The Goddess and the Church – A New Age Deity

Feminism has invaded the realm of theology, elevating the concept of The Goddess, or Great Mother, as a pantheistic and occultic paradigm for religion acceptable to feminists, who find traditional religions unacceptable because of their "male Gods."

This article is also available in Spanish.

The goddess, or Great Mother, has existed since the beginning of time…it is out of the primordial depths of her womb that the Universe and all life is born. *Morwyn*, *Secrets Of A Witch's Coven*

Reverence for the goddess is becoming more prevalent in our day. The goddess is embraced by witchcraft, feminism, the occult, and the liberal church. The New Age that is about to dawn upon us will be, according to the occult world, a feminine age. Likewise, those who hold this view believe that this current, masculine age has been an age of destruction and broken relationships among humanity. The New Age with its feminine energies will bring balance to the destructive aspects of the Piscean Age.

Rosemary Radford Ruether in her book, *Womanguides: Readings Toward A Feminist Theology*, states "It is to the women that we look for salvation in the healing and restorative waters of Aquarius. It is to such a New Age that we look now with hope as the present age of masculism succeeds in destroying itself." According to Starhawk, a feminist and practicing witch, "the symbolism of the Goddess is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The Goddess does not rule the world; She is the world."(1)

In order for this feminine age to come into full fruition a shift in consciousness must take place in the world. This shift in thinking and perception of reality will bring forth the goddess.(2)

As interest in the occult continues to rise and gain popularity in our culture, the goddess becomes more popular as a deity. The modern woman is at a crossroads in her spiritual quest. It is imperative that she realize her inherent deity, her god nature, for she is to be the salvation of humanity.

According to those who hold a belief in the Great Goddess, Europe was once ruled by a matriarchal egalitarian religion. Their belief dictates that Old Europe was a culture that worshiped a matrifocal (mother-focused), sedentary, peaceful, art-loving, goddess between 5,000 and 25,000 years before the rise of the first male-oriented religion. They maintain that this egalitarian culture was overrun and destroyed by a semi-nomadic, horse-riding, Indo-European group of invaders who were patrifocal (father-focused), mobile, warlike, and indifferent to art.(3) The ease with which the peaceful goddess worshipers were subdued confirmed to the war-like Indo-European invaders their feelings of natural superiority. The matriarchal religion of these early settlers was eventually assimilated into the more dominant patriarchal religion of the invaders. As these invaders imposed their patriarchal culture on the conquered peoples, rapes(4) and myths about male warriors killing serpents appeared for the first time in their history. The serpent was a symbol of the goddess worshipers. As the assimilation of cultures continued, the Great Mother Goddess became fragmented into many lesser goddesses.

According to Merlin Stone, author of *When God Was a Woman*, the disenthronement of the Great Goddess, begun by the Indo-European invaders, was finally accomplished by the Hebrew, Christian, and Moslem religions that arose later.(5) The male deity took the prominent place. The female goddesses faded

into the background, and women in society followed suit.(6)

The Goddess and Witchcraft

In the world of witchcraft the goddess is the giver of life. Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., in her book, *Goddesses In Everywoman*, has this to say about the goddess:

The Great Goddess was worshiped as the feminine life force deeply connected to nature and fertility, responsible both for creating life and for destroying life.(7)

She also proclaims, “The Great Goddess was regarded as immortal, changeless, and omnipotent” prior to the coming of Christianity. For witchcraft, the goddess is the earth itself. Mother Earth or Gaia, as the goddess is known in occult circles, is an evolving being as is all of nature. In the New Age worldview, environmentalism and the ecological movement play an important part in restoring the goddess. In her best-selling book, *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk says

> The model of the Goddess, who is immanent in nature, fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. Witchcraft can be seen as a religion of ecology. Its goal is harmony with nature, so that life may not just survive, but thrive.(8)

Witches think of Gaia, or Mother Earth, as a biosystem. They attribute consciousness to earth and believe it to be spiritual as well. In other words, Gaia is a living and evolving being that has a spiritual destiny. Those who practice witchcraft take responsibility for Mother Earth’s evolutionary development.

The environmental movement of our day is greatly influenced by those who practice witchcraft or hold neopagan beliefs. Witchcraft is an attempt to reintroduce the sacred aspect of the earth that was, according to their belief, destroyed by the Christian world. The goddess is, therefore, a direct

affront against the male- dominated religion of the Hebrew God.

Christianity taught that God was transcendent, apart from nature, and was a masculine deity. Witchcraft holds a pantheistic view of God. God is nature. Therefore, God is in all things and all things are a part of God. However, this God is in actuality a goddess and predates the male God. The goddess is the giver of all life and is found in all of creation.

> The importance of the Goddess symbol for women cannot be over stressed. The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy, our aggression as healthy, and our anger as purifying. Through the Goddess, we can discover our strength, enlighten our minds, own our bodies, and celebrate our emotions.(9)

For Betty Sue Flowers, a University of Texas English professor, the women's spirituality movement is the answer to the male-oriented religion of Christianity. She was a keynote speaker for the International Conference on Women's Spirituality in Austin, Texas, and addressed the conference on the return of the goddess. According to Flowers,

> The goddess is a metaphor that reminds us of the female side of spirituality. Metaphors are important. You can't know God directly. You can only know images of God, and each image or metaphor is a door. Some doors are open and others are closed. A door that is only male is only half open.(10)

The Goddess and Feminism

For many in the feminist world, the goddess is an expression of worship. A growing number within the feminist movement have bought into witchcraft as the central focus of their allegiance. Those who have become a part of the women's

spirituality movement reject what they call the patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition, deploring sexist language, predominantly masculine imagery and largely male leadership.(11)

In a Wall Street Journal article, Sonia L. Nazario stated, “Women first wanted to apply feminism to political and economic realms, then to their families. Now, they want it in their spiritual lives.”(12)

To fully understand the implications of the women’s spirituality movement one only needs to read the current literature on the subject. The editors of the book *Radical Feminism* state that “Political institutions such as religion, because they are based on philosophies of hierarchical orders and reinforce male oppression of females, must be destroyed.”

Radical feminists believe that the traditional church must be dismantled. For example, in her book *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*, Naomi Goldenburg announced,

> The feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh….It is likely that as we watch Christ and Yahweh tumble to the ground, we will completely outgrow the need for an external God.(13)

Many feminists are obviously moving away from an understanding of deity as an external “male” God who stands apart from Creation to a conception of deity as a goddess that is realized within one’s inner self and is one with nature.

Some extreme feminists in the goddess movement “pray for the time when science will make men unnecessary for procreation.”(14) The radical feminist see the goddess movement as a spiritual outlet for their long-held beliefs. According to Mark Muesse, an assistant professor of religious studies at Rhodes College,

> some feminist Christians push for changes ranging from the ordination of women and the generic, non-sexual terms for God and humanity to overhauling the very theology.(15)

Perhaps the most descriptive word for the feminist movement is "transformation." Catherine Keller, Associate Professor of Theology at Xavier University, in her essay "Feminism and the New Paradigm," proclaims that the world-wide feminist movement is bringing about the end of patriarchy, the eclipse of the politics of separation, and the beginning of a new era modeled on the dynamic, holistic paradigm. Radical feminism envisions that era, and the long process leading toward it, as a comprehensive transformation.

Another aspect of this transformation is the blending of the sexes. The feminist movement seeks a common mold for all of humanity. Jungian Psychotherapist John Weir Perry believes that we must find our individuality by discovering androgyny. He states,

> To reach a new consensus, we have to avoid falling back into stereotypes, and that requires truly developing our individuality. It is an ongoing work of self-realization and self- actualization. For men it means growing into their native maleness and balancing it with their femaleness. For women, it's the same growing into their full womanhood, and that includes their masculine side.(16)

This process sounds more like androgyny (or sameness) than individuality and it reflects a paradigm-shift involving nothing less than the reordering of man's understanding of God. A shift from thinking of God as male to seeing and experiencing God as a goddess: the Mother of Life.

The Goddess and the Occult

In the world of the occult, popularly known as the New Age, the goddess is believed to be resident within the individual

and simply needs to be awakened. In other words, the individual is inherently divine. Starhawk, a witch who works with the Catholic priest Matthew Fox at his Institute of Creation Spirituality, says that an individual can awaken the goddess by invoking, or inviting, her presence. Starhawk tells us,

> To invoke the Goddess is to awaken the Goddess within, to become …that aspect we invoke. An invocation channels power through a visualized image of Divinity….We are already one with the Goddess—she has been with us from the beginning, so fulfillment becomes…a matter of self-awareness. For women, the Goddess is the symbol of the inmost self. She awakens the mind and spirit and emotions.(17)

Jean Shinoda Bolen, a Jungian analyst and Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, when asked the question, What ails our society?, put it this way: "We suffer from the absence of one half of our spiritual potential—the Goddess."(18) Individuals who follow New Age teaching believe that the male-dominated religion of this present age has been an injustice to humanity and the ecosystem. Therefore, there must be a balancing of energies. The male energies must diminish and the feminine energies must increase in order for the goddess to empower the individual.

The New Age of occultism promises to be an age of peace, harmony, and tranquility. Whereas the present dark age of brokenness and separation continues to bring war, conflict, and disharmony, so it is the goddess with her feminine aspects of unity, love, and peace that will offer a solution for mankind and circumvent his destruction. For many in our society this appears to be the answer to man's dilemma. However, an occult solution that denies Christ's atonement for sin cannot fully meet a holy God's requirement for wholeness.

For the pagan, the goddess represents life and all it has to offer. "The Goddess religion is a conscious attempt to reshape

culture."(19) This reshaping is nothing less than viewing man and his understanding of reality from a female-centered perspective which focuses on the Divine as being female. Therefore, considerable emphasis is placed initially on feminine attributes, but ultimately the focus is on eroticism and sexuality.

> Women are clearly the catalyst for the formation of the new spirituality. It is women above all who are in the process of reversing Genesis…by validating and freeing their sexuality.(20)

A major part of this transformative process is the empowerment of women. The rise of the goddess is a direct assault on the patriarchal foundation of Christianity. This new feminist spirituality affirms bisexuality, lesbianism, homosexuality, and androgyny (through the expression of transvestitism).

As this revival of the goddess continues, a growing lack of distinction between male and female will become the norm. Jungian Psychotherapist John Weir Perry maintains,

> Both current psychology and ancient history point to an emerging transformation in our sense of both society and self, a transformation that includes redefining the notion of what it means to be men and women.(21)

The Bible clearly indicates that men and women were created as distinctive beings, male and female. This rising occult influence in our society seeks to undermine the Biblical absolute that gives our culture stability. Once again the Bible rings true as it states,

> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (2 Tim. 4:3).

The Goddess and the Liberal Church

The message of the goddess has gained a hearing in the church as well. The philosophy of the goddess is currently being taught in the classrooms of some of our seminaries. In a growing number of seminaries the student population is becoming increasingly female, and many of these women have a feminist outlook on life. Mary Daly, who considers herself to be a Christian feminist, says this about traditional Christianity: "To put it bluntly, I propose that Christianity itself should be castrated."(22) The primary focus of the "Christian" feminist is to bring an end to what they perceive as male-dominated religion by "castrating" the male influence from religion. Daly continued by saying,

> I am suggesting that the idea of salvation uniquely by a male savior perpetuates the problem of patriarchal oppression.(23)

Reverend Susan Cady, co-author of *Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality* and pastor of Emmanuel United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, is one example of the direction that Daly and others are taking the church. The authors of Sophia state that, "Sophia is a female, goddess-like figure appearing clearly in the Scriptures of the Hebrew tradition."

Wisdom Feast, the authors' latest book, clearly identifies Jesus with Sophia. Sophialogy presents Sophia as a separate goddess and Jesus as her prophet. The book takes liberty with Jesus by replacing the masculine deity with the feminine deity Sophia. Another example of how goddess "thealogy" (note feminist spelling for theology) is making its way into the liberal church is through seminars held on seminary campuses.

One such seminar was held at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. "Wisdomweaving: Woman Embodied in Faiths" was held at the school in February of 1990. If one looks at the schedule of the seminar, it is obvious that the

emphasis was not on orthodoxy. Linda Finnell, a follower of Wicca and one of the speakers, spoke on the subject of "Returning to the Goddess Through Dianic Witchcraft." Two of the keynote speakers were of a New Age persuasion. In fact, one, Sr. Jose Hobday, works with Matthew Fox and Starhawk at the Institute for Creation Spirituality.

A growing number of churches in the United States and around the world are embracing the New Age lie. Many churches have introduced *A Course in Miracles*, Yoga, Silva Mind Control, Unity teachings, and metaphysics into their teaching material. Some churches have taken a further step into the New Age by hiring onto their staffs individuals who hold to a metaphysical worldview.

Along with the deception that is subtly gaining influence in the liberal church, there are a growing number of churches affiliated with the New Age. These churches, without apology, teach the Luciferian gospel. They are the seed-bed of the occult.

It is amazing that while the liberal church will not accept or believe in Satan, they are willing to embrace Lucifer as an angel of light. It is interesting to note that the New Age Church represents itself as the Church of Light.

Whether the individual seeks the goddess through witchcraft, the feminist movement, the New Age, or the liberal church, he or she is beginning a quest to understand and discover the "higher self." The higher self, often referred to as the "god self," is believed to be pure truth, deep wisdom. In actuality, this so-called "truth" or "wisdom" embodies the oldest lie in the Book, the lie of self- deification: "Ye shall become as Gods." As Christians we must learn to discern every spirit lest we too become deceived.

Notes

1. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row,

Publishers, 1989), 23.

2. Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once & Future Goddess* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), xiv.

3. Ibid., xii-xiii. See also Lynnie Levy, *Of A Like Mind* (Madison, Wis.: OALM, 1991), vol. VIII, no. 3, pp. 2-3.

4. See also Zsuzsanna Emese Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (Oakland, Calif.: Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, 1986), 12.

5. See also Gadon, *The Once & Future Goddess*, xiii.

6.Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 21.

7. Ibid., 20.

8. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 25.

9. Ibid., 24.

10. Carlos Vidal Greth, "The Spirit of Women," *The Austin-American Statesman*, 5 March 1991, Sec D.

11. Ibid.

12. Sonia L. Nazario, "Is Goddess Worship Finally Going to Put Men in Their Place?," *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 June 1990, sec. A.

13. Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1979), 4, 25.

14. Nazario, "Goddess Worship."

15. Deirdre Donahue, "Dawn of The Goddesses,'" *USA Today*, 26 September 1990, sec. D.

16. John Weir Perry, "Myth, Ritual, and the Decline of

Patriarchy," *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992): 103.

17. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 99.

18. Jean Shinoda Bolen, "The Women's Movement in Transition: The Goddess & the Grail," *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992), 8.

19. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance,* 11.

20. Donna Steichen, "The Goddess Goes to Washington," *Fidelity Magazine* (December 1986), 42.

21. Perry, "Decline of Patriarchy," *Magical Blend*, 62.

22. Alice Hageman, *Theology After the Demise of God the Father: A Call for the Castration of Sexist Religion* (New York: Association Press, 1974), 132.

