the unified, creative will of the God family*". It is what we receive during conversion.

Man The creation of mankind, so Armstrong teaches took place approximately 6000 years ago. Man was created as a living soul with a potential for immortality. But the fall was planned and permitted by God. Otherwise, so it is argued, Satan would have outwitted God and this cannot be.

Like Jehova's Witnesses the *Worldwide Church of God* taught that the soul is NOT immortal. It goes into a phase of *soul sleep* after death and only becomes immortal at the resurrection of the righteous. The souls of the unrighteous, however, will be annihilated at the judgment.

Salvation Armstrong's concept of salvation involves both faith and works. Acceptance of Jesus Christ cleanses from past sins and enables to keep the law. But justification will only be given on the condition that the law is kept. Only those who develop spiritually shall finally be given immortality. So under Armstrong a member of the *Worldwide Church of God* could never have any assurance of salvation. He could only try hard to observe all kinds of religious laws:

Water Baptism is viewed as absolute essential. *"There is no promise that anyone will receive the Holy Spirit until baptized in water."* The bible clearly separates these two events. You receive the Holy Spirit immediately when you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Water Baptism is a sign of obedience but not necessary for salvation.

Sabbath:

"To break God's Holy Sabbath is sin and the penalty is eternal death"

This teaching is apparently derived from the former doctrines of the Seventh Day Adventists and is clearly unbiblical. Armstrong is correct in observing that we are often too negligent about observing the Lord's Day. But the emphasis on the Sabbath (Saturday) is not supported by the New Testament, and - like any other sin - it certainly does not lead to eternal death.

I must admit that teaching this doctrine is a good trick for making the congregation attend church regularly, and that was apparently the intended effect.

Observance of annual feast days: But besides the Sabbath, the *Worldwide Church of God* required its members to keep a variety of Jewish annual feasts. These are the *Passover*, the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, *Pentecost*, the *Feast of Trumpets*, and the *Day of Atonement*. To each of these festivals, Armstrong gave an additional Christian interpretation, like the Lord's Supper during Passover or the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The 10 commandments: However, celebrating Christmas, Easter, New Years Day, and even birthday is considered as idolatry. According to Armstrong, the second commandment (**Exodus 20:4**) excludes such festivals. The interpretation of the other commandments is similarly strict. The seventh commandment, for instance, is said to mean that only a first marriage is valid. Divorce is sinful for whatever reason (which is basically correct if you consider all aspect that eventually led to a divorce) and marriage after a divorce is adultery.

I have my doubts whether this interpretation is biblical. Every sin can be forgiven and divorce is not the "unpardonable sin".

The Dietary regulations of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are mandatory, as are the decisions of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. No consideration is given to the context of these requirements. Smoking is considered a sin, drinking alcoholic beverages is not. The Bible does not condemn either of the two, but it condemns excess (drunkenness) and reminds us in **1. Corinthians 3:16-17** that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and should not be defiled. Christian churches have different opinions about how to interpret that, because it is not entirely clear what "defiling" means and what is beneficial for our body. This is one of the issues where I often see traditions decide on the doctrines of a local church. I believe that **1. Corinthians 10:31** gives us a good guideline for that. *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

Tithing was and still is a major emphasis in the *Worldwide Church of God*. In practice this includes a first tithe (10 percent), a second, sometimes even a third. Some members feel obliged to give 30-40% of their income to the church out of fear that otherwise they will not be saved. Their money goes directly to the headquarter of the *Worldwide Church of God* and is managed by the Pastor General. This reminds me a little bit of the practices of the Roman Catholic church in the late middle ages. Tithing in the *Worldwide Church of God* has become the modern equivalent to indulgences: the church headquarter becomes extremely rich while the members try to buy their way into heaven because they have no assurance of salvation. Tithing is a necessary act of obedience. If we steal from God by withholding our tithe (or parts of it) from Him, we will experience difficulties to grow spiritually. But that does NOT mean that tithing is necessary for salvation.

Armstrong takes his justification for these requirements from the Old Testament and **Matthew 5:17-18**, where Jesus states that he did not come to change the law. So under the "Armstrong covenant" the believer is still under the law and the only advantage over those who did not accept Christ is that he is able to keep it.

Things to come In his various publications and courses Armstrong claims that he would be able to interpret biblical prophecy and to reveal the future like no one else. He maintained this position even after his failed prediction that the world would end in 1972. According to Armstrong we are already in the last days that precede the Great Tribulation. The Tribulation will last 3-1/2 years and will then be followed by a time of God's wrath - the sixth seal of **Revelation 6:12-13**. During that time the faithful will be protected in Petra, the ancient rock-walled city on Edom. The climax of this period will be the second coming of Christ. After the battle of Armageddon, the first resurrection will take place: the just will rise, become immortal, and reign together with Christ for 1000 years. Those "who haven't had a fair chance to hear the truth" will partake in the second resurrection during the millenium. They will hear the gospel and have a second chance to convert. Those who don't will be cast into the lake of fire. After the judgment of the great white throne, the "handful of recalcitrant sinners" will be resurrected and cast into the lake of fire - which for Armstrong is the same as annihilation. Many of these "revelations" appear to be a combination of human imagination and biblical terminology. There is no second chance to believe in Christ, not even for those who died before Christ came to earth - they had other means to receive forgiveness of sin. The bible clearly says in **Hebrews 9:27** that after death everybody will face judgment. And those who are condemned will not be annihilated but punished forever.

None of the doctrines of Armstrongism were really new. It appears that Armstrong was influenced by many other cults at the time, and his doctrines can be refuted in the same way we would prove the Mormons or Jehova's Witnesses wrong. However, the mixture and a few details were new and for some people Armstrongism appeared easier to accept than Mormonism or Jehova's Witnesses. Millions of Americans have been reached by Armstrong's messages and even Christians have accepted some of them as plausible interpretations of the Word of God. This is the real danger of Armstrongism today and we must keep our eyes open lest we be seduced to accept interpretations of the Bible that have little to do with the truth.

The cults that we have discussed so far are very close to orthodox Christianity in the sense that they are easily mistaken as "the real thing" by those who do not know the Word of God very well. We will now come to those cults that mix in elements from other religions and make claims that are simply absurd from the Christian perspective. Nevertheless, they find enough followers, particularly among those who feel spiritually needy but are quite distant from the Christian faith. They promise them a spiritual solution to their problem, inner healing, and true fellowship - and all this sounds so much more believable than the preaching of the many lifeless Christian churches. They are usually backed up by a powerful organizational structure with a lot of financial support, and a strong public presence - particularly on the World Wide Web, which they use to recruit new members.

Today, we want to talk about Sun Myung Moon's *Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity*, briefly called the *Unification Church* or sometimes simply the *Moonies*. They claim that

We now have the means to heal all modern-day human problems, exalt every human soul, and bring the kingdom of God within the reach of every man.

According to Reverend Sun Myung Moon, a title he gave to himself when he founded his church in 1954, this all-embracing claim is based on new revelations from God which were given to him in order to "complete the task of establishing God's kingdom on earth and bringing piece to mankind". Briefly told, this new revelation teaches that ever since the fall, God has been trying to rectify his creation but has not succeeded. He has worked through chosen champions, but none of them found acceptance among men. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and even Jesus Christ - they all failed. So it became necessary for the Messiah to return to earth again as *Lord of the Second Advent* and to find his perfect bride. They will become the *true parents*, the first couple that through God's power is able to lead a sinless life, to bring forth children with no original sin, and thus to re-establish the true lineage of God on earth. All humankind can be engrafted into this lineage by receiving the blessing of God through the *true parents*, and thus the kingdom of God on earth will be restored.