23. Ibid., 138.

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The Boston Church – An Abusive Church

Former Probe staffer Russ Wise shows that the Boston Church Movement has all the marks of a dangerous, controlling cult. It departed from its roots to become legalistic and abusive.

Church Background and History

The International Church of Christ, also known as "The Boston Church," began in Gainesville, Florida, under the leadership of Chuck Lucas in 1971. It was known then as the Crossroads Church of Christ, and Lucas was the pastor. Chuck Lucas was

also involved in “Campus Advance,” an outreach program at the University of Florida in Gainesville. It was there that he met Kip McKean who later became the founding evangelist and prime influence of the movement. Lucas trained McKean in discipleship based on Robert E. Coleman’s book, *The Master Plan of Evangelism.*

In 1976 McKean and other young men under Pastor Lucas’s influence were sent to other Churches of Christ with close proximity to university campuses to establish similar ministries. Kip was sent to Heritage Chapel Church of Christ and Eastern Illinois University in Charleston. His success brought scrutiny to his method of discipleship and many in the church questioned his use of manipulation and control to reach new disciples. McKean’s aggressive form of discipleship is both the source of the movement’s growth and its source of controversy.

In 1979 McKean was moved to the Boston area and the Lexington Church of Christ. It was in Boston that his methodology of subtle manipulation and mind control took its effect on great numbers of people. The church literally exploded in membership from 30 to over 1,000 members.

In 1983 the church changed its name to the “Boston Church of Christ.” In the early 1980s the church sent disciples across the United States and around the world to establish its ministry of discipleship, and thereby, to disciple the world.

Because the leadership believed that the biblical model for naming churches was to name them after the city where they were established, they named them the Stockholm Church of Christ or the Dallas-Ft. Worth Church of Christ, etc. They authorize one church per city. According to figures in 1997, the International Churches of Christ has planted churches on every continent,is currently active in 115 countries, has 292 congregations around the world, and has a membership of 143,000. The church has been embarrassed in recent years by

the departure of thousands of members who no longer could live under the smothering control of the church. Ex-members confide that as many people are fleeing the church's bondage as are joining.

According to a *Time* magazine article, 16 May 1992, the Boston Church utilizes a "control system" that is designed to focus all the energies of the member on bringing new people into the church. Mark Trahan, a former member in New York, said, "All you think about is recruiting." It becomes a way of life inside the group.

Trahan goes on to say that once members leave the church, they become "marked" people and are shunned by members who are directed to no longer have any contact with them.

As we continue our examination of the Boston Church Movement, we will see how it embraces legalism. Legalism often opens the door to another gospel—a gospel, in this case, that ultimately says the cross is not enough to gain our salvation.

Church Teaching and Belief

On the surface the Boston Church is much like other Churches of Christ in relationship to their teaching and doctrine. Both teach the necessity of water baptism by immersion, the innocence of infants, the invalidity of original sin, and that musical instruments are not to be a part of worship.

However, the Boston Church and the mainline Church of Christ differ on several counts. The Boston Church utilizes a hierarchical structure of church organization rather than one that reflects the independent nature of the local church. The Boston Church further differs from the mainline body in its controlling method of discipleship which represents the most serious concern about the church.

Discipleship, Boston Church style, is a requirement for the believer. There are no options. Each member has a discipler

and is held accountable to the church by that individual. Disciples are not allowed to make basic decisions on their own, but must conform to the wishes of the discipler and ultimately the church.

Disciples are given direction on every aspect of their lives, from church attendance and giving, to dating habits or personal relationships, from where to live to their sex lives, and a multitude of decisions in between. The lives of disciples are closely regulated and controlled. The leadership maintains that this is all done for the glory of God.

In an article by Stephen F. Cannon, *The Boston Church of Christ- -Has Mind Control Come to Beantown?*, the author gives us an insight into how the discipling program is structured. "New converts are discipled by older converts. The older converts are discipled by Bible talk leaders. The Bible talk leaders are discipled by zone evangelists. The zone evangelists are discipled by Kip McKean and the elders."

McKean is the absolute leader. He determines "how far a congregation will go in obeying the Scriptures by how consistently he corrects mistakes, rebukes sin, encourages obedience and by impartially carrying out the instructions of God . . . the Evangelist must know where the church is in the eyes of God, where it is headed and what it will take to get where God wants it to be."

This type of authoritarian leadership is not supported by Scripture. Rather, mutual servanthood was the model given to us by Jesus and Paul (Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:24-27; 1 Thess. 2:5-12; 2 Tim. 2:24-26). Scripture is clear in its teaching regarding to whom we are to be accountable: 1 Timothy 2:5 states that Jesus is our mediator, not man.

Baptism equals salvation. As mentioned earlier, the Boston Church agrees with the mainline Church of Christ on basic doctrine. Generally, the Boston Church is in agreement that

the member must be baptized by the Church of Christ by immersion to receive his or her salvation. However, the Boston Church goes one step further and says that the member must be a disciple in order for his or her baptism to count for salvation.

In other words, for the Boston Church, faith in Christ and His death for our sins is not enough for the believer to be acceptable before God; he must also be baptized by the "true" church as a disciple. The Bible, however, offers the unbeliever a simple option: believe on (trust in, have faith in, rely on) Christ and you will be saved; that is, the penalty of sin is wiped away and the person is spiritually adopted (born again) into God's family (Rom. 10:9). God does not place restrictions on us as sinners; He only asks us to believe and exercise our faith.

Abusive Behavior in The Church

There are many ways for abuse to become a controlling element in a church body. Later we will look at specific ways one can avoid deception. But for now, let's look at a few ways that we can discern abusive behavior in the church.

Excessive Control. A key element almost always found in abusive churches is a leadership that is excessive in controlling its members. Pat Zukeran, an apologist and an authority on The Boston Church Movement, says this about control-oriented leadership: "The leader in an abusive church is dogmatic, self- confident, arrogant, and the spiritual focal point in the lives of his followers. The leader assumes he is more spiritually in tune with God than anyone else. He claims insight into Scripture that no one else has. Or, he may state that he receives personal revelations from God."

Personal Interpretation of Scripture. Another element of abuse that usually accompanies this style of leadership is the insistence on a personal interpretation of the Scriptures, and

in some cases, even re-writing the Scriptures to underscore personal ideas and hobbyhorses. This level of manipulation opens the door to a subtle control that affects how one thinks and pulls the member more deeply into the web of deception.

The Bible challenges us to seek its counsel rather than that of men. We are to measure all teachings against the Word of God. We find an example of this counsel in Acts 17:11 where the Apostle Paul places himself under the authority of the Scripture.

Manipulation of Church Membership. Psychological manipulation is another element of abuse that may be found in abusive churches. It is most always very subtle and is usually a highly skilled method of control. The use of unwarranted guilt, intimidation, peer pressure, threats of divine judgment from God for disobedience, and confessional are among the methods employed to manipulate the member.

Stephen F. Cannon, mentioned earlier, says that “the chief tool to keep the flock in line seems to be the doctrine of personal confession to one’s discipler.” Cannon continues by quoting Rev. Buddy Martin, of Cape Cod Church of Christ, who claims that “almost everyone in the Boston Church of Christ tells their secrets.” Martin further confirmed that “those secrets are often used against the person if they don’t follow the party line’ and do what the elders want them to do.”

This kind of manipulation is foreign to our Lord, who sacrificially gave of Himself for others. Jesus’ example is one of humility and service, not the dogmatism and arrogance found in those who would abuse their followers.

One True Church. Another characteristic of an abusive church is that it often establishes itself as being the only “true” church. In their methodology all other churches are wrong or practice false doctrine. The Boston Church, like other churches with abusive traits, do not allow for any outside

teaching that may be contrary to their interpretation of "truth."

Unquestioning Submission. The abusive church demands undying allegiance to its leadership and its doctrinal positions. It becomes authoritative on every element and aspect in the life of the believer. There is no room for another position to be considered.

Understanding Thought Reform

Abusive churches such as the Boston Church Movement and others use thought reform as a standard element in their program of recruitment. The key to their success is the ability to keep the subject unaware of being manipulated and controlled.

Mindbending or thought reform is carried out in a sophisticated program that incorporates three elements to bring the desired result. First, those who use thought control endeavor to convince their subjects that their past is wrong and that it has negatively influenced their present life. Second, abusive leaders make every effort to gain control over the personal wills of their subjects by introducing mind-altering activities into their normal routine. Third, the goal of such groups is to alter their trainees' normal thought processes and bring them to a neutral, non-resistant state of mind so that the minds of the trainees can be effectively reprogrammed.

All thought reform cults use this type of mind control. The methods used include meditation techniques, pray-reading, chanting mantras, sleep deprivation, and other techniques that alter one's conscious awareness of reality.

Once the group has gained control of the new convert's mind, an intensive time of reprogramming or indoctrination is begun to establish the group's goals and to begin the reinterpretation of "truth" or other beliefs. The key to this

process of thought reform is to keep the subject unaware of the manipulation that is taking place in his or her mind.

How does thought reform work? Listed below are some of the tactics used by thought-reform programs according to Margaret Thaler Singer, clinical psychologist and emeritus professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and author of *Cults In Our Midst—The Hidden Menace In Our Everyday Lives.*

The first tactic is to "destabilize a person's sense of self." In essence, cultivate an environment of community in the individual that eliminates his or her personhood, thereby creating an identity crisis within the individual.

The second tactic is to move people to radically reinterpret their life history, dramatically alter their worldview, and wholeheartedly embrace a new conception of reality.

And the third tactic used by the group is to "develop in the person a dependency on the organization, and thereby turn the person into a deployable agent of the organization."

Dr. Singer offers six conditions that are employed to gain the desirable results of thought reform. The first condition that must be accomplished is to keep the new seekers "unaware that there is an agenda to control or change" them.

The second is to control their "time and physical environment." Converts are denied an opportunity to interact with family or friends, and they are subjected to a schedule that utilizes every minute of their day without giving them a chance to find time alone.

The third condition is to "create a sense of powerlessness, fear, and dependency." The group systematically eliminates the individual's support system. The organization may implement a system of rigid control that dictates where people work or live, how they spend their spare time, and other aspects of personal freedom, consequently increasing their sense of

powerlessness.

The fourth condition is to “suppress old behavior and attitudes.” By creating the right environment, new recruits’ prior ideas about right and wrong become irrelevant as the group continues to define the approved agenda of thought.

The fifth condition that must be met is to “instill new behavior and attitudes” so the new converts will readily assimilate into the organization. A system of rewards and punishment is instituted to further control. The goal is for the seekers to accept the new philosophy without question.

The sixth, and last condition that Dr. Singer offers, is to “put forth a closed system of logic” that deters any ability to question the authority of the leadership. Such a program allows no opportunity to express doubt or offer any kind of contradiction that would bring into question the veracity of the organization. The individual is always wrong in such a case and the organization is always right.

These six conditions are utilized to varying degrees by all groups that attempt to reform a new convert’s thought. It is no less than subtle brainwashing, and it is destructive in the long term.

If we are to guard our minds from the enemy and renew them as the Scriptures challenge us to do, then we must remain vigilant. We must not allow ourselves to be deceived.

Avoiding Deception

Previously we have dealt with the Boston Church and its abusive nature. We have also looked at thought reform and how the cults can use it to control their membership. In our last segment we are going to look at practical ways that we, as Christians, can avoid being deceived by those who would entrap us by false teaching.

Deception is a mainstay of thought reform cults and groups. It is a subtle form of manipulation that erodes the personal freedom of individuals. In an age that has produced the Jonestown and Heaven's Gate cults, it has become imperative for us to protect ourselves and our loved ones from those who would deceive and abuse us. Here are several practical ways we can prevent deception in our lives.

ONE: Be careful who you share your problems and spiritual struggles with. On the one hand, you should be open and accepting of others. On the other hand, you need to be cautious around people you do not know personally because devious individuals could use the information you share to take advantage of you. However, if people want to discuss their problems or their spiritual life with you, keep the focus of such discussions on them and off of you. (This approach will not allow someone, who may be out to solicit you into an aberrant group, to seduce you in a time of vulnerability.)

TWO: Be aware of Bible studies or meetings that are offered outside of known Christian groups or organizations. If you are unsure about a particular group, check it out by asking your pastor or other legitimate spiritual authorities.

THREE: Sincerity does not equal truth. If someone uses Christian terminology and is accommodating they may be camouflaging their true intent—deception—by meeting your social and personal need to belong. Remember legitimate groups are up front and more than willing to identify who they are and what they are about.

FOUR: Avoid groups that do not allow you to question their teaching or authority. Non-Christian groups attempt to mislead the individual regarding their true beliefs and goals by not allowing the prospective member to ask needed questions.

FIVE: Avoid groups that (1) do not allow you time to reflect

on what you have been taught or (2) encourage you to become overly involved in “church” activity or (3) refuse to grant you the time and freedom you need to make unhurried and unpressured decisions about your spiritual life.

SIX: Be aware of groups that attempt to limit or sever your relationship with your family, your church, and long-standing friends in the faith—people who are, in effect, your support net.

SEVEN: Be aware of groups that supplant individuality and personal freedom with a communal identity.

EIGHT: Make an effort to discover what kind of authority the group operates under. Do members have leeway in making decisions about their present and future, or are they manipulated to do what the group desires?

Scripture warns about those who would bring dissension into the church. Romans 16:17 states, “I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them.”

2 Peter 2:1 tells us that, “false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies . . . and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.”

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Freemasonry and the Christian Church – Are Masons Christian?

Russ Wise intently examines the teaching and practices of freemasonry from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective. What he finds clearly shows distinct differences between Freemasonry and Christian doctrine and practice.

This article is also available in Spanish.

Freemasonry : Its Background and History

There are probably few subjects as shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding as that of Freemasonry. Known under a variety of names (the Craft, the Brotherhood, the Order, the Fraternal Order, the Lodge, etc.), Masonry has been aligned with both the Christian church and the occult. A major problem for many whether within the Order or without is the question of the Mason's ultimate allegiance. If, in fact, there is no appreciable theological difference between the church and Freemasonry, their antagonists have no basis on which to denounce them. However, if there are beliefs and practices in Masonry that are incompatible with biblical Christianity, then it becomes imperative for the non-Mason and Mason alike to understand the true teachings of the Lodge.

The history of the Lodge is not easily discernible. Along with those who believe that Freemasonry had Christian beginnings are a growing number of Masonic authors who espouse an occultic origin for the Craft. There are those who indicate that the Craft was an outgrowth of the Ancient Mystery Schools or that it was first associated with the Druids or the Illuminati. In order for the individual to make a correct decision regarding Freemasonry, he must first understand the

motivation of the author.