These claims, which I have taken directly from the original web pages of the *Unification Church*, are in sharp contrast to our understanding of the Word of God. But the *Unification Church* states that our rather literal interpretation of the Word of God is wrong and that all its doctrines are actually taught by the Bible - we only have to understand the *divine principles* behind its figurative language.

History The teachings of the *Unification Church* are strongly tied to the personal history of its founder, Sun Myung Moon. On Easter morning 1935, he claims, Jesus Christ appeared to him and asked him to complete the mission that he had begun 2000 years ago. Moon, who was 15 at the time, began studying the Bible and many other religious teachings to find out what Jesus had left undone on earth.

In 1945 he organized his findings into what later became known as the *Divine Principle* and began to preach publicly in North Korea. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested by the Communist regime for "disturbing the social order" and sentenced to forced labor. In 1950, during the Korean War, he was rescued by United Nations forces and subsequently began preaching again.

In 1954 he officially established his new church in Seoul, calling it the *Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity*. His church attracted many followers from a Christian women's

university in South Korea. This stirred up newspaper reports about sex orgies in the Church and about Moon's own marital affairs. Rumors of this nature overshadow the *Unification Church* until this day, although there has never been a definite proof for them.

In 1960 Moon was married to his current wife, Hak Ja Han. The *Unification Church* teaches that this union marked the beginning of the restoration of humankind. By God's power, Moon and his wife were made able to lead a sinless life and thus established the position of *True Parents*. Consequently their nine children are the first human beings without original sin. Moon calls himself "*Father of the Universe*" and his followers see him as a messianic leader who deserves undivided obedience.

When Moon moved to the United States in 1971, his Church attracted many young Americans who struggled with spiritual emptiness and readily accepted Moon's teachings which seemed to be so close to the twisted understanding of spirituality in the seventies. His church grew quickly and Moon himself became very popular. He was invited to the White House and was given opportunity to address members of the US Congress. Soon "*Moonies*" were seen selling flowers and candy in almost all public places. This, in fact, turned out to be the main source of income for the *Unification Church* and subsequently attracted the IRS, which indicted him for evading income taxes. Moon served another sentence in prison, but was later set free after a Senate subcommittee investigated his case.

Today, the *Unification Church* has about 100,000 members in the U.S.A. and about 3 million worldwide. But reports about abusive practices within Moon's church have come up over and over again. Allegations about sexual abuse were made as well, particularly by those who visited his camps in South East Asia. Although these reports need to be weighed carefully, we can almost be sure that the *Unification Church* abuses its members as far as their labor, finances, and spiritual needs are concerned.

Major Doctrines - where are the differences? From a Christian's perspective, the teachings of the *Unification Church* have become more and more absurd. In 1992, Sun Myung Moon openly proclaimed to be the *Lord of the Second Advent*, the return of *Messiah*. He is the true owner of this world, so he said in 1997, and salvation can only come to those who are engrafted into *his* lineage. This also means that learning Korean will be mandatory for everyone to be saved, because this is the language of the *True Parents*. Those who reject Sun Myung Moon will perish, and this is why America has been declining. The "*one nation under God*" will cease because God's final purpose is "*one world under God*" and this can only be established in the lineage of the *True Parents*, that is Moon and his wife.

It is hard to understand how anyone in the world can believe such boastful claims of a man who provides no evidence for his teachings. The reason for that may be the slow evolution of Moon's teachings, which caused people to gradually accept everything said by Sun Myung Moon. If one accepts Moon's way of interpreting the Bible, his claim that there must be a second Messiah coming to earth is not so absurd anymore. If a naive observer then looks at Sun Myung Moon's life, the "*persecution for God's sake*" and his "*unfailing willingness to serve*", he may in fact accept that Sun Myung Moon could be God's chosen instrument. From then on he believes everything that "*Reverend Moon*" says.

So, let us look at his teachings and uncover the flaws that have led so many people astray. How does Moon justify the claims he makes.

Sources of Authority - anything but the Bible? Although Sun Myung Moon's church aims at the Unification of World Christianity, the Christian Bible is not the only source of authority. In fact, the Bible is subject to a new interpretation as laid out in Sun Myung Moon's *Divine Principle*. On 536 pages, this book presents a "*set of principles, based on the patterns which Reverend Moon found in the Bible during his years of search*". Without these principles, it is said, the Bible cannot be understood correctly. So the *Divine Principle* has become the true source of authority for the *Unification Church*.

One of the principles given by Sun Myung Moon is that the Bible often needs to be understood symbolically instead of literally. He writes, for instance, that "*we cannot believe that God would implant*

in Adam and Eve a desire to rebel against him and destroy themselves for the sake of a piece of fruit. So the fruit must signify something far more important than a tasty apple or pear". So, because the common sense in the 20th century cannot grasp anymore the meaning of trust and the severeness of breaking even a "simple" promise, the most straightforward interpretation of the fall is to be brushed away. Moon replaces it by an interpretation that makes far less sense to me: "the sin of Adam and Eve must have involved a sexual act", that is "Adam and Eve engaged in a premarital sexual relationship and thus they fell."

For the uninformed reader, this argument may seem plausible because it is built on the traditions and value systems of the late 20th century, which hypocritically distinguishes "small sins" - that is what society tolerates - from the "big sins" which we find morally unacceptable. But God doesn't have a scale for the graveness of sins. Adultery and premature sex is not worse in God's eyes than lies and broken promises - these are all sins and unacceptable for God. Besides, Moon is even wrong about the "premarital". God had already blessed the union of Adam and Even in **Genesis 1:28** - and that did not happen after the fall. And how shall a human being have physical intercourse with Satan, a spirit being?

So Moon's *Divine Principle*, which he supports by many writings of eastern religions, is actually a very human one, and he uses it to establish interpretations of the Bible that have nothing to do with the true meaning of the Word of God. Whenever you bring a verse that proves some of his teachings wrong he can simply "re-interpret it symbolically" and change its meaning to whatever he likes. In **2.Peter 1:16** the Apostle Peter writes

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Apparently Sun Myung Moon does just the opposite in order to build up his own name.

God & Man *God himself told me that the most basic and central truth of his universe is that God is the Father and we are his children* God is the creator of all things, the absolute reality, eternally self-existent, transcendent of time and space. So far Moon's doctrines are orthodox. But before creating the universe, he writes (*DP 24*), God was *incomplete*. He existed only as *internal masculine subject* and needed to create an external feminine subject to become complete. God cannot exist without man and man cannot exist without God. Thus man is "as important in value as as God himself". This concept of God is strongly related to the constant interplay between the Yang and Yin in the *Taoist* religion, which apparently influenced Moon a lot. Man was created in order to fill the need of God to "share, give, and take with someone in a reciprocal relationship". Being in the image of God, we are to live our life for others as well. "Without this giving and taking between subject and object ... nothing endures for eternity". The kingdom of God will be here on earth, when there is God-involvement in every relationship.

According to Moon, this is the divine principle on which we have to base our life and our understanding of God's word. The trinity is denied - there is only one God and the creation is his necessary counterpart. But the Bible nowhere mentions that God *needs* his creation. God is entirely self-sufficient. He doesn't need us to be complete.

The Fall Moon's divine principle also leads to an entirely different understanding of evil, the fall, redemption, salvation, and the role of Jesus Christ. According to Moon, *evil* is the emergence of selfishness in the world. Lucifer resented God's selfless love towards Adam and Eve and seduced Eve before God could complete his creation.

The fall, it is argued, was both *spiritual* and *physical*. The issue could not have been just a mere fruit - it must have been something more fundamental. And what can be a more fundamental act of selfishness than a sexual relation. So the *Unification Church* teaches that Eve had intercourse with Lucifer and "received certain elements from him". Hoping to get rid of these, she seduced Adam, and passed them on

to him as well. Thus sin entered the once perfect lineage created by God and instead the evil lineage of Satan was multiplied.