Masonic authors Delmar Darrah, A. S. MacBride, and Melvin Johnson point out the unreliability of many of their fellow Masonic writers. Darrah, in his book titled *History And Evolution Of Freemasonry*, states that “Masons have believed the things concerning the origin of the institution that they wanted to believe and have gone forth and told them as facts. When links were missing, they have been supplied by drawing upon fertile imaginations.”(1)

Christianity and the Craft

Leading Masonic authorities in the 18th and 19th centuries held a distinctively Christian interpretation of Freemasonry. Such leaders as Rev. James Anderson, William J. Hughan, William Hutchinson, Rev. George Oliver, and others had a Christian view of their Craft.(2) Hutchinson, in particular, noted that Jesus Christ was the example for the Master Mason. He stated, “The Master Mason represents a man under the Christian doctrine saved from the grave of iniquity and raised to the faith of salvation. As the great testimonial that we are risen from the state of corruption, we bear the emblem of the Holy Trinity as the insignia of our vows and of the origin of the Master’s order.”(3)

The Anti-Masonic Movement

The decade between 1826 and 1836 represented troublesome years for the Masonic Order. After several incidents that cast a negative light on Freemasonry,(4) a growing anti-Masonic sentiment began to emerge. As a result, there was a mass exodus of Christians from the Lodge, thereby creating a vacuum to be filled by those who held a non-Christian view of Masonry. During this time Albert Pike seized the opportunity to spread and entrench his pagan interpretation of the Craft. Pike and others began to reinterpret the symbols of the Craft.

The paganization of the Lodge took place over several decades, but it did not reach public awareness until the latter part of the 19th century. Even so, it was not until the 1920s, when a large number of books began appearing in print that claimed pagan origins for the Craft, that these efforts became widely known.

Masonic Universalism

The anti-Masonic movement dealt Freemasonry a severe blow. However, the exodus of large numbers of Christians proved to be a stabilizing factor(5) for the non-Christian forces of the Craft. Once the Christian majority had left the Craft, Pike was then able to redesign it in a way that would support his pagan views.

It is interesting to note that during the very time that Pike was heavily involved in his paganizing process, the Craft was experiencing a renewed growth in membership from Christians. The majority of these new Christian members represented church leadership and accepted the Christian interpretation of Hutchinson, Oliver, Hughan, and others. Their influence, however, wasn't enough to offset the growing paganization of the Lodge.

Manly P. Hall, a 33rd degree Mason, was one of the early authors who claimed a pagan origin for Freemasonry. In his book entitled *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, he says that Freemasonry is not a material thing: it is a universal expression of the Divine Wisdom. "The Masonic order is not a mere social organization, but is composed of all those who have banded themselves together to learn and apply the principles of mysticism and the occult rites."(6)

Hall (and a host of other writers including Pike) created a pagan history for Freemasonry that would later take root and grow to become the accepted understanding of Masonic origins. As this new interpretation took hold in the minds of the

membership, Christianity was being all but eradicated from the Craft. It became unthinkable to mention the name of Christ or to pray in the name of Jesus. The Craft was set firmly on the ground of “universalism.”

The primary standard for membership was, and continues to be, that the candidate believe in “God.” This god could be Krishna, Buddha, Allah, or any other god, but Jesus Christ is not to be considered anything more than their equal.

This universalist, or inclusive, idea about God has opened the door for every false deity to have a place within the Lodge. Hall makes his universalist orientation unmistakable by stating, “The true disciple of Masonry has given up forever the worship of personalities. With his greater insight, he realizes that all forms . . . are of no importance to him compared to the life which is evolving within.”(7)

Hall adds to his belief in universalism by stating that “the true Mason is not creed-bound. He realizes with the divine illumination of his lodge that as a Mason his religion must be universal: Christ, Buddha, or Mohammed, the name means little, for he recognizes only the light and not the bearer.”(8) So, for the Mason, God is not a personal being, but an impersonal force, an energy that has no substance.

The Mason who is a Christian is put in a very difficult position. Although his Fraternal Order supported his Christianity in its early years, it now no longer allows for it as there is no question about the pagan orientation of Freemasonry in our day. Therefore, the Mason must ask himself whether he can, in good faith, remain a part of an organization that devalues the God of Christianity.

Freemasonry as a Religion

As the evolution of modern Freemasonry took place over a period of several hundred years, it continued to be influenced

by those who held an occultic worldview. For them, the Craft was a revival of the ancient mysteries.

Albert Pike, the noted Masonic scholar, said that “it is the universal, eternal, immutable religion, such as God planted it in the heart of universal humanity.”(9) Pike’s statement is a good example of Masonic double speak. The Christian can interpret what is said as being in reference to the personal God of Christianity who created the universe. However, when one takes Pike’s statement together with the balance of his worldview it becomes apparent that he is referring to the impersonal god of Freemasonry as mentioned earlier.

Pike, in his book *Morals and Dogma*, says this about religion and Freemasonry: “Every Masonic Lodge is a temple of religion; and its teachings are instruction in religion.”(10) According to the modern day interpreters of Masonry, it has now taken its logical place as the unifier of all religions. One such interpreter, Foster Bailey, an occultist and a 32nd degree Mason, said that “Masonry is the descendant of a divinely imparted religion” that antedates the prime date of creation. Bailey goes on to say that “Masonry is all that remains to us of the first world religion” which flourished in ancient times. “It was the first unified world religion. Today we are working again towards a world universal religion.”(11)

In other words, Freemasonry has its roots in the same sources as the mystery religions of the world that brought on the wrath of the Hebrew God of the Old Testament. And the Craft is now preparing the way for the revival of the same religion of the ancients.

The Mason, however, may be unaware of much of what is taught by the Lodge. The Mason who is uninitiated in the higher degrees is deliberately deceived by his brethren. Pike says that “truth is not for those who are unworthy.” He goes on to say that “Masonry jealously conceals its secrets, and intentionally leads conceited interpreters astray.”(12)

Hall put it this way: “Spiritual qualities are necessary before the real Masonic secrets can be understood by the brethren themselves.”(13) What Hall seems to be saying is that one must reach a certain spiritual level before he can rightly understand the deep symbolic teachings of Freemasonry. As an example, one of the most known symbols for Masonry is the letter “G.” Depending on whose interpretation one chooses, this symbol may represent geometry, God, or gnosis. A Christian would obviously interpret the symbol as God, whereas the pagan would see it as knowledge or gnosis.

Albert Pike was even more direct when he stated, “The Blue Degrees are but the outer court of the Temple. Part of the symbols are displayed there to the initiate, but he is intentionally misled by false interpretations. It is not intended that he shall understand them; but it is intended that he shall imagine he understands them. Their true explication is reserved for the Adepts, the Princes of Masonry.”(14)

The Mason may unwittingly be a part of the Lodge thinking that it is an extension of his Christian faith, when in fact it may be a “Trojan horse,” allowing another god into his soul.

The Masonic God

The god of Freemasonry and the God of the Bible are not one and the same. There is a great difference between the two concepts of God. The Masonic god, “The Great Architect of the Universe” (G.A.O.T.U), is believed to be above all other gods.

According to Albert Pike, all people, regardless of their spiritual orientation, can unite under the “Grand Artificer of the Universe.” The Masonic god is all-inclusive and all-embracing. All potential Masons must acknowledge a “God” in order to gain membership in the Lodge, but there is no definite criteria regarding which “God” is implied or what “God” is acceptable.

Pike states that Masonry is the unifier of all religions and that “the Christian, the Hebrew, the Moslem, the Brahmin, the followers of Confucius and Zoroaster, can assemble as brethren and unite in prayer to the one God who is above all the Baalim.”(15) In other words, the biblical God is reduced to the level of all the other gods and at the same time rendered as equal with the false gods of those religions. Therefore, Christianity is stripped of its uniqueness as the one true religion that offers humanity its only hope for salvation.

This universal god of Freemasonry is believed by many within the Lodge to be the God of the Bible, but this god is not the triune God of the Christian faith. Freemasonry purposefully diminishes the co-equal and co-eternal status of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. That is, the second and third Persons of the Trinity are placed below God the Father, disallowing the triune nature of the biblical God.

The Masonic god is clearly given a greater position among all other “gods.” Albert Pike spoke of “God as being One; Unapproachable, Single, Eternal and Unchanging. . . . There is but one God, infinite and incomprehensible, to whom no human attribute can be properly assigned, even when imagined to be infinite.”(16) Therefore, according to Pike, the god of Freemasonry is “Single” in nature and not the triune God of the Bible. Likewise, the Masonic god is unapproachable. He is not a personality that cares for his creation, he is a force a principle.

Manly P. Hall, a 33rd degree Mason, refers to God as being the “Life Principle” that lies within all living things. In a passage quoted earlier, Hall stated, “The true disciple of ancient Masonry has given up forever the worship of personalities. With his greater insight, he realizes that all forms . . . are of no importance to him compared to the life which is evolving within.”(17) Hall reveals in this passage that

- The god of Freemasonry is a force resident within all living things, and
- The religion of the Craft is pantheism.

On the other hand, the God of Christianity is transcendent and only becomes resident within the human family, and then only when He is invited to do so. In Masonry, Jesus Christ is not accepted as being “One” with the Father and is not looked to for salvation.

Jesus made his Father’s requirements very clear: “It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only'” (Luke 4:8). The Father says that “you shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him . . . you shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth” (Deut. 6:13-15).

The Mason who professes to be a Christian must decide whom he will serve: the God of the Bible or the god of Freemasonry. He cannot serve them both.

The Masonic Jesus

The central question that every Christian Mason must ask himself is “Who is Jesus Christ according to the Lodge?” Earlier we saw that Albert Pike was greatly influenced by the occult and that he was responsible for the rewriting of the rituals for all the degree work beyond that of Master Mason.

Because of Pike’s influence, Freemasonry has adopted a universalist approach toward divinity. According to Jim Shaw, a 33rd degree Mason who left the Lodge, Masonry teaches that “Jesus was just a man. He was one of the exemplars,’ one of the great men of the past, but not divine and certainly not the only means of redemption of lost mankind. He was on a

level with other great men of the past like Aristotle, Plato, Pythagoras and Mohammed. His life and legend were no different from that of Krishna, the Hindu god. He is the son of Joseph,' not the Son of God."(18)

Jesus Christ is not to be looked upon as God incarnate, or as the Savior of humanity, but He is to be considered as no different than any other great spiritual leader or guru. To follow through with this conclusion, the Lodge does not permit the name of Jesus or Christ to be used in any of its prayers or rituals.

As an example, when Scripture is used in rituals the name of Jesus or Christ is omitted lest it offend someone. In essence, the Lodge has rewritten Scripture to suit its own end. The Bible is clear in its warning that God's Word is not to be changed or tampered with. Deuteronomy 4:2 says, "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it."

Masonic prayers are not to include the name of Jesus Christ, but they are to refer to the Great Architect of the Universe. The *Maryland Master Mason* magazine offered this statement concerning prayer in the Lodge: "All prayers in Mason lodges should be directed to the one deity to whom all Masons refer to as the Grand Architect of the Universe."(19)

For the Christian, this idea should cause some real concern. The Bible is clear regarding what Jesus says to those who are ashamed of the Son. "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."(20)

The biblical Jesus does not allow for the bias of Freemasonry when it comes to receiving His proper place of reverence and worship. In short, Jesus does not seem to be as tolerant as the Mason when it comes to His divine authority.

The Bible gives us further instruction regarding our response to the Christian faith. “And Jesus came up to them, saying, All authority has been given me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you'” (Matt. 28: 18-20).

The Mason is thus faced with the choice of whom he will serve: Jesus, the Savior of his soul, or the tolerant god of Freemasonry who leads him to destruction.

Masonic Light and Darkness

“Freemasons are emphatically called the Sons of Light, because they are in possession of the true meaning of the symbol; while the profane or uninitiated who have not received this knowledge are said to be in darkness.”(21) In other words, the Mason has been delivered from the darkness into the light and is elevated above those who have not received the initiation into the degrees and mysteries of Freemasonry.

The “profane” individual, or the non-Mason, remains in darkness and is in need of light. The Mason, after being enlightened, continues to be in need of more light. It seems that the Mason never comes to fully understand his Craft and all that it means. However, as the Mason gains more light and understanding of the various symbols representing each degree, he becomes more aware of its different meanings. Albert Pike, the Masonic scholar, speaks of this deception, “Masonry conceals its secrets from all except Adepts and Sages, or the Elect, and uses false explanations and misinterpretations of its symbols to mislead those who deserve only to be misled; to conceal the Truth, which it calls Light, from them, and to draw them away from it. Truth is not for those who are unworthy or unable to receive it, or would pervert it. So Masonry jealously conceals its secrets, and intentionally leads conceited interpreters astray.”(22)

According to Pike, “Masonry is a search after light.”(23) The question that one must ask oneself is, What is the source of this “Light” that contemporary Freemasonry is based on? Pike goes on to tell us that the light of Masonry is based on the Kabalah, or Jewish mysticism. For the Christian this is indeed a difficulty, because the Christian cannot accept the occult beliefs of the mystics. The Bible tells us that “truth” or “light” can only be found in God’s Word.

The Mason is taught that as he receives more light he grows in perfection. As he grows in perfection, he believes that he actually increases his personal worthiness and, in the process, gains a deeper appreciation of Masonry. This in-depth understanding leads to a greater degree of enlightenment and enables the Mason to feel as if he has done all he must do for acceptance into the Grand Lodge above. This appeal to human pride is a deadly trap because we all have a sin nature and want to feel that we have “earned” salvation and “deserve” it.

However, the Mason who professes Jesus Christ as his Lord is left in a very difficult position by the Lodge. The Lodge considers the Christian as being profane or unworthy to receive the “Light” of the Craft. The Mason is faced with this dilemma: if the Lodge has the Light that mankind is looking for and if Jesus is that Light, how is it then that Jesus is not to be mentioned in the Lodge if He is indeed the Light of the world?(24) This idea becomes increasingly difficult when the Christian attempts to reconcile what the Bible says regarding Jesus and what the Craft says about the presence of Jesus in the Lodge.

Albert Pike speaks of Lucifer as the Light-bearer! “Lucifer, the Son of the Morning! Is it he who bears the Light, and with its splendors intolerable blinds feeble, sensual, or selfish Souls?”(25) The Bible identifies Lucifer as being Satan and an angel of light. According to Paganism, Lucifer is the bearer of the light that enlightens man’s understanding of his Higher Self or his “God Self.” Masonic author Foster Bailey says it

this way, “Masonry therefore, is not only a system of morality, inculcating the highest ethics through which result, if followed, the conscious unfolding of divinity. . . . It portrays the recovery of man’s hidden divinity and its bringing forth into the light . . . the power to achieve perfection latent in every man.” Masonry purports to be the Light that awakens man’s mind to his perfection and ultimate divinity.

The question that begs to be answered by each Mason is simply this: “Which Light’ will he follow, the true Light of Christ or the dimly lit light of the Lodge?”

The Hidden Things of Freemasonry

There is a great deal of secrecy in Freemasonry. From the very beginning the Entered Apprentice is kept in the shadows regarding the full meaning of the symbols of the Craft. He is not offered any further understanding until he has proven himself worthy to receive deeper truths.

Not only is the Mason to keep the secrets of the Lodge, but he is to swear oaths accompanied by severe penalties if he ever chooses to reveal them. According to Carl H. Claudy, a former Grand Master of Masons, the Masonic penalties are intended to inspire terror in the candidate. Claudy says that if a candidate breaks his oath, he will experience the abasement that any man would feel when he had broken a solemn pledge. But even more so, he would experience “the wrath of God blasphemed. The horror of a sin of which there is none greater.”(26)

The above statement is an example of the misinformation that the Mason often labors under. The idea that God recognizes and upholds the Mason’s oath to a pagan god is simply not biblical. However, the biblical mandate for the believer is to “swear not at all . . . But let your Yes’ be Yes,’ and your No, ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil

one.”(27) In other words, the Lord makes it very clear that anything sworn other than yes’ or no’ is from the mouth of the Devil.

The Christian God is not a god of fear and misery, but He is a God of compassion and mercy. Masonic author and 33rd Degree Mason Manly P. Hall identifies the nature of the cosmic force to which the Mason owes his allegiance. He states that “the average Mason, as well as the modern student of Masonic ideals, little realizes the cosmic obligation he takes upon himself when he begins his search for the sacred truths of Nature. . . . Every Mason knows that a broken vow brings with it a terrible penalty. . . . When a Mason swears that he will devote his life to (Masonry) . . . and then defiles his living temple . . . he is breaking a vow which imposes not hours but ages of misery.”(28) The Mason is not offering his loyalty to the God of Christianity, but to the pantheistic god of Nature.

Albert Mackey, author of the *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, offers several reasons why non-Masons object to Masonic secrecy. However, there are only four which he accepts as being true. First, it is an oath. Second, it is administered before the secrets are communicated. Third, it is accompanied by certain superstitious ceremonies. And fourth, it is attended by a penalty.(29)

The candidate is led to believe that the penalties accompanying the oaths that he swears to are indeed carried out. At no time is he told that these penalties are simply symbolic. Mackey states that the penalties are not to be inflicted by the Lodge but by God. He says that “the ritualistic penalties of Freemasonry . . . are in the hands not of man, but of God, and are to be inflicted by God, and not by man.”(30) The Lodge is standing on thin ice when it presumes that God will safeguard its paganism by putting its detractors to death.

The greatest problem for the Christian Mason is that by taking

the oaths of the Craft, and living his life according to them, he has opened the door to Lucifer to steal his relationship with the living God.

Symbolism and Freemasonry

“In all time, truth has been hidden under symbols, and often under a succession of allegories: where veil after veil had to be penetrated before the true Light was reached, and the essential truth stood revealed.”(31) These words of Albert Pike, the noted Masonic scholar, sound noble and true. However, the Christian must weigh Pike’s lofty words with the Scripture.

Our Lord was, at all times, eager to help his disciples recognize the truth of His teachings. The only problem they had to overcome was their lack of spiritual understanding. The gospel writer of Matthew 7 tells us that all we must do, is simply ask. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”(32) The Lord desires to draw us near to Himself. We do not have to pass through veil after veil to reach divine understanding. He has readily given it to us in His Word. According to Dr. Robert A. Morey’s research, “there were no degrees in Masonry two hundred years ago; and that the Master’s degree is no more than 150 years of age.” He goes on to say that “most Masonic historians now admit that it was the Frenchmen Desaguilliers or Dr. Anderson who invented the first three degrees. The few symbols introduced by these two Christian clergymen came from the Bible and were Christian’ in every sense.”(33) Here again we see that the origins of the

Craft were rooted in Christian belief.

However, as we have seen earlier, the Craft has undergone a paganization process by those who would subvert it to their own use. Whereas, in the early years of the Lodge, the symbols that were introduced revealed truth, in the present, those very same symbols and hundreds of others are used to mislead the candidate. Albert Pike made it clear when he stated, “part of the symbols are displayed . . . to the initiate, but he is intentionally misled by false interpretations.”(34)

Jesus taught in parables and made use of symbols in His instruction. He freely offered understanding, and He was quick to help others recognize His Father. But when we look at Freemasonry we find secrecy and the “truth” concealed. A person must prove himself worthy in order for the “Light” to be shared with him. And when it is made known to the initiate, this “truth” is often hidden further in false interpretations.

Masonry has numerous symbols. For the Christian, Masonry utilizes the Bible as one of its symbols as it uses the Koran, the Vedas, the Gita, or any other “holy” book. When the Christian candidate sees the Bible on the Masonic altar and hears the Bible referenced to in the rituals, he assumes that Freemasonry is indeed Christian as he has, most likely, been told. However, the Bible is seen only as a symbol by the Lodge, as are all the other “holy” books of other religions.

This attitude toward the Bible makes it clear that, for Masonry, the Bible is not seen as being inspired by God, useable for reproof, correction, or training in righteousness. Rather, it “is only a symbol of Divine Will, Law, or Revelation.”(35)

Salvation in the Lodge

“This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in

any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."(36)

The early Masons followed a biblical understanding of salvation and what it meant to be a Christian. However, the pagan writers who rewrote the Masonic rituals omitted the references to biblical salvation and wrote them in a way that would not offend anyone of another religion.

The early rituals for the Master Mason Degree were Christian in their overall meaning. According to Dr. Morey, biblical phrases such as "regeneration," "redemption," and "heaven" were used without question.(37)

The greatest issue for the Mason, at present, is whether he will accept the life and work of Jesus Christ for his redemption or whether he will look to himself for personal salvation. Manly P. Hall says that "a Mason is evolved through ages of self- purification and spiritual transmutation."(38) So, the modern Mason, who follows the Fraternity's writings, looks to himself for purification and acceptance before a righteous God. Hall says elsewhere that the Master Mason's "spiritual light is greater because he has evolved a higher vehicle for its expression."(39)

Foster Bailey, the author of *The Spirit of Masonry,* says that "Masonry is one of many ways to God" and that Masonry "is not only a system of morality, inculcating the highest ethics through which result, if followed, the conscious unfolding of divinity, but it is also a dramatic presentation of regeneration."(40)

In other words, Bailey is saying that Masonry is a vehicle for mankind to discover his divinity and achieve personal regeneration. This idea is totally foreign to the Bible. The Christian cannot, in any way, get beyond the fact that Jesus Christ as the Light giver and redeemer of humanity is opposed to the teachings of the Lodge.

The Bible distinctly teaches that salvation only comes through the person of Jesus Christ. It cannot come by any other means. The Scripture is clear that if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we will receive salvation. It is not based upon our works or deeds; it is solely based upon what Jesus did on the cross.

Masonry does not accept the fact that man is born sinful and is in need of redemption. The Craft does not have a grasp of the depth of man's rebellion against his Creator. Masonic author H. L. Haywood in his book, *The Great Teachings of Masonry*, states that "many think that man was once a perfect being but that through some unimaginable moral catastrophe he became corrupt unto the last moral fiber of his being, so that, without some kind of supernatural or miraculous help from outside him, he can never be saved."(41)

Because Masonry does not have an understanding of the serious nature of man's separation from God, it cannot offer a suitable solution to his problem. The Bible tells us that man is in a state of separation from God and that he is in need of a savior. The Gospel writer of Mark speaks of the fallen nature of humanity. The Scripture says that it is what comes out of man that defiles him. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, adulteries, thefts, murders, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."(42) Freemasonry cannot offer mankind an adequate solution to his problem of sin.

A Christian Response to Freemasonry

I recall the words of my father when I first spoke to him about his involvement in Freemasonry. He told me that the Lodge taught that "once a Mason, always a Mason." Even as a senior citizen, that idea continued to have a definite hold on his thinking. My father, as a Christian, had not been able to

see the vast difference between the teaching of the Church and that of the Lodge.

Once I was able to share the teaching of the Lodge with him, he was then able to make a clear decision regarding his future with the Fraternity. But, even after he had left the Lodge, he was unable to mentally sever the tie that bound him to the Lodge; he still felt the tug: “Once a Mason, always a Mason.”

The Mason falls within one of four categories regarding his continued relationship with the Lodge.(43) First, there are some who do not have a clear knowledge of Christianity. They believe that religion and Christianity are the same and that if someone uses the Scriptures, that person must be a Christian. Such people are sincere but untaught. Because they do not know what Christianity teaches, they see nothing wrong with Freemasonry.

A second category would be those who do not know what Masonry is and what it teaches. They are not only uninformed about Christianity but are equally uninformed about the teachings of Freemasonry. These individuals are without any theological foundation on which to discern truth from error. Likewise, they are often ignorant of the occult direction the Lodge has taken over the past few decades.

A third group is made up of individuals who profess Christ, yet continue as Masons regardless of how much they know about Christianity and Freemasonry. They are indeed in a state of rebellion and have chosen not to follow the truth of Christ.

The final group are those who profess Christ and yet have abandoned the Christian faith. Those who have embraced this position are essentially Unitarian in their belief. They no longer hold to the absolute deity of Christ or His blood atonement.

For the most part, all Masons fall into one of these categories. In some cases, it may be that the blame is not to

be laid on the individual but on the Christian church for not adequately teaching its truths. The Mason has a choice to make, but the church has a responsibility to equip its people with the truths of the faith.

Jesus made it quite clear in the Scripture. He said, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.”(44) It is difficult for the Mason to abide in Christ as long as he remains in the Lodge and follows its teachings. It is impossible to bear fruit apart from Jesus. He alone is the one who brings the fruit forth.

It is imperative for the Christian to deal with the question of obedience. It is impossible to serve two masters without loving one and despising the other. The root problem is often the fact that the individual has not been spiritually reborn. Once again Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God . . . you must be born again.”(45)

Notes

1. Delmar D. Darrah, *History and Evolution of Freemasonry* (Chicago: Charles T. Powner, 1979), 207.

2. Albert G. Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (Chicago: The Masonic History Co., 1946), 734.

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The Little Lamb That Made a Monkey of Us All

Like many others, I was caught totally flat-footed, astonished by the announcement of the successful cloning of an adult sheep, Dolly. Caught so unaware, in fact, that Probe is re-airing my three-year-old program on human cloning the week of March 17-21, 1997, because so little had changed. When the announcement of a successful sheep cloning was made, it was too late to pull the program from the schedule; tapes had already been sent to all the radio stations and there just wasn't time to replace it in only three weeks. Consequently (and spurred by a number of phone calls and e-mails from around the country), I have compiled a few thoughts and comments regarding scientific and moral considerations about this historic breakthrough to temporarily plug the gap.

Scientific Considerations

Normal mammary cells were intentionally starved of critical growth nutrients in order to allow the cells to reach a dormant stage of the normal cell cycle. This process of bringing the cells into dormancy apparently allows the cell's DNA to be reprogrammed by the proteins already in the egg cell

for renewed cell division and new cell functions. The cells were fused with an enucleated egg cell (a cell that had its nucleus removed) and stimulated to begin cell division by an electric pulse.

The process was inefficient. Out of 277 cell fusions, 29 began growing *in vitro.* All 29 were implanted in receptive ewes, 13 became pregnant, and only one lamb was born as a result. This is a success rate of only 3.4%. In nature, somewhere between 33 and 50% of all fertilized eggs develop fully into newborns.

The procedure was very non-technical, and no one is really sure why it worked. It needs to be repeated. All attempts to clone mouse cells from adults have failed. Some suggest that sheep embryos do not employ the DNA in the nucleus until after 3-4 cell divisions. This may give the egg cell sufficient time to reprogram the DNA from mammary cell functions to egg cell functions. Human and mouse cells employ the nuclear DNA after the second cell division. Human and mouse cells may not be capable of being cloned because of this difference.

The purpose of these experiments was to find a more effective way to reproduce genetically engineered sheep for the production of pharmaceuticals. A sheep embryo can be engineered to produce a certain human protein or hormone in its milk. The human protein can then be harvested from the milk and sold on the market. Instead of trusting the somewhat unpredictable and time-consuming methods of normal animal husbandry to reproduce this genetic hybrid, cloning it assures that the engineered gene product will not be lost.

Genetic material is the same in all cells of an organism (except the reproductive cells, sperm and egg, which have only half the full complement), but differentiated cells are biochemically programmed to perform limited functions, and all other functions are turned off. Based on attempts in frogs and mice, most scientists felt that the reprogramming was impossible.

A critical question is the lifespan of Dolly. All cells have a built-in senescence or death after so many cell divisions. Dolly began from a cell that was already six years old. A normal lifespan for a ewe is around 11 years. Will Dolly live to see her seventh birthday?

It is also uncertain as to whether Dolly will be reproductively fertile. Frog clones are usually sterile.

Reprogramming the nucleus could lead to procedures to stimulate degenerating nerve cells to be replaced by newly growing nerve cells. Adults do not generate nerve cells normally.

Moral Considerations

Will humans be cloned for spare parts? While this is certainly possible, I consider it very unlikely that this would be sanctioned by any government. That doesn’t mean, however, that someone won’t try.

Will humans be cloned to replace a dying infant or child? This is certainly a possibility, but we need to ask if this is an appropriate way to deal with loss. Might unrealistic expectations be placed on a clone that would not be placed on a normally-produced child?

Will humans be cloned to produce children for otherwise childless couples? This is the most often-given reason for human cloning. This argument is unpersuasive when there are currently so many children that need adoption. Also, this further devalues children to the level of a commodity. If *in vitro* fertilization is expensive, cloning will be worse.

Will humans be cloned for vanity? Someone will certainly try.

Will human clones have a soul? In my mind, they will be no different from an identical twin or a baby that results from *in vitro* fertilization. How a single fertilized egg splits in

two to become two individuals is a similar mystery.

Does cloning threaten genetic diversity? Excessive cloning may indeed deplete the genetic diversity of an animal population, leaving the population susceptible to disease and other disasters. But most biologists are aware of these problems, and I would not expect this to be a major concern unless cloning were the only means available to continue a species.

If the technique is perfected in animals first, will this save the tragic loss of fetal life that resulted from the early human experimentation with *in vitro* fertilization? *In vitro* fertilization was perfected in humans before it was known how effective a procedure it would be. This resulted in many wasted human beings in the embryonic stages. The success rate is still only 1 in 5 to 1 in 10; normal fertilization and implantation success rates are 2-3 times that. While animal models will help, there will be unique aspects to human development that can only be known and overcome by direct human experimentation which disrespects the sanctity of human life.

This provides a means for lesbians to have a child. One supplies the nucleus and the other provides the egg. The egg does contain some unique genetic material in the mitochondria that are not contributed by sperm or nucleus. One cell from each donor would be fused together to create a new individual, though all the nuclear genetic material comes from one cell. Sue Bohlin has an upcoming program on homosexual myths including gay marriage. This is no longer marriage as it is currently understood, and the technological hoops that must be jumped through for any gay couple to have children should be a clear warning that something is wrong with the whole arrangement.

Are human clones unique individuals? Even identical twins manage to forge their own identity. The same would be true of clones. In fact, this may argue strongly against the

usefulness of cloning since you can never reproduce all the life experiences that have molded a particular personality. The genes will be the same, but the environment and the spirit will not.

All together, I find the prospect of animal cloning potentially useful. But I wonder if the procedure is as perfectible as some hope, and may end up being an inefficient process to achieve the desired result. Human cloning is fraught with too many possible difficulties, from the waste of human fetal life during research and development to the commercializing of human babies (see my previous cloning article) with far too little potential advantage to individuals and society. What there is to learn about embryonic development through cloning experiments can be learned through animal experimentation. The cloning of adult human beings is an unnecessary and unethical practice that should be strongly discouraged if not banned altogether.