Ever since, God has been trying to rectify this situation. He needed to erase the evil from his creation and to re-create the world of goodness. He needed to restore the sinless lineage - to create *True Parents* who would live in perfect obedience and complete unselfishness and would thus be able to have children without original sin. This would then be the beginning of a new world order - the kingdom of God on earth.

You need to twist the Word of God a lot to come to these doctrines. Moon, as I mentioned, emphasizes that the Bible uses a lot of symbolic language - which opens the door to every interpretation you like. He states that "the religions of this world have served as tool for God" to re-create the world of goodness. Thus the teachings of other religions are the means to unlock the secrets of the Word of God and Moon certainly borrows a lot from various eastern religions.

The Bible is very clear concerning the fall and there is no reason to assume that the description of the fall in **Genesis 3** should not be taken literally. Disobedience, however small, is sufficient to break the trust between God and man. Since the fall, no man except Jesus has ever been sinless: *There is none righteous, not even one* (**Romans 3:10**, see also **1. John 1:8**). No one will ever be able to have sinless children: the lineage of God will not be passed physically but only spiritually.

Jesus Christ Moon's teachings about Jesus Christ in the *Divine Principle* are not always clear. He was God's champion, chosen to fulfill God's mission on earth. He achieved perfection and thus "attained the purpose of creation". In the light of this, he may be called God, but he can by no means be called God Himself. In fact, "as a man he was no different from us except that he was without original sin".

Jesus came to earth to become the *True Parent* of mankind. Adam had failed - Jesus should re-create the true lineage of God on earth, so that God could have fellowship again. He was to find his chosen bride, the second Eve, and to "bring forth upon this earth his own sinless children. All mankind would have found life by grafting on to them". But Jesus did not find acceptance as Messiah and was murdered on the cross. That - so Moon writes - was not his purpose. In fact, in the Garden of Gethsemane he prayed desperately that this would not take place. He failed like many before him.

Nevertheless, he did not die in vain. His body decayed. But he was resurrected spiritually and through faith in Christ we will experience *spiritual rebirth*. However, the cross is unable to remove our original sin as it cannot achieve physical salvation. So Jesus will have to come again as the Third Adam, the Lord of the Second Advent. He will come in the flesh, suffer many things and be rejected. But some will recognize him and the Kingdom of God will gradually appear. He will find his true bride and become the true parent and thus bring physical salvation to man kind. All religions will be united under him.. On the basis of **Revelation 7:2-4** and **14:1** it has been revealed to Sun Myung Moon that "Christ will be born in a country in the East - from the rising of the sun" - that nation is Korea. The Korean people will become the Third Israel.

The careful observer will not fail to notice that the description of the Lord of the Second Advent fits Sun Myung Moon very well. His followers have always viewed him as the promised Messiah, the perfect and sinless father, the True Parent through whom they can be born anew, the only one authorized by God to forgive sins. But the claim to Messiahship has not been made publicly until 1992. On August 24, 1992 Sun Myung Moon made the following statement during his inauguration address for his World Culture and Sports Festival in Seoul .. *we are the savior, the Lord of the Second Advent, the Messiah*. He has repeated this claim over and over again since then. The *Unification Church* now openly teaches that Sun Myung Moon is the new Messiah and that He and his wife are the *True Parents* of mankind. They are both sinless and their nine children are the first children born without original sin.

In the *Divine Principle*, Moon gives a lot of scriptural evidences for his teachings, again twisting the meaning of the Word of God by interpreting it symbolically. He was careful not to proclaim himself openly as Messiah for a long time. But now he states to have achieved what Jesus did not achieve. This almost makes him superior to Jesus in the eyes of his followers. It makes me wonder, why there was so little public outrage among Christians when Moon proclaimed Messiahship.

There are many bible passages that clearly prove Sun Myung Moon's teachings about Jesus wrong. In **Luke 24:44-48** Jesus explains that it was necessary for him to die on the cross and rise again. **Luke 24:36-39** and **Acts 2:29-31** are proof for the physical resurrection of Christ. **Acts 1:9-11** makes clear that Jesus will come again from heaven and not be born on earth again. Salvation is found in *no one else* but Jesus (**Acts 4:12, Romans 10:9**) and there will be no Lord of the Second Advent.

So Sun Myung Moon's doctrines are in sharp contradiction to the Word of God. **Colossians 2:8** and **Galatians 1:8** tell us what God thinks about such teachings. *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the principles of this world rather than on Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!*

The Holy Spirit The Holy Spirit is the feminine counterpart of God. She is not a person but a form of energy derived from God. She is the *True Mother* who will give rebirth to fallen children as children of goodness. (DP 215)

Salvation Salvation is a complex subject for the *Unification Church*. Since Jesus died before accomplishing his mission, faith in Jesus Christ will only provide spiritual, but not physical salvation. Christ's coming as Lord of the Second Advent will complete His unfinished work. When *"the True Father and the True Mother become one, God will come down and become one with them on earth"* He will create the central persons through whom mankind can receive spiritual life. By *"accepting the True Parents, obeying them and following them 'more than my own life' and by doing what the Messiah requires with great faith"* a person's original sin will be eliminated and he will eventually become perfect.

"Restoration cannot be fulfilled by God's power alone, but is to be fulfilled by man's joint action with God". This clearly is salvation by works with no assurance, or - to be precise - by complete submission under Moon who can abuse his followers as much as he likes. This makes the *Unification Church* a personality cult. Sun Myung Moon is the absolute authority of the Church in every respect. His followers have to work extremely hard for him if they want to have a chance for salvation.

Marriage is believed to be essential for salvation as well. Only the male and female together can represent God totally. In order to be saved, one has to be matched, married, and blessed by the *True Parents* in a ceremony in which one becomes symbolically part of his family - the true, pure, and sinless lineage of the Messiah. Over the years Sun Myung Moon has performed many mass wedding ceremonies for the members of his church - many of the couples hardly knew or had ever seen each other before. Former members also report that the marriage ceremony involved strange secret rituals that had the purpose to *"indemnify"* for the sin of Adam and Eve. There were also rumors about sexual abuse in this context but they have not been confirmed.

These doctrines have nothing to do with the Word of God. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says *For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

Salvation is *only* by faith in Jesus Christ. You cannot work your way into heaven, and no sanctified ceremony will bring you there.

Things to come Moon teaches that *“our body, once it is dissolved into dust, cannot be resurrected into its original state. It is not necessary for a spirit man to resume his flesh when there is a spirit world, where he is supposed to go and live forever”*. In brief - *there is no physical resurrection*. Jesus was resurrected only as a spirit being and so will we.

But *“spirit men who passed away to the spirit world without having perfected themselves must come again and fulfill the responsibility they left unaccomplished in their physical life”*. In this case, the earthly man is the *“second coming”* of the spirit man. John the Baptist, for instance, had to accomplish the mission Elijah had left unaccomplished. In other words - the *Unification Church* teaches *reincarnation* as it is taught by many eastern religions.

These teachings are embedded into an elaborate hierarchy of attainment, by which men will achieve entrance into the *Kingdom of Heaven on earth*. Fallen man must be raised to a proper relationship with God and go through three stages of perfection: a *form-spirit stage*, a *life-spirit stage*, and a *divine-spirit stage*. Until the time of Jesus, men attained the form-spirit stage by obedience to the law. Since the cross, men attained the life-spirit stage through faith in Jesus Christ. During the time of the Lord of the Second Advent, *“spirit men can attain the divine-spirit stage of perfect restoration by believing and serving the Lord of the Second Advent”*.