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A Course In Miracles – A Christian Worldview Evaluation

Former Probe staffer Russ Wise looks at the religious movement started by A Course in Miracles *from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective. As he examines its origins and its tenets, he finds that it departs from true Christianity in multiple areas and is clearly a false teaching.*

Historical Background

In 1965 a Jewish atheistic psychologist from Columbia University began to channel messages from a spirit she believed to be Jesus. She ultimately produced, or she says Jesus revealed to her, well over a thousand pages of revelation during the next seven years.

According to her testimony, Helen Schucman had a difficult relationship with her department head at the university. In an attempt to move beyond their differences, they set out on a journey to find a base of common agreement. Schucman began having "highly symbolic dreams" and experiencing "strange images." Her colleague encouraged her to transcribe the content of these phenomena so they might understand them better.

As she began to write, she was surprised to see "This is a course in miracles" appear on the paper. She went on to say that this was her introduction to the "Voice." This voice began to give her rapid inner dictation that she took down in shorthand.

According to the dictated material, the voice of *The Course* was Jesus. As a result of the influence Christianity has had on humanity, *The Course* chose Christian terminology to convey its message. A 1977 pamphlet published by the *Foundation For Inner Peace* states, "its only purpose is to provide a way in which some people will be able to find their own Internal Teacher"—in other words, their personal "Spirit Guide."

Key Players

There are several individuals who play key roles in spreading the message of *The Course.* Perhaps the most prominent is Marianne Williamson. A former lounge singer and now its most celebrated guru, she has become *The Course's* media star, appearing on numerous television programs. Her most-watched and persuasive appearance was on *Oprah.* She has been Oprah's

guest on several occasions. Because of her personal interest in New Age philosophy, Oprah Winfrey purchased a thousand copies of *A Return To Love,* Williamson's book, to give to her television audiences.

Another high profile individual, well-known in New Age circles, is Gerald Jampolsky, M.D. He is a psychiatrist, formerly on the faculty of the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco and founder of the Center for Attitudinal Healing in 1975. He has written several books based on what he has gleaned from *The Course.*

In his influential book, *Good-Bye to Guilt,* Jampolsky describes his conversion to *The Course*.

> I began to change my way of looking at the world in 1975. Until then I had considered myself a militant atheist, and the last thing I was consciously interested in was being on a spiritual pathway that would lead to God. In that year I was introduced to . . . *A Course in Miracles. . . .* My resistance was immediate. . . . Nevertheless, after reading just one page, I had a sudden and dramatic experience. There was an instantaneous memory of God, a feeling of oneness with everyone in the world, and the belief that my only function on earth was to serve God.

As a result of the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of our society, namely the baby boomer generation, there is a ready-made market for the "feel good" spirituality of *The Course.* Through the influence of Williamson, Jampolsky, and others, a growing number of Christians are being sucked into this whirlpool of spiritual confusion in which they exchange the truth for a lie.

The Course and the Mainline Church

We have already established that *The Course* uses Christian terminology and its followers believe it to be the revelation of Jesus. As a result, a number of denominations within

Christendom have embraced *The Course* as being legitimate and introduced it into their churches.

Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians have used *The Course* in Sunday schools and special study groups within the church. Presently there are over 1,500 official study groups that have utilized *The Course* both inside and outside traditional Christian churches.

If It's Not Love—It Must Be Illusion

Marianne Williamson, author of the best-selling book *A Return To Love,* says that we have "a natural tendency to focus on love."

Only love is real. All that is negative is illusion. It simply does not exist. If anything negative is in your consciousness, it is real only because you give it reality by holding it in your mind. According to *The Course,* sickness, hate, pain, fear, guilt, and sin are all illusions. The *Cyclopedia In A Course In Miracles* states that "illusions are investments. They will last as long as you value them." The Cyclopedia continues, "The only way to dispel illusions is to withdraw all investment from them, and they will have no life for you because you will have put them out of your mind."

The Course sums it up this way, "There is no life outside of Heaven. Where God created life, there life must be. In any state apart from Heaven life is illusion." There you have it! It is perfectly clear—murder, rape, and other forms of evil do not exist because they do not come from "love." Try explaining to a mother who has lost a son or daughter that their loss is the result of an illusion.

The Problem of Evil

You guessed it, *The Course* also teaches that evil does not exist. It is an illusion that must be overcome by right thinking. *The Text* (i.e., volume one of *The Course*) reads,

“Innocence is wisdom because it is unaware of evil, and evil does not exist.” In essence what is meant is that evil does not stand on its own, that it only has reality as the individual believes its existence. So, you might say that the rape victim created her own evil situation and thereby caused her own suffering. The victim is guilty; the perpetrator had no choice.

The Problem of Guilt and Sin

A pamphlet published by the *Foundation For Inner Peace* states, “Sin is defined as a ‘lack of love.’ Since love is all there is, sin in the sight of the Holy Spirit is a mistake to be corrected, rather than an evil to be punished.”

The Course further teaches that there is no need to feel guilt because there is no sin. Sin does not exist. The problems that man faces are a result of separation from God. This separation is only illusion because it likewise does not exist. It is only a reality for those who believe they are not part of the divine.

The Text makes this point clear where it declares that “no one is punished for sins, and the Sons of God are not sinners.” As you might anticipate, there is likewise no need for the cross because there was never a transgression that needed to be dealt with by God, only a mistake. If we are a part of God, how then can we become fragmented by sin since separation (i.e., sin) does not exist?

Thought-Reversal

The stated goal of *The Course* is to change how one thinks, to change one’s belief system by subtle deception. The individual is for the most part unaware of the transformation he or she is undergoing because *The Course* utilizes Christian terminology. *The Manual for Teachers* (i.e., volume three of *The Course*) boldly says, “It cannot be too strongly emphasized that this course aims at a complete reversal of thought.”

Religious Recovery—The Thirteenth Step

Many who become involved in studying *The Course* are active in self-help groups such as Twelve Step programs. They are seeking to make connections in their lives and discover who they truly are. They are willing participants in this transformation.

Many are desiring some form of "spirituality" and for those who see the Bible as being too harsh, *The Course* offers what they believe to be God's correction of our misinterpretation of the original message of Jesus.

The Course becomes the "thirteenth step" in recovery for those who are attempting to escape the rigid fundamentalism that has smothered them in the past. For them, the recovery process becomes a spiritual transformation.

The integration of psychology and spirituality becomes a lure that pulls them deeper into the web of deception and ultimately suffocates them. The biblical teaching of original sin is dismissed for the more palatable "original goodness."

This "thirteenth step" regards all faiths as a part of the whole; they are one, and a psychological unity of sorts is achieved. *The Course* becomes whatever the individual desires it to be, it is "Christian," but not if you don't want it to be. It's psychology, but more than psychology. It's not New Age, but then again it is.

The Course claims to have all of life's answers. It has become the "spiritually correct" solution to bring about peace and unity. However, in the end, this transformation brings spiritual death.

Helen Schucman's new do-it-yourself psycho-spirituality is not new. The Hindus have been taught for centuries that the world and all that is in it is *Maya,* or illusion.

Sense and Sensibilities

We must be clear that the message of *The Course in Miracles* is *not* the message of Jesus Christ. Schucman and her Course do not teach that Jesus is God incarnate yet fully human, but that He is an highly evolved being who became divine. The Bible does not allow for such an idea.

The Bible also leaves no room for the idea that evil does not exist, but instead that evil entered the world through disobedience. Likewise, the Bible does not allow for the idea that God is a universal oneness rather than a personal Being.

Kenneth Wapnick, a Jewish agnostic who later became a Catholic monk, founded the *Foundation for A Course in Miracles.* Wapnick states that *The Course* and biblical Christianity are not compatible. He gives three reasons why he holds such a view. First, *The Course* teaches that God did not create the world. Second, *The Course* teaches that we are all equally Christ. Jesus is not the *only* Son of God. And third, *The Course* is clear in its teaching that Jesus did not suffer and die for man's sin.

The above differences clearly show why a Christian cannot in good faith consider *The Course* as a source for his or her spiritual understanding. It is unequivocally anti-biblical and is without doubt promoted by Satanic deception (2 Corinthians 11:14: 1 Timothy 4:1).

A Short Course in Doctrine

The Course teaches that there are no absolutes; truth is relative and is determined by one's experience. According to the *Cyclopedia In A Course In Miracles,* "only what is loving is true." So truth is subjective.

Marianne Williamson, the author of *A Return To Love,* made this observation about truth in her book: "There's only one truth, spoken different ways, and the Course is just one path to it

out of many." In other words, no one religious tradition has all the truth, but there are many avenues to the truth and the individual has the freedom to choose the path most suitable to him or her.

Who Is Jesus?

According to Williamson, Jesus is one of many enlightened beings. In her text she makes this statement, "Jesus and other enlightened masters are our evolutionary elder brothers." She continues by saying that "the mutation, the enlightened ones, (including Jesus) show the rest of us our evolutionary potential. They point the way." So in reality Jesus is a way-shower.

Williamson makes a telling observation on page 41 of her book by saying that *"A Course In Miracles* does not push Jesus. Although the books come from him, it is made very clear that you can be an advanced student of the Course and not relate personally to him at all." This is an interesting comment regarding the lack of relationship one is to have with their God. For Christians, faith is built on a personal relationship with Jesus. Without it, their salvation would be in question.

Williamson continues by saying, "Jesus reached total actualization of the Christ mind, and was then given by God the power to help the rest of us reach that place within ourselves." Such a statement brings to mind Matthew 7:23 where Jesus says, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

The Christ and Salvation

The Manual For Teachers states that "Jesus became what all of you must be." It continues by declaring, "Is he the Christ? O yes, along with you."

The Course identifies with much of New Age thought in that it teaches false Christology. New Age proponents teach that *The*

Christ is the one who is the most highly evolved being during a given age. This Christ, whether it be Buddha, Krishna, or Jesus, is the messiah for a given age. They believe, for example, that Jesus was *The Christ* for the Church or Piscean Age. According to their philosophy, Jesus achieved Christhood and by right-thinking we too can achieve Christhood.

The Text says that, "Christ waits for your acceptance of Him as yourself, and of His wholeness as yours." Keep in mind that these words you have just read are, according to *The Course,* the "spirit-dictated" words of Jesus. Now hear the true Word of God from the Bible where we read, "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5). The Scripture is crystal clear about the deception of multitudes by signs and wonders based in experience rather than His Word.

The Scripture teaches that Jesus alone is the Christ, the Son of the living God. John 1:20 and 20:31 indicate that we are not His equals.

Abandoning Your Miracle

There are a growing number of people waking up to the fact that *The Course* cannot adequately meet their growing need to worship a being beyond themselves, much less defend them in spiritual warfare.

Warren and Joy Smith are examples of how *The Course* is totally inadequate when it comes to defending one's spirit from the evil one and his dominion. The Smiths were deeply involved in the study of *The Course*. Warren relates Joy's story in his book, *The Light That Was Dark.*

Joy was being spiritually harassed by a man who was highly proficient in astral projection (projecting his spirit for great distances). Warren relates how they faced the attacks. "We tried every metaphysical and spiritual technique we had ever learned—we repeated our *Course in Miracles* lessons, did

visualizations, prayed as best we knew how, sent the spiritual intruder blessings, and kept the whole situation surrounded in white light—but none of it had any effect. We had to wait it out. The spiritual presence was calling the shots."

After an intense time of frustration, they went to their course study leaders for help. Joy explained that they "had repeatedly applied their *Course in Miracles* lessons, such as: 'There is nothing to fear,' 'In my defenselessness my safety lies,' and, 'I could see peace instead of this.'" After explaining that nothing had worked, Frank, their study leader, "made it clear that he agreed with the Course's metaphysical teaching that evil was only an illusion and that the experience was probably something that Joy was working out within herself."

Frank's wife, Trudy, was dazed when she heard herself say, "Put on the whole armor of God and stand fast against the wiles of the devil!" In amazement at herself she added, "Ephesians 6:10. It's in your Bible."

Trudy went on and said, "I'm sorry, Frank. There is a devil . . . read Ephesians!" In the days ahead Joy continued to undergo the harassing attacks. During this time of uncertainty Warren visited a bookstore and discovered a book entitled *The Beautiful Side of Evil* by Johanna Michaelsen. He read it through and decided its message of deliverance was worth a try.

It wasn't long before he had an opportunity to test his newly found discovery—biblical exorcism. Joy fell into a depression as she had on so many occasions, and Warren seized the opportunity to act.

He relates the incident in his book this way, "Reading from my notes the exact words that I had taken from Johanna's book, I firmly addressed the presence. 'Satan, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I command you to be gone! I forbid your

presence here. I claim the protection of the blood of Jesus upon us. Go where Jesus sends you!" Immediately Joy's face cleared and the oppression was gone.

Warren later remarked, "We were amazed that the presence left every time we called on his [Jesus Christ's] name. Nothing in *A Course in Miracles* or any other metaphysical teachings had ever talked about this aspect of Jesus."

Warren and Joy's encounter with personal evil ultimately convinced them that the Bible was the spiritual teaching that they could rely on. Warren said it best, "So far it hasn't let us down."

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Christ in a New Age

In April of 1982 a full-page ad appeared in the *Dallas Morning News* and other major newspapers around the world. The ad headline read "The Christ Is Now Here." Notice the term *The Christ*. This is a direct reference to a coming "Messiah" who is expected to usher in a New Age of peace and unity. The term New Age refers to "a time of transformation, a time that will bring great change."

The change that is to come (which many believe is already here) will be a renewed emphasis on the self and self-discovery. This self-discovery is rooted in paganism, witchcraft, and Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

The New Age Movement has become an umbrella term for the "rising interest in the occult in our day." Within occult circles the Movement is perhaps better known as the Aquarian

Age, the Human Potential Movement, the Holistic Health Movement, or simply Cosmic Humanism. In all of these systems, human beings are seen as free to do their own thing without any accountability to anyone or anything beyond themselves.

In the occult world it is a common belief that there are twelve ages in evolutionary time and that each age lasts approximately two thousand years. Astrologers believe that the current age of Pisces will phase out of existence as we near the year 2000, and the New Age of Aquarius will take its place.

During this time of change and spiritual deception, a growing number of people are embracing New Age practices. About 67 percent of American adults claim to have had a psychic experience. Twenty- five percent of the population believe in reincarnation and among college students that percentage rises to thirty. Forty-two percent of American adults believe that they have been in contact with individuals who have died. One survey stated that (1) 67 percent of American adults regularly read their astrological forecast and (2) school childrens' belief in astrology is growing dramatically from 40 percent in 1978 to 59 percent in 1984.

Male vs. Female Energies

According to occult thought, the Piscean Age has as its foundation the male-centered energies that characterize Christianity. The Aquarian Age, on the other hand, is an attempt to bring balance back into the evolutionary process by introducing female energies into our understanding. Those who have embraced this new-age understanding of humanity believe that all of the problems that man faces are a direct result of Christianity and its perceived male- centered belief system.

Therefore, a change in man's thinking must occur to bring about a more equal system that will allow feminine energies to govern humanity. This female-centered system will be based on

intuition and experience rather than logic and rational thought, the latter being seen as male characteristics.

The Bible teaches us that human beings, both male and female, are accountable to the God of creation and are equal in His sight (Gal. 3:28). We are not divine beings who are simply ignorant of our god- like state (Ps. 100:3).

Back to the Future

The past fifty years have given rise to Secular Humanism, the notion that “man and the rest of the material universe are all there is and that there is no supernatural realm and certainly no God.” This idea fostered the view that man is only accountable to himself. However, Secular Humanism offers little or no hope to humanity and fails to provide any answers concerning the possibility of human existence after death.

Because Secular Humanism cannot answer man’s spiritual questions, many people consider it to be an inadequate answer for individuals seeking wholeness in body, mind,and spirit. Thus even though Secular Humanism has largely replaced Christianity as the dominant religious and philosophical system in the West and established itself as a more “tolerant” way, it cannot answer man’s deep questions about himself and his future.

New Age occultism seemingly had the answer. It allowed man to maintain his evolutionary prominence and regain the lost “spirituality” he had previously placed at the altar of humanism. The New Age Movement has permitted man to move toward an evolutionary future in which he becomes an autonomous god who is answerable to no one but himself.

In contrast, the Bible clearly teaches that man is finite and limited in his knowledge of himself and his universe. Isaiah 55:8-9 clearly indicates God’s perspective of man’s inability to achieve divinity:

> *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,*
> *Neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.*
> *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,*
> *So are My ways higher than your ways,*
> *And My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Likewise, the Scripture identifies the attributes of God as being all-knowing (Matt. 19:26), all-powerful (Rev. 19:6), holy (Rev. 4:8), eternal (Ps.90:2), and loving (1 John 4:16). Man obviously misses the mark on all the above qualities, and it becomes quite apparent that he really is less than divine.

New Possibilities or New Age Lies

The New Age offers man the same deal the serpent offered Eve in the garden. If you eat of this fruit (in this case the idea that you are divine), you will become like God—knowing good from evil. All you need to do is deepen your awareness of this new reality by becoming more open to the Christ within.

The occult world teaches that man is a spiritual being and that God, as an energy force, is inherently within all mankind. Therefore, there has never really been a separation or estrangement, only a belief in one. The New Ager believes that all of life is connected and a part of the whole. Oneness is a goal to be achieved. Man and God are one.

New Age philosopher Benjamin Creme, in his book *The Reappearance of the Christ and the Masters of Wisdom*, points out that “in a sense there is no such thing as God, God does not exist. And in another sense, there is nothing else but God: only God exists. . . . All is God. And because all is God, there is no God.”

Confused? You should be! In other words, God is impersonal. Creme is saying that God is not a person, but that He is an energy that is in all things; therefore, you are divine, along with the rest of creation.

The Scripture, however, is clear in its teaching that God is a personal being and distinct from His creation. God, the Father, has a personal nature. For example, God has a will (Matt. 6:10 and 1 John 2:17), God knows (2 Tim. 2:19), God plans (Eph. 1:11), and God communicates (Ex. 3:13 14). God is distinct or separate from the world, but He is actively involved with His creation (Heb. 11:3; Col. 1:17; Ps. 113:5-6; Isa. 57:15).

Jesus: The Way, or the Way-shower?

For the New Ager, Jesus is one of many Christs who appear in a given age to direct humanity toward the divine—in effect, to show the way to divinity. Jesus was a man who by virtue of his working through the spiritual road-blocks of his life gained the highest evolutionary level that man can achieve and was given the office of "Christ."

Scripture, however, does not allow for such a view. Nor did Jesus consider Himself one of many Christs who would come to point man toward his own personal divinity. John 14:6 is clear in its meaning: there is only one way to the Father and that way is by accepting Jesus as Who He claimed to be, the God-man, the only begotten Son of God. He is not simply one who shows the way, but **is** The Way.

Not only did Jesus confess His deity (Matt. 22:41-45; 26:61-64; Jn. 10:30-33), but His Father likewise acknowledged His deity (Heb. 1:5-8). Jesus is the Word (John 1:1); He is the first born of all creation (Col. 1:15), and the gate by which we must enter for salvation (John. 10:7 9).

Within the New Age belief system, Lucifer is not seen as an evil personality but is looked upon as the angel of man's inner evolution. He opened the doorway to man's recognition of himself as god.

In his book *Reflections On The Christ*, David Spangler says

that “Lucifer is literally the angel of experience. Lucifer, then, is neither good or bad in his true essence. He is completely neutral. He is an agent of God’s love acting through evolution.” So Lucifer is a positive influence on man who desires the best for humanity and does not embody evil in any form.

Spangler goes on to say, “Lucifer comes to give us the final gift of wholeness. If we accept it then he is free and we are free. That is the Luciferic initiation. It is one that many people now…will be facing, for it is an initiation into the New Age.”

The Scriptures do not allow for such a view. Jesus is the deliverer, Lucifer is the deceiver (John 8:44). Jesus is the savior, Lucifer is the accuser (Rev. 12:10). The “initiation” that man must receive is in reality a free gift from God (John 10:7-11). It is not a mystical experience from this world that leads to spiritual death but a gift to be appropriated that leads to eternal life.

Salvation for a New Age

At-one-ment, or absorption into the One energy that is God, is a prominently held view of most New Agers’ understanding of salvation. It is the unfolding of one’s consciousness to the point that the “True Self,” the divine nature, is realized. As a flower unfolds petal by petal, so too does spiritual evolution unfold, revealing the deeper realms of God-consciousness.

In New Age thinking, salvation is “the gaining of enlightenment.” It is a state of consciousness in which the person’s separation from other humans is transcended and unity is achieved. It is the absorption of the one into the all. Individuals lose their distinctive personality and become one with the impersonal energy they believe to be God.

Christianity teaches that humans are finite beings who only become whole, in the biblical sense, when they receive God's spirit (Tit. 3:5; 1 John. 5:11). Therefore, true spirituality results from an act; it is not simply a part of human nature (1 John. 1:8-9, Rom. 10:8-9).

Education and New Age Humanism

We said earlier that Secular Humanism lost a lot of its popularity and power because it wasn't satisfying. It didn't adequately meet man's needs or fulfill his spiritual yearnings, especially his concerns about life after death. Still the humanist philosophy is a continued threat to the Judeo-Christian worldview, but now the dominant threat from humanism is New Age Humanism a marriage of New Age spirituality with Humanism's man-centered thought system.

Humanism was and is a real threat to our Christian heritage, but the Eastern philosophical ideas found in New Age thought are even more dangerous to our way of life. Bringing the two systems together into New Age Humanism is more deadly still because in this new synthesis is both a seductive, false religious system and an agenda-driven philosophical system. Inherent in New Age Humanism is an evangelistic zeal to convert (or subvert) the opposition, and gaining influence on the young is a primary goal. One method is getting control of our educational program.

For example, in the early eighties, *Instructor* magazine, a publication for teachers, carried an article entitled, "Your Kids are Psychic! But they may never know it without your help." The article says that "teachers in particular are in a position to play an exciting role in the psychic development of children." The article goes on to identify psychic ability as the practice of telepathy, clairvoyance, and other psycho-technologies.

Another example of the Eastern influence on education is the

teaching of the late Dr. Beverly Galyean. Her primary premise is as follows:

> *In essence we are not individuals but part of the universal consciousness [which is God]. Realizing this essential unity, and experiencing oneself as part of it, is a major goal for a child's education. Because each person is part of the universal consciousness which is love, each child contains all the wisdom and love of the universe. This wisdom and love is the higher self. The child can tap into this universal mind and receive advice, information and help from it. This is usually done through meditation and contact with spirit guides.*

Dr. Galyean continues by saying that "once we begin to see that we are all God…the whole purpose of life is to reown the Godlikeness within us; the perfect love, the perfect wisdom, the perfect understanding, the perfect intelligence, and when we do that, we create back to that old, that essential oneness which is consciousness."

An example of this philosophy is found in Dr. Jean Houston's text *The Possible Human*. Dr. Houston, the past president of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, espouses a New Age understanding of education. She refers to "The Master Teacher" as being an inner ally who has urgent messages to send us. Houston says that "if we cooperate with them that is, with our own deepest knowing we begin to notice an astounding change in our lives." In other words, she is talking about demonic spirit guides that will seduce the individual into the occult world.

Another example is found in a college level textbook that is most often used on the freshman level. The text *Becoming A Master Student* includes a chapter titled "You create it all" in which students are told that they create everything including the lectures they attend, the textbooks, their

instructors, and their classmates. All those things they are absolutely certain they do not control the weather, wars, world hunger, the planets in actuality, they create those, too.

Our response is obvious: we must speak on behalf of our children in the educational arena. Unless we achieve this goal, we will have emotionally and spiritually lost the battle for our childrens' future.

A Biblical Response

Transformation is the key element in the recipe to bring about the New Age. Change must take place in the lives of individuals as well as society. The New Ager sees his transformation as his becoming one with the universe, and as equal with all therefore, he has no need for a savior. He becomes more and more introspective as he looks within himself for answers, guidance, and so on.

Likewise, transformation is an important element in Christianity. The Christian is to be transformed (Rom. 12:2) from within, thereby presenting himself wholly acceptable to God. We are new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), with a new nature (Eph. 4:24). This inward transformation, a renewing of the mind, results in an outward expression of care and concern for others.

For the New Ager, transformation is an open door to the occult world; for the Christian,transformation is the process whereby the believer becomes more Christlike.

God has called us out of darkness to become sons and daughters of His Light, His Truth, and His Kingdom (John 3:19-21). The New Age world lies in darkness, and God is calling the Christian to bring a candle and penetrate the darkness.

Evangelizing the New Ager

When witnessing to a New Ager it is helpful to begin your discussion on a topic of common interest where you share a compatible view. In so doing you establish a non-threatening precedent for fair treatment in your communication.

Issues that may be common to both parties the rejection of humanism, human rights, or ecology would be a good place to begin your discussion. Remember your goal is to be a positive witness and to proclaim the saving grace of Jesus. Consider these points for effective witnessing:

- *Pray that God will give you direction as you share.*
- *Always define one another's terms and establish a biblical reference. This is necessary even though New Agers will be unlikely to accept the Bible as authoritative.*
- *Stress the uniqueness of Jesus as the Savior and His resurrection as proof of His true divinity.*
- *Remember that arguing is not a positive witness. It is important to share your personal relationship with the Lord. A personal relationship with Jesus is virtually impossible for the New Ager since he views God as being impersonal.*
- *Look for opportunities to present Jesus as a person who is knowable and who desires a relationship.*
- *Help him recognize the reality of evil and see that Jesus is his only avenue of escape.*
- *Show him that man's problem is sin and not ignorance of his personal divinity. The New Ager must realize that because of his personal sin he is unable to escape the reality of separation from God. Jesus, as the only sinless Son of God, is the answer.*

Salvation for the New Ager is oneness with all of creation. You want him to understand not only God's grace, but also Christ's sacrifice on the cross which was sufficient for the New Ager as well.

This New Age of Aquarius that is to come upon the scene in the near future has eroded much of the Christian consensus that was once held. The challenge of the Christian church is great, but it must be met. If not, our culture will increasingly return to paganism.

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Unity School of Christianity

History

The Unity School of Christianity began as a quest for physical healing by its co-founder, Mary Caroline Page, known as Myrtle, the wife of Charles Fillmore. Even before their marriage in March of 1881 Myrtle had already developed an eclectic theology. Charles had a background in Hinduism, Buddhism, Rosicrucianism, and Theosophy.

They became students of metaphysics and after taking some forty or more courses Myrtle developed what was to become known as Practical Christianity. Myrtle became a practitioner of "mental healing."

A spiritual breakthrough came for Myrtle in 1886 when she

attended a meeting lead by Dr. E.B. Weeks, a noted metaphysician. Dr. Weeks made a statement that would change Myrtle's understanding of herself and set her on a new course of spiritual development. Myrtle was in a state of mental and physical illness and had come to a point where she was not helped by either medicine or physicians. Dr. Weeks's statement that day brought her the healing she sought. She cherished each word of the phrase "I am a child of God and therefore I do not inherit sickness."

Myrtle believed that she had discovered a great "spiritual truth" regarding healing, i.e., by repeating this phrase as a positive affirmation she would be healed. She began to offer her services to others and soon developed a following of those seeking divine healing.

The Fillmores were students of Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, a mental healer and metaphysician. Myrtle was also a follower of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, who was likewise influenced by Quimby. Unity, therefore, was birthed by the Fillmores, but its roots go back to directly to Mary Baker Eddy and both directly and indirectly to Phineas Quimby.

According to Charles Fillmore the name Unity was adopted in 1895, denoting that Unity was devoted to the spiritualization of all humanity and took the best from all religions. He said the following regarding the eclectic belief system of Unity:

> *We have studied many isms, many cults. People of every religion under the sun claim that we either belong to them or have borrowed the best part of our teaching from them. We have borrowed the best from all religions, that is the reason we are called Unity. . . . Unity is not a sect, not a separation of people into an exclusive group of know-it-alls. Unity is the Truth that is taught in all religions, simplified. . .so that anyone can understand and apply it. Students of Unity do not find it necessary to sever their church affiliations.*

Thus many Christians adopt Unity's teachings and bring those back into their churches, not identifying their "new" teachings as Unity's and thereby compromising the doctrinal integrity of the church.

Unity Doctrine and Theology

God

God is not a personality but a spiritual energy "force" or principle of love. Charles Fillmore in his book, *Jesus Christ Heals*, says that "God is not loving. God is love . . . from which is drawn forth all feeling, sympathy, emotion, and all that goes to make up the joys of existence."

Fillmore goes on to say, "God does not love anybody or anything. God is the love in everybody and everything. God exercises none of His attributes except through the inner consciousness of the universe and man." In other words, God is not a personal being but an energy or force that expresses itself as a pantheistic love that permeates all things.

H. Emilie Cady attempts to reconcile the seemingly incongruous possibility that God can be both personal and impersonal by her statement:

> *To the individual consciousness God takes on personality, but as the creative underlying cause of all things, He is principle, impersonal; as expressed in each individual, He becomes personal to that one personal, loving, all-forgiving Father-Mother.*

It's obvious that Unity's understanding of who God is has fallen victim to its own syncretism. Unity, while attempting to identify itself as being biblical, has offered too much on the "altar of tolerance" and, thereby, has prostituted itself on the bed of other gods.

Donald Curtis, former minister at Unity Church of Dallas and author of several Unity books, has this to say about God: “Every one of us has planted within him a God-seed, and the business of life is to see that this seed grows, unfolds, and expresses in our world.”

Curtis goes on to say, “As this seed unfolds through the development of the Christ consciousness, we fulfill our highest objective in this world.”

The ultimate goal of those who follow Unity teaching is to recognize their “oneness” with the “Force,” thereby realizing their true self, the God-Self. The god of Unity is an adaptation of Hindu belief regarding the divine. God is a part of His creation. God is in all things.

Jesus the Christ

Unity also holds an unbiblical view of Jesus. Donald Curtis agrees with Unity theology in that he believes that Jesus the man is fundamentally different from Jesus the Christ. Curtis says, “Christ is the universal principle of love and wisdom. Christ is the only Son of God, but this only Son of God lives in each one of us.”