But a spirit can raise his level by intercommunicating with men on earth. By an active give and take between spirit and body the divine-spirit stage can be attained and the Kingdom of Heaven reached. *“The ultimate purpose of God is to save all mankind”* (DP 190). Hell is only a temporary condition and is in the world. The Kingdom of Heaven on earth is as yet vacant. It will be opened by the Lord of the Second Advent through the *“marriage of the lamb”*, that is his wedding with the Second Eve. This will re-establish the good lineage into which all mankind will eventually be engrafted. According to Moon, this event has happened by now.

Then men will live in communion with God and there will be God-involvement in every relationship. Thus the give and take between subject and object, the perfect relationship will be maintained - and God will be completely fulfilled in His creation.

The influence of eastern religions in all these teachings is obvious. Reincarnation, stages of perfection, and mutual dependence between God and man, - all this is nowhere taught in the Bible. It is appointed unto men to die once, and after this there will be judgment (**Hebrews 9:27**), where the dead will be judged according to their actions (**Revelation 20:12**). There is no second chance to improve your stage after death and the eternal fire is certainly a reality.

Special Aspects In addition to teaching severely twisted doctrines under the mantle of Christianity, the *Unification Church* has become known for a variety of abusive practices, because - as former members report - the end justifies all means that eventually *“serve God's purposes”*, probably a twisted interpretation of **Luke 16:8-9**.

So it is o.k. to use deception in order to gain a donation or workshop attendance from members of Christian churches. It is acceptable to use brutality to *“separate Satan”* from a member that appears not to be fully devoted to Sun Myung Moon.

Members are expected to give all they have and are to the Church. It is reported that some *“Moonies”* work 22 hours a day and fast several weeks in order to pay for their sin. All this, they are told, all this is nothing compared to what *“Father”*, that is Moon, does and one should feel indebted to *“father”* Moon.

Because of the strong discipline and commitment to the *Unification Church*, a member's life is centered entirely around the church. It is the source of their religion, as well as their cultural, social, and other support systems. Consequently, they will find it very difficult to leave the organization if they become disillusioned by the *Unification Church*. Now to a certain extent this is true for Christian Churches as

well. We aim at commitment and a strong fellowship.¹ But the degree of dependence in the *Unification Church* is another dimension, although the alleged brainwashing of members has not been confirmed. Most people who have tried to leave the *Unification Church* came out unharmed, although very disappointed. They need our help.

It is also not clear how the *Unification Church* handles the money that comes in by donations and through the hard work of its members. The money does not flow back into the local groups and the few leaders of the Church are certainly able to lead a better life than most members. Allegations that the *Unification Church* is a business organization under the cover of religion - like for instance *Scientology* - have not been confirmed yet although the Church had been observed by the IRS. The handling of finances in the *Unification Church* is certainly a malpractice but this has happened in various evangelical organizations as well.

Summary *Scientology* is clearly a very dangerous cult. Its teachings are in sharp contrast with the Bible and its practices give rise to much concern. Although Christians with a sound biblical background will certainly not fall into the trap of *Scientology*, it poses a threat for those who think they could profit from the self-improvement techniques and thus embrace both Christianity and *Scientology*. The Bible tells us to

have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light (Ephesians 5:11-13). For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (John 3:20-21). The New Age Movement is a growing belief system in North America encompassing thousands of autonomous - and sometimes contradictory - beliefs, organizations and events. It blends the theology of pantheistic Eastern religions with practices from Western occultism. The term *New Age* itself refers to the *Age of Aquarius*, which, according to *New Age* followers, is dawning. It is supposed to bring peace and enlightenment and to reunite man with God.

In contrast to other cults, the *New Age Movement* is difficult to define. There is no *New Age Church*, no *New Age Religion*, no officially registered *New Age Organization*, no membership, no founder and no leader of the movement. Instead, it is a widespread way of thinking that appears in many forms, beliefs, and practices such as

Astrology, Aura, Black and White Magic, Chakras, Chi Energy, Crystals, Druidism, Eastern Mysticism, Extraterrestrials and UFOs, Firewalking, Gaia, Gnosticism, Hare Krishna, Hinduism, Human Potential Movement, Mind Science, Native American Spirituality, Near-death Experiences, Nirvana, Parapsychology, Psychic, Reincarnation, Shamanism, Spiritism, Tai Chi, Taoism, Tarot Cards, Theosophy, Trance-Channeling, Transcendental Meditation, Transpersonal Psychology, Witchcraft, Yin-Yang, Yoga, and Zen.

Some of the practices seem to be little more than innocent relaxation techniques with no religious content - only designed to reduce stress and physical tension. But actually all of them are based on one or more of the following beliefs

1. *All is one - all reality is part of the whole*
2. *Everything is God and God is everything*
3. *Man is God or part of God*
4. *Man never dies*

5. Man can create his own reality.

The *New Age Movement* uses a special terminology for these beliefs. Words like *holistic and synergistic thinking, networking, global unity and harmony, cosmic energy, awakening, consciousness, and human potential* dominate conversations and writings. They sound esoteric and fascinating, but also hide the true religious content behind a scientific appearance. As a result, *New Age* practices have made their way into almost every area of the culture - sociology, psychology, medicine, the government, ecology, science, arts, the business community, the media, entertainment, sports, education, and even the church. Christians and non-Christians alike have been seduced to accept practices and beliefs that are clearly based on anti-Christian doctrines.

History Historically, the *New Age Movement* can be seen as the modern revival of ancient religious traditions and practices. Its actual original roots are found in the Garden of Eden, as described in **Genesis 3:4-5**

And the serpent said unto the woman, you shall not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

In the original lie, Satan questions God's word and authority and, disputes that death results from disobedience, and claims that through the acquisition of secret or Gnostic wisdom man can be enlightened and can be *like God*. Over the centuries, this lie resulted in a variety of religious traditions and occult practices, which were already strongly condemned in the Old Testament (**Deuteronomy 18:9-17; Isaiah 47:9-15**) but nevertheless developed in the pagan cultures. It continues to its ultimate state of development and will be revealed as Satan's one-world system at the end of the age (**Revelation 17-18**). (see Pastor's lesson)

The major world religions whose beliefs and practices are entwined with the *New Age Movement* are *Hinduism* (ca. 3,000 B.C.), *Buddhism*, (ca. 560 B.C.), and *Taoism*, (ca. 500 B.C.). Another prominent occultic influence was *Druidism*, the religion of the Celts, which extended from 300 B.C. into the middle ages. These teachings were transplanted into modern times by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), the *Theosophical Society* founded by Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891), and through the *First World Parliament of Religions*, held in Chicago in 1893, which essentially initiated the spread of Hinduism throughout the United States. The 1960s witnessed a particular revival of Eastern mysticism and the study of secret wisdom from India. *Zen Buddhism, Carlos Castaneda, Transcendental Meditation, and Yoga* became very popular. In the eighties, *Shirley MacLaine's* books and television shows gave the *New Age Movement* more popular exposure and momentum.

Today, various research polls are consistently demonstrating that a significant shift has been occurring in the West and that millions of adults have embraced a world view that is totally at odds with the faith they profess. According to surveys 86% of Americans claim to be Christian, yet 72% reject the notion of absolute truth, 40% believe a *New Age* (pantheistic) view of God, 30% believe in reincarnation, and 36% believe that astrology is scientific.

The *New Age Movement* is now comprised of hundreds of groups and individuals who have gained significant influence on almost every area of our culture. The movement expresses itself in widely divergent forms, from the blatantly obvious to the subtle and from the organized religious to the secular ones. As a result, even many Christians have been fooled by *New Age* thinking and now tend to mix beliefs into their faith which in today's world sound so plausible but are completely wrong from a biblical perspective. In this sense, the *New Age Movement* is the successful continuation of Satan's ultimate lie, ultimately aiming at the seduction of Christianity.