Curtis makes a primary deviation from biblical understanding in that he holds the position that Jesus is man and that Christ is divine consciousness. He states, “Let us prepare ourself so that the Christ may be born in our own consciousness!” In other words, our spirituality is based on the discovery that the Christ is inherently within each one of us regardless of our personal beliefs or affiliations.

Curtis continues: “When we say ‘Jesus the Christ,’ we must realize that Jesus represents man and Christ represents God in man.” Unity distorts Christ as the Messiah and renders Him as a “universal principle of love” that resides in all of humanity simply waiting to be discovered through self-consciousness.

Unity, along with other New Age belief systems, espouses a mental and spiritual ‘transformation’ that will raise our consciousness. According to Curtis “there are levels of development through which we grow toward full Christ-consciousness when we are truly transformed, fully reborn.”

The pantheistic nature of Unity is expressed in Curtis’ declaration that “we let our self be ruled by the Christ within. We let the Christ teaching unfold in and through us in this great new age. We know that this Christ principle indwells every individual, no matter what his religious beliefs may be. . . . We give thanks for the realization of the mystical Christ, for the Christ consciousness alive in our life.”

Unified Man

According to Donald Curtis, man’s primary purpose is to recognize that he is divine. He states: “There is another teaching, however a higher teaching. It is that man has always existed as part of God, and that this God-self, which is the living Essence of everything, individualizes itself in man.”

Curtis goes on to say that “within each of us there is a great, wise, and beautiful Being. This is what we really are—the living Essence of everything. We are evolving constantly. We have self- consciousness; now we must develop God-consciousness, a sense of universal unity. And we must endeavor to manifest this God- consciousness in our world to solve our apparent differences through love and understanding.”

Unity teaches evolution, both physical and mental or spiritual. It teaches that mankind evolves toward Godhood and that this collective God-consciousness will be man’s solution to all his problems. This teaching elevates mankind to divinity, a position that is far from biblical teaching.

In his book *The Way of the Christ*, Curtis says that “man is

human, but he is first of all divine." He adds that "as we recognize and identify with the Christ within, we become one with the universal Self-God."

This is nothing more than Hindu philosophy dressed in Western garb: everything is a part of God and God encompasses all that is, whether it be animate or inanimate. This idea, pantheism, is widely held in the East and is being imported to the United States via every means available to man.

Salvation

H. Emilie Cady in her book, *Lessons in Truth*, says that "man originally lived consciously in the spiritual part of himself. He fell by descending in his consciousness to the external or more material part of himself." In other words, the fall of man was from the spiritual realm to the physical and this fall has caused him to suffer spiritual amnesia. Therefore man's dilemma is to reclaim his place in the spiritual realm through right thinking.

Unity teaches that as man discovers his innate divinity he continues to raise his consciousness until he becomes fully God- realized. Once man has achieved this state of understanding he recognizes that he is in perfect oneness with God and is not in need of redemption but that he is indeed the divine.

The unbiblical position regarding salvation held by Unity is clearly seen in the Unity publication, *The Way to Salvation*. This pamphlet states that "Jesus Christ was not meant to be slain as a substitute for man; that is, to atone vicariously for him. Each person must achieve at-one-ment with God, by letting the Christ Spirit within him resurrect his soul into Christ perfection."

Curtis says that "more than ever, we need to become quiet and focus upon the inner. We need to be still and to know that the presence within is God." When one becomes fully aware of this

divine presence salvation is realized because the individual no longer has a sense of lostness.

Reincarnation

Unity teaches that the individual lives a number of lifetimes within one existence. Dr. Donald Curtis of the Unity Church of Dallas writes that “it isn’t so important that we make it in this particular lifetime, as it is to realize that we do make it, because there is only one lifetime and it goes on forever.”

Article 22 of the Unity Statement of Faith states, “we believe that the dissolution of spirit, soul and body, caused by death, is annulled by rebirth of the same spirit and soul in another body here on earth. We believe the repeated incarnations of man to be a merciful provision of our loving Father to the end that all may have opportunity to attain immortality through regeneration, as did Jesus.”

Charles Fillmore rejected the standard understanding of reincarnation as described by the Hindu or the Buddhist. He could not accept their respective teachings regarding the Law of Karma or the Transmigration of the soul. For him reincarnation was a much more simple way for God to offer man a second chance at perfection.

This teaching of reincarnation is perhaps the most destructive of all the false teachings of Unity. The belief in reincarnation undercuts the primary tenets of the gospel. One would have to deny the deity of our Lord, His physical resurrection, and His Second Coming to accept the error of Charles and Myrtle Fillmore.

Reincarnation undercuts Christian doctrine in three ways. First, it assumes that God is impersonal and is therefore unknowable. Second, reincarnation denigrates the Atonement of Christ, and third, it denies the fact that Jesus physically resurrected from the dead. We need to look at each of these

more closely.

The Bible does not offer any evidence to support these assumptions. On the contrary, the Bible clearly teaches that God is a personal Being and that He is knowable. Isaiah 43:25 and Jeremiah 31:20 tell us that God remembers; Exodus 3:12 and Matthew 3:17 say that God speaks; Genesis 1:1 and 6:5 along with Exodus 2:24 say that God sees, hears and creates. Elsewhere the Bible tells us that God is a personal Spirit (John 4:24 and Hebrews 1:3). Since God is a personal Being, He has a will (Matthew 6:10, Hebrews 10:7-9 and 1 John 2:17). Because God has an expressed will, He will also judge His creation (Ezekiel 18:30 and 34:20, and also 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Unity attempts to denigrate the Atonement of Christ in order to build a better case for reincarnation; however, the Atonement delivers man from the cyclical concept of rebirth. Reincarnation does not offer us either peace or hope. The Atonement offers us peace because we do not have to rely on our own righteousness, and it offers us hope because of what Jesus did on the cross. Jesus has dealt with our sin on the cross and our response is to simply accept His work on our behalf.

Likewise, Unity cannot accept a physical resurrection for our Lord. Unity holds that the disciples expected Jesus to be reincarnated, not resurrected. The biblical claims that Jesus rose physically, appeared to and was recognized by many, was physically touched by some, and ate fish with others are troublesome and must be explained away or spiritualized into meaninglessness if Unity is to seem plausible. (See Luke 24:16 and 31.)

Conclusion

The Unity School of Christianity is recognized as a cult because it exhibits several cultic characteristics. One such

characteristic is syncretism. Syncretism is the attempt to combine or reconcile differing beliefs, usually by taking the most attractive features from several sources and combining them into a something new. Unity has taken what some would call “the best qualities” of various religious view points and combined them into a new and more acceptable faith.

Another characteristic of cults that is true of Unity is the denial of the biblical doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ’s person and His finished work on the cross. In Unity, salvation comes by recognizing our inherent divinity and our oneness with God.

Unity is, in my opinion, the most deceptive of the cultic groups that use the word Christian in their name. Unity’s distinction is that the follower of its teaching is encouraged to remain in his respective church home whether it be Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or whatever. The followers of Unity considers their denominational affiliation as a mission field where they can subtly disseminate their ideas.

I recall that when I first became a believer and was attending a Methodist church, there was a particular woman in the church who often greeted me with the phrase, “Greetings to your higher self.” It was a peculiar way to greet someone, yet I never asked her what she meant by it. It was several years later when I became a student of the cults that I understood the significance of her greeting. She was a follower of Unity’s teachings, that each of us has the divine residing within us and that the higher self is God.

According to Charles Fillmore, Unity is the blending of various religions and belief systems into one unified system of thought. The Fillmores introduced beliefs into their system that had been commonplace in Eastern religions and occult practices.

The Fillmores introduced a pantheistic view of God to their

followers and saw God as being both male and female. God is seen as an energy or force that resides in all things both animate and inanimate. Likewise God is seen as being impersonal and a part of His creation.

Jesus is a principle of “love” that brings oneness to all things. This Christ principle is present within each one of us and ultimately unifies us in a salvation experience.

Unity teaches that man’s primary problem is that he has spiritual amnesia and needs to reconnect with his destiny. He needs to regain the realization that he is evolving toward divinity.

Salvation, according to Unity, comes by recognizing one’s divine nature. Unity does not recognize the Atonement of Christ but rather seeks what Eastern mystics refer to as at-one-ment or realizing oneness with the divine on a spiritual level.

Since Unity does not recognize the work of Christ on the cross (the Atonement), but rather accepts evolution as a positive ingredient in man’s spirituality, it is only logical that they embrace reincarnation as a valid system for spiritual enlightenment. As you can see, then Unity is not based on biblical teaching. To the contrary, it is heavily influenced by Eastern thought and belief. Unity is a classic New Age cult and is not Christian in any aspect of its doctrine or teaching.

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Embraced by the Light of Deception – A Christian Critique

Former Probe staffer Russ Wise shows that Betty Eadie's best-selling book Embraced by the Light *is a combination of biblical images and spiritual deception.*

The Popularity of Betty Eadie's Book

A growing number of Christians are embracing the light of Betty Eadie, the author of ***Embraced by the Light*.** Ms. Eadie's book, along with several other new-age bestsellers, are influencing the Christian church in a negative way.

The bestseller, *Embraced by the Light*, is one that needs to be dealt with. It has been on the *New York Times* Bestseller List for over a year now and has sold more than two million copies thus far.

Betty Eadie is a woman on a mission and her mission is to introduce the "Jesus" she met in her near-death experience to as many people as she can. She has been on a variety of national television programs and hundreds of local programs. According to her publicist she has spoken in a significant number of churches, and Christians make up a large portion of those who purchase the book. That is scary.

Ms. Eadie has become somewhat of a guru for many. When she was in Dallas in February, 1994, the *Dallas Morning News* carried a lead story expressing the adoration of her new-found followers. One woman said that Ms. Eadie gave her a kind of inner peace and that without it she would have lost her mind.

Another woman said that she cried all the way through the book the first time she read it. A man said that the book validated a lot of things he had believed and that he now looks at things differently.

According to the *Dallas Morning News* article the book's greatest appeal "stems from the description of eternal life, a comforting notion for people who have survived a loved one or for those pondering their own fate."

The popularity of Betty Eadie and her book *Embraced by the Light* in Christians' lives raises some important questions for us to ask ourselves. Why is her message so readily accepted by Christians? How has the church failed in its mission, thereby creating an atmosphere where such heresy could flourish?

Ms. Eadie says that she was shown in the spirit world that we were with God in the beginning and that we helped him to create the earth. She tells us that Eve's "initiative" made it possible for mankind to have children, that sin is not our true nature, and that we are inherently divine.

She continues by saying that we are all God's children and that we are here on earth to learn the lessons we need for our own spiritual evolution. Our key lesson is to remember our divinity and return to heaven. Eadie embraces the idea that all religions and faiths are equal in God's sight and that they are essential in our development. Likewise, spirits from the other side will also help us learn the lessons of life and aid in our progress.

Ms. Eadie says that death is a spiritual "rebirth" as we simply make a "transition" to another state of being. There will be no judgement day and we will judge ourselves regarding our spiritual evolution.

Mormonism and Magic

She also teaches that we choose the illnesses that we would suffer and that some would choose the illness that would end their lives. She further teaches that hell is not forever and that because of “love,” in the end, all will be saved.

Before we can fully understand Ms. Eadie’s worldview and theology it is important for us to recognize that she is a Mormon and has been exposed to new age paganism. She has, in fact, been a member in good standing of the Mormon Church for the past fifteen years or more.

Betty Eadie’s background is a mixture of native American Indian spirituality, Catholicism, and Mormonism. Her mother was a full- blooded Sioux Indian and as a young child Betty attended a Catholic boarding school.

This spiritual syncretism helps us recognize the source of her close encounter with “the Light.” As we take a closer look at her new-found belief system we are able to not only see Mormon ideas but beliefs that are found in the occult.

On page 57 of her book Betty tells the reader, “within our universe are both positive and negative energies, and both types of energies are essential to creation and growth. These energies have intelligence—they do our will. They are willing servants.”

You may remember “The Force” of *Star Wars* and its “light” and “dark” side. The Force was both “good” and “evil.” One simply chose which side of “The Force” one wanted to utilize for his evolutionary development. There was no “right” or “wrong” choice; it was a matter of personal preference.

The Force is similar to “magic.” In the occult world magic has a “good” side and an “evil” side. It is also considered to have a “light” side and a “dark” side.

Magic is an attempt by man to gain equality with God. To become a part of the creative process. God spoke the universe into existence by His word. The magician, sorcerer, or witch attempts to speak things into existence by words based on their occult knowledge.

The Christian desires to obey the will of God, not to force God to do his bidding. This is the essential difference between occult practice, magic, and Christianity.

Another example of Ms. Eadie's new age belief is the account of her being in a garden while she had her out-of-body experience (OBE). She saw a rose and was struck by its beauty and as she looked at it she felt that she had become "one" with it. She states on page 81 of her book, "I felt God in the plant, in me, his love pouring into us. We were all one!"

"At-one-ment" or the interconnectedness of all things is a primary tenet of new age thought and philosophy. Betty Eadie, through her OBE, experienced the greatest deception Lucifer plays on humanity—that we are a part of the divine, that we are indeed deity. The idea that we are divine beings opens our understanding that we have all that we need "within" us to progress toward our full potential as a god or goddess.

Our "looking" or "going" within is an attempt to discover our inner allies and gain "deep" learning so we further evolve mentally and spiritually. These allies or inner teachers, helpers, or guides are available to all of us, according to the new age mystics.

This inner teacher is also known as the "Higher Self" or the "True Self" and is in constant battle with our cognitive or conscious self. The focus of knowledge is transferred from the objective and cognitive to the subjective and intuitive or experiential. *It is my contention that the greatest danger Betty Eadie represents for the Christian is that Truth is based on or in* experience *rather than the Word of God.*

Betty Eadie’s View of Jesus

Ms. Eadie believes that the “Jesus” she met during her OBE was the “real” word of God and not a book that has been corrupted over the millennia. Perhaps some of the most disturbing aspects of her book is what is left out rather than the deception within.

Betty Eadie never mentions the crucifixion or the atonement for sin. In her worldview they simply are not needed. According to her belief we are at-one with God. Likewise, she never mentions the cross of Christ; evidently her “Jesus” is too positive to mention something as negative as the cross or the need of redemption.

There is no mention of evil or victory over sin. There is no resurrection. Ms. Eadie is almost evangelistic in her declaration that “all religions upon the earth are necessary because there are people who need what they teach. People in one religion may not have a complete understanding of the Lord’s gospel and never will have while in that religion.” (see Gal. 1:8 and 2 Cor. 11:13 along with Matt. 24:24)

Eadie continues by saying “as an individual raises his level of understanding about God and his own eternal progress, he might feel disconnected with the teachings of his present church and seek a different philosophy or religion to fill that void. When this occurs he has reached another level of understanding and will long for further truth and knowledge.”

She says, “Having received this knowledge, I knew that we have no right to criticize any church or religion in any way. They are all precious and important in his sight.”

Another concern of Ms. Eadie’s is her unbiblical teaching regarding the person of Jesus. On page 44 of her book Ms. Eadie recounts her meeting the Jesus of her out-of-body-experience:

> I understood that he was the Son of God, though he himself was also a God, and that he had chosen from before the creation of the world to be our Savior.