For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things. (Mark 13:22-23)

On the other hand, not everything labelled with the term *New Age* is actually related to the *New Age Movement*. Record companies, for instance, have discovered, that the label *New Age* is good for marketing purposes. In reality *New Age* music only refers to a certain style of music. Many musicians suddenly found themselves in this category. You will find even certain classical music and some pretty good Christian music in this section.

Major Doctrines As far as doctrines are concerned, there is nothing really new in *New Age*. Its two key elements - *Evolutionary Godhood*, the spiritual evolution of man into God, and *Global Unity*, the assumption that everything is linked together - are only modern reformulations of ancient Hindu teachings and almost identical to the foundations of *Christian Science* or *Scientology* - if you abstract from certain peculiarities.

Nevertheless, the *New Age* formulation is smoother and more appealing. The new age, which is soon to come, shall bring peace and enlightenment, harmony, mutual love and acceptance - and who does not want that? Naturally, *New Age* followers look forward to the coming of a new leader who unites the world in love and harmony. *New Age* practices are designed to explore the human potential and to push man ahead into a new spiritual horizon, closer to God and closer to *being* God.

Therefore, we will not only discuss *New Age* beliefs but also reveal how they are hidden in the various *New Age* practices that can be found everywhere in this country.

Sources of Authority - anything but the Bible? The *New Age Movement* rejects the idea of an absolute truth and therefore does not have any particular source of authority. The only absolute dogma in *New Age* is that *truth is relativistic* - each person has its own reality and subjective experience: what is true for one person may not be true for another. This makes it almost impossible to dispute with devoted *New Age* followers. If you have a different opinion, they simply say ``it's fine - if you believe so, that is your reality". But they do not think that your reality is relevant for them as well - at least not on the spiritual level.

Nevertheless, due to the sheer number of *New Age* groups there are many publications such as the *New Age Journal*, *Body Mind Spirit*, *Yoga Journal*, *Gnosis*, *East West*, *Noetic Sciences*, and *Omega*, which influence the minds of *New Age* followers and constantly stir up new concepts.

God Even though many *New Age* adherents describe God in personal terms, the *New Age* concept of God is quite vague. *God* is an impersonal life force, consciousness or energy - much like ``*The Force*" in the movie *Star Wars*. The *New Age* view of the world and the universe is *monistic* and *pantheistic*, which means that everything that exists is of One essence, and that One essence is God. Everything is a different form of that essence and the *Divine Force* is what holds everything together.

There is a variety of colorful descriptions of this divine force in the many *New Age* publications and many names for God among different *New Age* groups, such as *God-consciousness*, *Universal Love*, *Self-Realization*, *the I AM*, *Higher Self*, *Brahman*, *Nirvana*, etc. However, *New Age* generally rejects God as a personal eternal being who created, rules over, and defines the limits of His creation (**Acts 17:24-26**).

Man The fact that God is in everything obviously elevates the position of man. *New Age* adherents often believe that man is *perfect and divine*, able to create his own reality. In *New Age*, **Psalm 46:10** reads as ``*Be still, and know that you are God*". Each individual thus has a *higher self* inseparately and eternally related to its person. For some, this is the immortal soul, for others an extraterrestrial being. The higher self is immortal and has perfect memory. In *New Age* terminology, it lives in *holographic time* which is not bound to the linear order of time as we know it. It is also *androgynous*, that is in perfect balance between male and female, positive and negative energy.

Since man is intrinsically divine, perfect, and with unlimited potential, his only real problem is *ignorance* of that fact. Man's perception of finiteness is in reality an illusion. Thus he needs to become enlightened

through experiential knowledge (*gnosis*). *New Age* groups offer various occultic techniques to enable individuals, and ultimately the world, to evolve into this one divine consciousness and to become God again.

An almost universal belief among *New Agers* is an adaptation of the Hindu concept of *reincarnation* which teaches that after death the soul, or essence comes back in another form to continue spiritual evolvement. *New Agers* misrepresent church history, the doctrines of Christianity, and often twist Scripture to support the idea that original Christianity taught reincarnation. For them, *resurrection* and being *born again* is just the same as reincarnation. They argue that the early church suppressed the doctrine of reincarnation and censored its teaching.

Salvation Reincarnation is usually seen as a step in the progression towards Godhood. But progressive steps are not always guaranteed and the number of reincarnations may run into millions. That is determined by the law of *Karma* - the law of cause and effect. What you are now is determined by what you did in your previous existences. The higher self remembers everything and these memories need to be resolved and cleared if we are to go on to a higher enlightenment. Self-realization, total enlightenment, or illumination, where the soul enters into the endless freedom from the demanding control of karma, is the ultimate goal. From there on, there is no rebirth - one has reached the *Nirvana*, the place of passionless peace.

In contrast to Hinduism, none of the *New Age* books emphasizes ascetism or clean living as a way to clear the karma. Instead, there is a great emphasis on *Global Unity*. Since everyone and everything is linked together, man is to live in unity with man, nature, the earth, the universe, and God. The *New Age Movement* teaches that we will learn our proper divine relationship with one another and through this achieve harmony, mutual love, and unity. At a first glance, this appears to be a goal well worth to be pursued, but there are several caveats.

- The *New Age* understanding of unity with nature and the earth opposes the Scriptural teaching of man's superiority over plants and animals (**Genesis 1:26-27, 2:19**). While we certainly have to show more responsibility for what God has entrusted to us instead of abusing our planet as we currently do, this does not mean that there are no differences between animals and humans or that we should worship earth and nature, as *Native American Spirituality* and the *Gaia* movement use to do.
- Most *New Agers* believe that harmony can only be achieved through economic unity. They hope for a single world leader, who will eventually guide the world into a harmonious economic whole. The scriptures warn us that such a leader will very likely be the coming Antichrist (**2. Thessalonians 2:3-4**):

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

There is a very thin borderline here between honorable goals and ideas that are in sharp contrast with the Scriptures and we have to learn to discern properly.

Jesus Christ The *New Age* teachings about Jesus Christ have become very popular among those who believe Jesus to be only a great moral teacher. They believe that during the "lost 18 years" before Jesus appeared publicly at the age of 30, Jesus became an explorer who traveled to far off lands to the spiritual centers in India and Egypt, and Tibet, where he studied under various spiritual masters. During that time he evolved to the state of "the Christ", the ultimate state of self-realization. When he returned to his native people in Israel, He taught a Hindu world view of *Christ consciousness*, expressed in terms that the

Hebrews would understand. So Jesus was merely a way-shower, whose primary function is to awaken humanity and illumine the path.

This contradicts everything Jesus said and did. The theory of Jesus studying in India under the gurus simply does not fit into the New Testament record. The gurus are all vegetarians. Jesus ate the Passover lamb, fed multitudes with fish, after His resurrection ate fish demonstrating to Him that He was actually resurrected bodily. Jesus taught one life and then judgment, heaven or hell, which certainly is antithetical to Hinduism. He only quoted books and prophets from the Old Testament, none else. Jesus was without sin, so he could not have broken any even the smallest Jewish law, which means that he had to attend three Jewish feasts every year. Traveling back and forth between India and Israel all the time would simply have been impossible. So, if we accept the biblical account of Jesus, he could not have been in India during the "lost 18 years". Besides, he did not need to study. **Luke 2:41-47** clearly points out that at the age of twelve Jesus already had all the knowledge he needed.

The Holy Spirit There are no teachings about the Holy Spirit.

Things to come We are at the beginning of a new age - the *Age of Aquarius*, the eleventh sign of the zodiac. Astrologers say that this age is characterized by a new religious atmosphere and a heightened degree of spiritual and cosmic consciousness. It will be a time of liberation of the mind, of love and enlightenment, an age of a balanced viewpoint. During this age we will move beyond the masculine God the Father, who has dominated the Piscean age during the past 2000 years, and be nurtured by the Mother-Goddess, a feminine energy.

There are different opinions about when the Aquarian age will begin. Some say that we are already in it. Others believe it will be complete in 2062. There are no astronomical data available to determine this, so it mostly depends on what people believe. In any case, it is supposed to be inaugurated by the coming of a supermind, a perfect being who will lead us into a long awaited era of universal peace, love and joy. For *New Agers* this is the being anticipated by all religions - the Hindu *Avatar*, the *Al Mahdi* of the Muslims, the Jewish *Messiah*, the Buddhist *Maitreya*, or the *second coming of Christ* - they all point to the same being that is soon to come. Actually, in April 1982 full-page ads were placed in all major newspapers around the world claiming that "THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE" but he has never been revealed publicly.

From a biblical perspective, events will be quite different. Christ will return visibly for all the world to see - there is no need to announce his presence. But the rapture of his church will be followed by the great tribulation for the unsaved and not an age of universal happiness. Afterwards, the millennial kingdom will be reigned by Jesus Christ, and not by some new Mother-Goddess.

New Age Practices and Beliefs *New Age* is much less a definite cult which emphasizes worship and religious teachings than a movement that is characterized by its practices and the underlying beliefs. In general, *New Age* practices are designed to prepare people for the new age to come and to push them ahead into a new spiritual horizon, towards the *Global Unity*, closer to God and closer to being God. In the following we will briefly discuss some of the activities that come under the umbrella of the *New Age Movement*.

Astrology *Astrology* is a method using the position of the planets, sun and moon at the time and place of birth as signposts to explain the person's character, life and destiny. It is based on the occult belief that man and the universe are connected by a mystical force, or are - using *New Age* terminology - in global unity. Therefore, man is a microcosm of the patterns of his planets at birth, and the planets reflect one's inner self. The task of the *astrologer* or the *horoscope* is to interpret the constellations of the stars in order to determine what the future will bring for a particular person.

The word *horoscope* comes from the Greek, meaning literally a *watcher of the hour*. A chart of the planetary position at birth purported to reveal the person's destiny. There are three main components of the chart: the *planets*, the *Zodiac signs* and the *Twelve houses*. The planets represent people and aspects of the emotional, mental or spiritual self. The zodiac signs describe the way in which the planets are limited or expanded. The houses represent various areas such as self, home, marriage, career, etc. Thus, roughly, the planets are *who* or *what*, the zodiac signs are *how* and the houses are *where*. Additionally, the angles between the planets must be considered. Present and future influences are read by comparing the present movement of planets to the birth chart, a method called *transits*. Another method, the progressed chart, is calculated with each day after birth equaling a year in real life.

Traditionally, *Astrology* was *fatalistic*: the chart delineated a personality and course already ordained by the planetary influences. Aspects of the chart were seen as either beneficial or adverse. Today, the humanistic view of a person as the master of his or her fate has turned the chart into a set of possibilities and choices. Chart symbols are viewed as having both negative and positive possibilities, which makes the chart a blueprint for the self and soul, a pattern that can be rearranged in various ways by the self-aware individual. For the *New Ager*, *Astrology* is a tool to "know thyself" as well as a tool of divination. Modern *Astrology* prefers to call interpretations of the future "coming trends" which will help us to make choices.

There is no clear evidence of how *Astrology* began, but most historians believe that the Chaldeans were the first to develop it. Already in **Deuteronomy 18:9-12** the Bible strongly condemns divination and worship of the heavens, both of which *Astrology* is a part. Verses like **Deuteronomy 4:19, 17:3, Daniel 2:27-28, 5:7, Isaiah 47:13**, and **Acts 7:42** are equally clear.

People have pointed out that *Astrology* occasionally makes very accurate predictions and are therefore convinced the chart is working based on spiritual and mystical universal laws. While the accuracy of certain predictions cannot be disputed, the very fact that not *all* predictions are 100% accurate clearly indicates that *Astrology* is not from God, which can only mean that those involved in *Astrology* operate - often unknowingly - on demonic supernatural power.

Channelling *Channeling* is the process whereby a human host claims to enter into an altered state of consciousness thereby allowing a spirit entity to take possession of their body and give instructions to *New Age* believers. This altered state can be in varying degrees of control. Some channelers will have complete control of their body and simply speak the message of the spirit guide. Others will completely lose consciousness, entering a deep trance as the message is given from the entity. A third group of channelers will often remain conscious but will voluntarily yield control of their body for the purposes of allowing the entity to use their hands for writing messages. This form of *Channeling* is more commonly known as *Automatic Writing*.

The history of *Channeling* can be traced back to its earlier more blatantly occult roots of *Spiritism*. In the 1840's the *Fox sisters* claimed to communicate with the spirit of a murdered man. Their convincing act tricked thousands until 1886 when they finally confessed that they were frauds. Nevertheless, the *Spiritism* movement was under way. Proponents of *Spiritism*, *Automatic Writing* and other forms of communication with the dead, were *Helena Petrovna Blavatsky*, who founded *Theosophy* in 1875, *Alice Bailey*, founder of the *Arcane School* in 1923, and others who have influenced the development of *Channeling*. But it was not until the 1960's and '70's that *Channeling* became commonly accepted and even fashionable. Today, there are ten thousands of channels throughout the world today. These channelers travel to *New Age* fairs, seminars and conferences throughout the world, where *New Age* devotees flock by the tens of thousands to hear the latest truths.

The ultimate message of the *New Age* is manifest in the message of the various channelers. That message being, All is God, you are a part of the All, therefore you are God. Since you are God then you can alter reality to fit your view of truth. *New Agers* come to the channelers to find out how they can use the spirit world to influence reality. Again, the Bible strongly forbids communication with the dead (*Necromancy*),

as expressed in **Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:9-12 & 15; 1 Samuel 28; 1 Chronicle 10:13-14; Isaiah 8:19**. It should also be noted that channelers either commit fraud (i.e. fake spiritual communication), are self-deceived (2 Thessalonians 2:10; 2 Timothy 3:12) or in actual contact with demons who are masquerading as deceased spirit masters (see **Isaiah 19:3; Ephesians 6:12; 1 John 4:1-3**). Neither of these options is in any way beneficial.

Psychics

Very strongly related to channellers and astrologers are *psychics*, who claim to have many gifts or talents in the area of extrasensual perception, clairvoyance, communication with the spirit world, abilities to read the human aura and use these special skills as a healer or reader. The history of psychics may be traced back thousands of years ago to the seers, shamans, and soothsayers of ancient pagan religions and occult practices. Their spread through Europe and America began in the early 19th century and continued constantly over the past 150 years. During the lifetime of *Jeanne Dixon*, America's most famous psychic, America experienced unparalleled growth in the interest and acceptance of psychics and paranormal phenomena. Over her 50 year career Dixon was advisor to world leaders including US presidents and wrote eight books. At the time of her death in January 1997, Dixon syndicated columns were featured in over 800 daily newspapers worldwide.

Today, the psychic industry has become a remarkably successful business. Psychics offer their services day by day through hundreds of late night commercials and toll-free phone numbers. Dionne Warwick's *Psychic Friends Network* alone is estimated to receive 3 million minutes of calls a month at about \$4 per minute. Psychic fairs are commonplace in the US. Metaphysical and *New Age* book stores can be found easily in almost every American city, and the Internet is booming with *cyberpsychics*.

Much of the mystique and lure of modern psychics is the alleged *proof* of their claims through various alleged supernatural manifestations. People often trust psychics because of their persuasive demonstrations, although the history of psychics is littered with cases of proven fraud. Professional magician James Randi, for instance, has publicly exposed a number of psychics, spiritualists, channelers, and charlatans. One of Randi's first targets was Israeli psychic *Uri Geller*, tested by the Stanford Research Institute for his powers to bend spoons and levitate objects. Randi demonstrated that the tricks were actually very simple and much assisted by the people's imagination.

The likelihood of fraud and fakery is one reason the Bible warns against relying on *signs and wonders* as evidence for truth-claims. Jesus always refused to give additional signs to those who did not believe his message, for he knew that people get easily deceived by signs. ``*For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect*" (**Mark 13:22**). The Bible tells us not to look at celebrated random examples of some accurate predictions, but requires a prophet to be 100% accurate all the time. Jeanne Dixon certainly was not always accurate, and neither are any of today's psychics. But even real examples of spiritual manifestations would not prove the phenomena is harmless or from God. The Bible warns of demons, *seducing spirits* and *doctrines of devils* (**Timothy 4:1**).

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

Extraterrestrials and UFOs

The UFO phenomenon has increased steadily over the last 50 years. While in the 1950's only 3-1/2% of the US population believed in UFOs this number has risen to an impressive 75-85% today. The past has no shortage of witnessing strange sightings in the heavens that could not be verified as comets or some other natural phenomenon and the search for *extraterrestrial intelligences* is well underway. There is the Californian S.E.T.I. Institute (*Search for extraterrestrial Intelligence*) and numerous other groups. The

Voyager spacecraft has been sent out into space accompanied with a message to try and contact some other life in outer space. The *Aricebo Observatory* in Puerto Rico is involved as well as many others from different countries.

How did we get to this view of mankind being just another species in the universe? It has become the inherent consequence of our acceptance of the evolution theory. It is only natural, we are told, that while we were developing here on this planet the same could have been happening elsewhere given the correct conditions. Given enough time anything can happen. Some scientists even suggest that there could be beings so beyond man on the evolutionary scale that they would look like Gods to us and many people are certainly fascinated by this idea.

It is interesting to observe how the idea that extraterrestrial beings could pay us a visit mutated from a scare into something that quite a few people actually hope for. In the late 40's Orson Wells narration *The War of the Worlds* over the radio scared hundreds of people out of their houses. Through the 1950's the movies expressed our fears of these alien visitors as enemies waiting to take over our planet. But slowly our attitude changed. TV shows like *Star Trek* gave us space as the final frontier, and an acceptance to move out beyond our earth. New movies came showing that UFOs were not really our enemies but our friends, welcoming us to a new frontier.

In fact, true UFO believers are looking for a *technological savior* to show up in the sky and expect spirit beings to land here on earth to help establish a new world order. More than 700,000 people have already reported sightings of UFOs or claimed abductions. Others claim to be in constant communication with extraterrestrials. They receive *Transmissions* through what we already know as *Channelling* and *Automatic Writing*. The messages are identical to ones the mediums and spiritists have been getting for centuries, just a bit more with technological slant.

One message received over and over again says ``*The Christ of the Aquarian age will arrive in the first public spaceship landing, to be seen by all your people on international satellite television*", and many UFO believers are looking forward to that day. Just imagine a landing of UFOs and one comes out arrayed in white saying he is the Christ. Do you think the world would be convinced? After all he came just as he left from the sky and every eye will behold him. What if he had powers and was able to do signs or miracles, how could anyone refute it?

But if that were to happen, would it really be Christ stepping out of the UFO? Wouldn't it be just one of the greatest deception ever fostered upon mankind - with the potential of leading millions of people astray? What can we actually expect from UFOs and extraterrestrials?

According to the descriptions of UFOs defy the laws of physics. They travel at speeds of 5,000 to 10,000 mph without making a sonic boom. They make immediate stops and survive the inertia. They are invisible on photographs, disappear and reappear somewhere else. So if UFOs actually exist, they are certainly not from this physical world and you don't really want to get in contact with them. Reports of those who claim to have been abducted by UFOs are strongly reminiscent of medieval tales of encounters with demons and the communication between extraterrestrials and mankind strongly resembles well-known occult techniques.

The Bible does not give the slightest hint about life on other planets. Scripture indicates that God created only two kinds of intelligent beings, angels and men. Man was placed here on earth, created in the image of God and with a special relationship to him. No other intelligent beings have ever been created and there are certainly no extraterrestrials. The belief in UFOs and extraterrestrials is nothing but a technologically modified version of the age-old deception that shall lure people into getting into a contact with demons and follow practices that the Scriptures clearly forbid.

Hare Krishna

Hare Krishna, the Krishna consciousness movement can be traced back the India of early 1500's, where public chanting the names of Krishna was first practiced. During the next centuries it experienced several declines and revivals in India and began to conquer the Western World in 1965, when A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada emigrated to the United States, opened a store-front center, published his religious magazine *Back to Godhead*, and founded the *International Society for Krishna Consciousness*.

The spirit of the late sixties helped the movement to grow rapidly. George Harrison's song *My Sweet Lord*, probably the most famous instance of public *Hare Krishna* chanting, made the movement quite popular. After the death of Prabhupada in 1977 the *International Society for Krishna Consciousness* has gone through several legal and doctrinal conflicts, including several murder cases and child abuse lawsuits, but managed to survive until this day.

Essentially, *Hare Krishna* is a Hindu-type religion with its own temples and preaching centers. It looks to Krishna as the "*Supreme Personality, the Lord, the complete whole, the Absolute Truth*". Krishna is the creator of all that exists; even the gods worshiped in other religions are simply "*plenary expansions or parts of Krishna*". Krishna is the Supersoul who enters into everything that is. Thus everything is just "*part and parcel of the Supreme Lord*".

The Bible is acceptable in *Hare Krishna* but it is taught that the Vedic literature of Hinduism contains much more specific information about God than you'll find in the Bible. Jesus Christ, for instance, is one of the demi-god manifestations of Krishna, sent to be the spiritual master of particular people in a particular time. But the true mediator between God (Krishna) and humanity is A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. He is referred to as *His Divine Grace*, a title he chose for himself. It is even said of him that "*Prabhupada was a world-genius, greater than Jesus*" and that he is to be "*honored as highly as the Supreme and Almighty Lord*"

According to *Hare Krishna*, man's only problem is his lust for temporal pleasures rather than love for Krishna. This lust keeps humanity trapped in the material world, rather than pursuing salvation, through millions of reincarnations and the law of Karma. Salvation from this endless cycle is attained only through following the spiritual disciplines of Krishna consciousness. These spiritual disciplines include:

1. *Chanting* the Hare Krishna mantra, the holy name of the Lord Krishna for about 1-1/2 to 2 hours each day, which is considered the solution to all problems.
2. *Distributing Hare Krishna literature*, which may result in the salvation of both member and recipient
3. *Keeping the prohibitions* against four degrading activities that cause humanity to submit to lustful. These are (1) gambling, (2) intoxication from alcohol, drugs, caffeine, and nicotine, (3) sexual activity outside marriage and for any purpose other than procreation, and (4) animal slaughter - which means you have to be strictly vegetarian.
4. *Dressing appropriately*. Men are supposed to shave their head except for a small tuft toward the back of their head and wear an orange Hindu dress. Women wear beautiful and modest Indian *saris*. In recent years the dress code has been eased for those whose assigned duties related to meetings with the general public.
5. *A strictly regulated communal life*.

Although *Hare Krishna*'s emphasis is more religious than the average *New Age* activity, it is based on the same beliefs. The aim at a high degree of purity is certainly honorable but the *Hare Krishna* approach is

not the way to salvation. Salvation is not earned by erasing karma through reincarnation, repetition of a mantra, or following an extensive list of rules and rituals. Humans live only once, and then face judgment from God (**Hebrews 9:27**) and the only way to get saved is provided by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

Transcendental Meditation and Yoga

Transcendental Meditation, which is advertised as a meditative method of obtaining serenity without drugs, was brought to the West in 1959 by *Maharishi Mahesh Yogi*. It offered peace, happiness and spiritual growth through a system of deep meditation and soon acquired a celebrated following including such famous names as the Beatles, Mia Farrow, and various sport stars. However, its popularity sagged in the late 60s and the Maharishi saw it necessary to revise *Transcendental Meditation*. He shifted the emphasis in the presentation of *Transcendental Meditation* from the spiritual to the practical and scientific to evade both materialistic and religious resistance to his spiritual teachings. *Transcendental Meditation* was presented to the Western world as a scientific way of reducing stress and finding peace within oneself. This strategy permitted *Transcendental Meditation* to obtain government support and a place in the curriculum of public schools. Today, it has become the most widely practiced form of meditation in the country. Thousands of school teachers have become meditators through this system and many have encouraged their students to practice *Transcendental Meditation* as well.

However, while *Transcendental Meditation* strives to couch its concepts in neutral terms and promotes its medicinal benefits as a form of relaxation, it nevertheless incorporates the fundamentals of Hinduism into its approach. Though the techniques can be learned in a purely mechanical way, answers to *How* and *Why* inevitably take the novice into the realm of Eastern philosophy.

According to *Transcendental Meditation*, man's ultimate need is for a state of consciousness called *Unity* and man's deepest difficulty is his lack of consciousness of his own divine Being. Instead of attaining consciousness of God, people try to be good or merely think *about* God. To quote Maharishi Mahesh Yogi himself, "*All misery in the world is due to missing this one point*"

The *Puja*, an initiation rite leads the novice goes through a ceremony worshiping the Hindu deities and offering them sacrifices. It is only after this ceremony has been performed that one may receive his personal *mantra* to meditate upon. The mantra is given by the master to a follower as a kind of weapon to ward off reasoning, thinking, and conceptualization and unite the meditator with the divine within him. In *Transcendental Meditation* the mantra is a group of sounds that is to be repeated silently over and over again in order to draw the mind towards its own essential nature. The mantra must never be spoken aloud or revealed to anyone. There is a reason for keeping the mantra secret. Devotees would quickly find out that their personal mantra was by no means chosen for them only and that it is much more than just a meditation device. Maharishi himself admits that the use of the mantra invokes gods and spirits from the spirit world - and that is its only purpose.

Gradually, the initiate comes under the control of both his instructor and his own mantra. There comes a time when the constant repetition of his mantra produces a numbness of mind, when he does not even hear himself praying to the gods. His mind empties of all thought, leading towards the *merging of self* with the so called *absolute deity*, Brahma. Eventually, adherents to *Transcendental Meditation* lose touch with reality and many end up with mental disorders. Quite a few suffer demon attack and even possession. It is not unusual that *Transcendental Meditation* adherents take up the occult in its many forms, including levitation, witchcraft etc.

Even *Yoga* exercises - currently taught to about 4 and 5 million people each week - are not as innocent as they may seem. Many people take up *Yoga* as a harmless pastime to help relieve tension and aches. Experts say, however, that physically yoga is no more effective than any other form of training. On

the other hand, the fact remains that even physical yoga is inextricably united with Eastern metaphysics. Every single minute movement to be found in any yoga exercise is really a prayer to the Hindu gods! Each passive, gentle movement is a symbol which 'speaks' to the spirits and is designed to reach a state of union with oneself as God. In other words, whoever practices yoga actually participates in a Hindu ritual.

Unfortunately, because Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has claimed that *Transcendental Meditation* is not a religion, many Jewish and Christian leaders have endorsed *Transcendental Meditation* to their congregations, and practice it themselves. But the origin of *Transcendental Meditation*, its initiation rite, nature, practice, and theory are religious at the core. *Transcendental Meditation* is pure Hinduism and not compatible with Christianity. Christians who take up *Transcendental Meditation* or *Yoga* seriously, will eventually lose all love for their Savior and God, begin to accept *other gospels*, and usually start to say that God can be reached by other faiths. Some may also experience the other horrific problems already mentioned.

Transcendental Meditation is not to be fooled with or toyed with. It is a cult, a lie of the devil, and cannot, in any form, be mixed with Christianity.

It is a sad truth that many of the *New Age* beliefs already made their way into the curriculum of our public schools, often under the disguise of neutral, academic, psychological, or scientific sounding terminology. Terms like *transpersonal psychology*, *guided imagery*, *visualization*, *human potential*, *inner guides* sound so innocent. Unconventional educators and parents may actually believe that by endorsing these disciplines they are truly helping students and society at large.

Indeed, Yoga and meditation may calm a nervous student; visualization and guided imagery could help improve his creativity; teaching principles of psychic development may enhance his sense of self-importance and increase his sense of power. But many educators and parents do not realize that these techniques already cross the thin line between a normal use of relaxation or imagination and occult techniques or philosophies. Integrating these methods and ideas into school curricula will lay a heavy burden on our children and future generations. Again, we must learn to discern: unconventional new methods may be very helpful but we must not allow the occult to spread further in our schools.

The U.S. Supreme Court has held that religious practice in the schools constitutes a violation of the Establishment clause of the First Amendment since public schools cannot promote the practice or ideology of any religion. If we cannot teach Christian values in schools anymore, we can at least make sure that other religions will not be taught as well - even if they come under the disguise of scientific terms.

Summary The *New Age Movement* is a conglomerate of seemingly unrelated groups, techniques, and beliefs that keep influencing each other and constantly create new mixtures. Its characteristic is not a homogeneous doctrine, but practices that are based on a modern version of Satan's original lie. Although no leader can be made out, one can clearly observe how Satan himself orchestrates the whole movement, spreading his lies wherever he can find people open to deception.

Discussions with *New Agers* sometimes appear to be hopeless. But if you address the fundamental issues - the irrationality of relativism, the inconsistencies of living out the *New Ager* view of the world, factual and historical errors, and the biblical account of the real God, Jesus, and gospel - then they may realize that there is a choice to be made instead of blurring the distinctions, and that love and forgiveness can not be found in an impersonal force but only in the God of the Bible.

Dealing with Cultists <http://www.cs.cornell.edu/home/kreitz/Christian/Cults/all.html> - TOP

We have gone over the teachings of 8 major cults and the biblical responses to their teachings. Now that we know what they believe - what can we do if we get into contact with people that are involved in a cult or the New Age Movement? Witnessing to them can be very frustrating, if you let them steer the discussion, because you will mostly dwell on topics that are not relevant for their salvation. *You* should be the one who asks questions concerning their beliefs about the fundamental issues. Recall however, that you are trying to reach a lost soul behind the wall of indoctrination, so you should keep a few things in mind.

1. *Do not argue and do not attack or ridicule the person.* Avoid anything that could even sound like you are attacking the person. They have a right to have their beliefs.
2. *Do not denigrate the character of the cult's founder.*
3. *Know and use the word of God* - it is quick and powerful (**Hebrews 4:12**). Keep in mind that throwing Bible verses at persons is not enough. You need to know the context in which it was used.
4. *Know what the cult believes* and be ready to ask specific questions about issues where it deviates from the word of God.
5. *Give your own testimony* about what Christ has done for you. There is nothing more convincing than that.
6. *Exalt the Lord Jesus Christ:* He is Lord of all and salvation is through Christ alone. This has to become very clear.
7. *Consciously depend upon the Holy Spirit.* Under his guidance you will be able to reach out.

Of course, there is no guarantee that you will be able to rescue a deceived soul. Sometimes you just have to let them go and pray that the word of God will continue to work in his life, because

*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (**Isaiah 55:10-11**)*