Ms. Eadie's statement regarding the person of Jesus is legitimate with the exception of one word that causes us to think of how the Jehovah Witnesses translate John 1:1. The article "a" becomes very important when it precedes "God." However, for Ms. Eadie the use of the article "a" indicates that she views Jesus as another distinct deity rather than the second person of a triune god—thereby exposing her Mormon understanding of the trinity. The Mormons believe in three separate beings who are each divine rather than three persons comprising one God as the Bible indicates.

The Bible is explicit in its affirmation of the Trinity. Deuteronomy 6:4 is clear in its declaration of one God. Elsewhere in Scripture we see God the Father (Matthew 6:9), God the Son (John 1:1), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4) as three distinct Persons who are equal in every aspect of their being.

In John 10:30 Jesus says that He is one with the Father, thereby leaving no doubt of their oneness regarding their essence and that they are not two separate beings or gods as Ms. Eadie would have us believe. Ms. Eadie refers to "the Spirit of God," although she does not mention the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Trinity by name. The Bible, likewise, is clear regarding the stature of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:26 the Holy Spirit is seen as the enabler in helping God's people understand divine truth.

Betty Eadie's view of Jesus comes into focus once Biblical light is shed upon it. It becomes perfectly clear that she does not hold a trinitarian view of God.

Deception of New Age Religion

The unsettling message that Betty Eadie offers in her book is that we are not sinners needing redemption, but that we are spiritual beings who have lost our way. We have forgotten our divinity. Spiritual growth is a progressive process toward self-realization and at-one-ment.

The new-age worldview of Betty Eadie is evident:

- All is One
- All is God
- Man is God
- All is changing
- Man is changing
- All is relative
- Self is the Judge
- The gospel is unnecessary

Ms. Eadie sounds like Shirley MacLaine, the popular new age entertainer and author, when she says that her prior existence "had been purposely blocked from me by a 'veil' of forgetfulness at my birth." Ms. MacLaine had previously made the same statement in her popular book *Out on a Limb*.

In other words, we were with our heavenly Father in the spirit world and eventually came to the point where we were spiritually dry and realized that the only way to get beyond our dryness was to jump start our spirituality. Thereby, we chose to leave our heavenly home and incarnate on this earth where we might further develop our spiritual essence and advance our possibilities in the spirit world.

Ms. Eadie states that prior to our leaving our spiritual home and incarnating in this world we perfected a plan for growth before we took on this physical shell. She says on page 47 of her book that "the Father explained that coming to earth for a time would further our spiritual growth. Each spirit who was

to come to earth assisted in planning the conditions on earth, including the laws of mortality which would govern us."

In the spirit world Ms. Eadie was told "that we had all desired to come here, that we had actually chosen many of our weaknesses and difficult situations in our lives so that we could grow." She continues by saying, "to my surprise I saw that most of us had selected the illnesses we would suffer, and for some, the illness that would end our lives . . . we were very willing, even anxious, as spirits to accept all of our ailments, illnesses, and accidents here to help better ourselves spiritually."

According to Betty Eadie we are basically good. On page 49 of her book Ms. Eadie says "that sin is not our true nature. Spiritually, we are at various degrees of light—which is knowledge—and because of our divine spiritual nature we are filled with the desire to do good." She continues by saying "that there is a vital, dynamic link between the spirit world and mortality, and that we need the spirits on the other side for our progression."

In the above statement Ms. Eadie is allowing her god's eclectic worldview show. The idea that man is basically "good" is commonly held in the field of humanistic psychology rather than in Christian Scripture. The Bible indicates that man is in need of redemption and forgiveness. Her belief that we, in the mortal world, are in need of the spirits from the other side to aid us in our spiritual progression is taken directly from her Mormon background. We find this teaching in the Doctrine and Covenants (128:15), one of the Standard Works of the Mormon Church.

The Biblical indication is that in the last days many will be deceived. The gospel writer of Matthew seems to agree. Not only will unbelievers be deceived but also those who have trusted Jesus for their salvation may be equally deceived. The Scripture says, "For false christs and false prophets will

arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matthew 24:36) The problem that many have in our day is that they seek "signs" and "wonders" rather than Jesus. Experience has become their teacher rather than the Word. Our response is simply, Jesus—the only begotten Son of God. There is salvation in no other. Our hope is not in our experiences, but in a person.

Testing the Book by The Bible

Betty Eadie exposes more of her Mormon worldview with her belief in a pre-mortal existence. When Ms. Eadie first speaks of "Jesus" in her book she said "I knew that I had known him from the beginning, from long before my earth life, because my spirit remembered him." Another example of her "new found" belief in a pre-existence was when "Jesus" allowed her to recall her feelings when creation occurred. She says that "all people as spirits in the pre-mortal world took part in the creation of the earth."

Ms. Eadie offers another example. She relates an experience during her heavenly visitation where she "traveled to many other worlds—earths like our own but more glorious, and always filled with loving, intelligent people." She continues by saying, "I knew that I had been to these places before." She had an experience that she could not deny.

Some have said that a man with an argument is always at the mercy of a man with an experience. A growing problem in our society is the willingness to accept one's experience over the protestation of the facts. As Christians we need to be careful that we do not fall into this trap. Our responsibility is to consider the Word of God and allow **it** to validate the experience or not. We must be extremely careful not to allow our or anyone else's experience to mold our belief system.

Another example of Ms. Eadie's pre-mortal experience was an encounter with those in the spirit world. She said, "I saw

again the spirits who had not yet come to earth, and I saw some of them hovering over people in mortality. I saw one male spirit trying to get a mortal man and woman together on earth—his future parents." (I had a brief moment of *deja vu* and thought of Marty McFly in *Back to the Future*).

A growing number of Christians are accepting Ms. Eadie's account of the after-life, and the church is allowing her beliefs to take root by their lack of biblical teaching. The Bible is very clear regarding the individual's moment of existence (Psalm 139:13-16). Nowhere in Scripture does our Lord offer a possibility that we pre-existed with Him in the spirit world. The burden of proof is on the one with the experience and not the objective Word of God.

What can we learn from Betty Eadie and her near-death experience? First and foremost is that near-death experiences tend to alter one's worldview. Raymond Moody in his book *The Light Beyond* offers evidence for such a concern. He states that those who experience a near-death episode

> …emerge with an appreciation of religion that is different from the narrowly defined one established by most churches. They come to realize through this experience that religion is not a matter of one 'right' group versus several 'wrong' groups. People who undergo an NDE come out of it saying that religion concerns your ability to love—not doctrine and denominations. In short, they think that God is a much more magnanimous being than they previously thought, and that denominations don't count.

This idea, that doctrine is of no importance but we should only be concerned about love, is parallel to the teachings found in the New Age worldview. Ms. Eadie is in agreement with Dr. Moody's statement that "love" is our ultimate goal and that religion is simply a vehicle to get us to the party. It makes little or no difference whether we get there in a Ford or a Chevrolet. As warm and cozy as this idea sounds, it does

not take into account the words of our Lord in John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Jesus was very clear that He wasn’t offering one of many ways, but that He was **The** Way and **The** Truth. He was very confident that salvation was found in no other.

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Hinduism: A Christian Perspective

Rick Rood gives us an understanding of this major world religion which is becoming more a part of the American scene with the growth of a Hindu immigrant population. Taking a biblical worldview perspective, he highlights the major differences between Hinduism and Christianity.

This article is also available in Spanish.

Though Hinduism may seem far removed from our everyday experience, it’s becoming increasingly important that we as Christians understand this mysterious religion from India. This is so, if for no other reason than that Hinduism claims 1/6 of the world’s population, with over 750 million followers worldwide. But it’s also important because its influence is being felt more and more in our own country.

Most of us have had at least some exposure to what has become known as the New Age movement. If so, we have probably realized that Hinduism is the wellspring of a good deal of New Age thinking. Most of us are probably also aware than an increasing number of Asian Indians are residing in the U.S. We

may be surprised, in fact, to learn that there are approximately 200 Hindu temples or Hindu centers in the U.S. Many believe that due to its eclectic nature, Hinduism has the potential to serve as a major vehicle for uniting much of the non-Christian religious world.

The appeal of Hinduism to Western culture is not difficult to comprehend. For one, Hinduism is comfortable with evolutionary thinking. As modern science emphasizes our physical evolution, so Hinduism emphasizes our spiritual evolution. As much of modern psychology emphasizes the basic goodness and unlimited potential of human nature, so Hinduism emphasizes man's essential divinity. As modern philosophy emphasizes the relativity of all truth claims, so Hinduism tolerates many seemingly contradictory religious beliefs. As a religion that also emphasizes the primacy of the spiritual over material reality, Hinduism appeals to many who are disillusioned with strictly material pursuits.

Though there are some core beliefs common to virtually all Hindus, there really is no "Hindu orthodoxy"—no hard and fast dogma that all Hindus must believe. It's actually a family of gradually developing beliefs and practices.

Hinduism has its roots in the interrelationship of two basic religious systems: that of the ancient civilization residing in the Indus River Valley from the third millennium B.C., and the religious beliefs brought to India by the Aryan people (possibly from the Baltic region) who began infiltrating the Indus Valley sometime after 2000 B.C.

The religion of the Aryans is described in the writings of "holy men" contained in the Vedas (meaning "knowledge" or "wisdom"). The Vedas are four collections of writings composed between about 1500 and 500 B.C., which form the basis for Hindu beliefs, and which reveal a gradual development of religious ideas. The later sections of the Vedas are known as the Upanishads. These Vedic writings are considered inspired.

Later Hindu writings, including the renowned Bhagavad Gita, are of lesser authority, but widely popular.

Hindu Beliefs About God And the World

An understanding of the Hindu beliefs about God is important even if we don't know any Hindus or people from India because we are all in contact with the New Age movement, and it draws its ideas about God from Hinduism. What then do Hindus believe about God?

The early portions of the Hindu scriptures known as the Vedas describe a number of deities who for the most part are personifications of natural phenomena, such as storms and fire. Prayers and sacrifices were offered to these gods. An extensive system of priestly rituals and sacrifices was eventually developed which served as means of obtaining the blessing of these gods.

The later portions of the Vedas, called the Upanishads, reflect a significant development in Hinduism's concept of the divine. Many of the Upanishads, instead of speaking of a multitude of gods, refer to an ultimate reality beyond our comprehension called Brahman. Though Brahman is impersonal in nature, it is sometimes referred to in personal terms by the name Isvara.

Along with this idea of a single divine reality, the Upanishads also teach that at the core of our being (referred to as "Atman") we are identical with this ultimate reality.

A popular saying in Hinduism is "Atman is Brahman!" In fact, all living things are Brahman at their innermost core! In addition, instead of ritual sacrifice, intuitive knowledge of the oneness of all things came to be endorsed as the way of contact with divine reality. Also found in the Upanishads is the teaching that the material world (including our conscious personalities) is less than fully real. The word "maya" is

used to designate the power by which God, or ultimate reality, brought this less than real world into existence.

Though this monistic or pantheistic philosophy provided a comprehensive intellectual understanding of the divine reality for Hindus, it lacked a strong appeal to the heart. As a result, just before the dawn of the Christian era, a great transformation occurred in Hinduism, spurred particularly by the writing of the Bhagavad Gita, the "New Testament" of Hinduism. The Gita records a conversation between the warrior-prince Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna (who is unveiled as an incarnation of the god Vishnu), in which personal devotion to deity is endorsed as a way of salvation for all classes of people.

From this time forward, these two major streams of Hindu thought and practice grew and developed—the more intellectual and philosophical stream that emphasized the oneness of all things, and the stream that emphasized personal devotion to a god. The latter stream has predominated among the common people of India to this present day. Chief among the gods so venerated are Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer). In India there are many temples devoted to Shiva (or to one of his "wives," such as Kali), or to Vishnu (or to one of his ten incarnations known as avatars). All in all, it is often stated that Hinduism claims 330 million gods and goddesses!

One might wonder how such a multitude of beliefs about the divine could possibly co-exist in one religion. But they do. There is, however, a widespread recognition that none of the personal gods of Hinduism is in any way exclusive or unique. They are all simply different ways of conceiving of the one reality behind all things—Brahman.

Foundational Hindu Beliefs

Next we must turn our attention to two core beliefs of Hindus:

(a) what they believe about the source of evil and suffering and (b) what they believe about life after death.

The first of these core beliefs is the doctrine of *karma*. The word karma means “action.” But the religious concept has more to do with the results or consequences of actions. The doctrine of karma states that every thought and action results in certain consequences born by the actor or thinker. If a person lies or steals, he will be wronged in some way in the future. Hindus believe that all suffering is due to one’s own past actions, in this or in a previous life. Some believe that karma implies strict determinism or fatalism (that one must simply resign himself to living out his karma). Most, however, believe that though our present is determined by our past, nonetheless we can influence our future by conducting ourselves in a proper manner in the present.

Some have equated the doctrine of karma with the statement in Galatians 6:7 that “whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” It is certainly a biblical teaching that our actions have consequences—for good or ill. But this is not the same as believing that every experience in life is a consequence of one’s own past actions. This is definitely not a biblical idea.

The second core belief of Hinduism is the doctrine of reincarnation, or transmigration of souls, called *samsara*. Since it is impossible that all of one’s karma be experienced in one lifetime, the Hindu scriptures state that after death individual souls are “reborn” in this world, in another body—human or otherwise. The nature of one’s rebirth is determined by the karma resulting from past actions.

Closely associated with the doctrine of reincarnation is that of *ahimsa* or non-injury to living things. This is the core moral value of Hinduism, the protection of all life (which is ultimately divine), and is the main reason why some Hindus are vegetarian.

Also associated with reincarnation is the *caste system*. According to Hindu teaching, there are four basic castes or social classes (and thousands of sub-groups within the castes). Each has its own rules and obligations pertaining to nearly every facet of life. At the top are the Brahmins or priests. Second in rank are the Kshatriyas or warriors and rulers. Third are the Vaisyas or merchants and farmers. Below these are the Shudras or laboring class. Salvation is possible only for the top three castes, who are called the "twice born." Outside the caste system are the untouchables or outcastes. Though outlawed in India in the late 1940s, many in the countryside are still considered outcastes.

One's caste is determined at birth by his or her own personal karma. Attempts, therefore, to bring about social change or to improve one's social position would appear to run contrary to the law of karma and the caste system.

It's little wonder that the chief aim of the Hindu is to experience release or liberation from this cycle of death and rebirth caused by karma. Hindus call this liberation *moksha*.

Hindu Ways Of Salvation

Why do New Agers practice yoga? Why are they so devoted to meditation? It may come as some surprise that these practices are central to the Hindu search for salvation!

We noted earlier that the chief aim in Hinduism is to gain release from the cycle of reincarnation caused by karma—the consequences of past actions, in this or in previous lives! Now we want to look at the primary ways in which followers of Hinduism seek to achieve this salvation—liberation from earthly existence.

Before discussing the three primary ways of salvation in Hinduism, we must mention the four goals of life permissible to Hindus. Hinduism recognizes that in the course of many

lifetimes people may legitimately give themselves to any of these goals. The first is the goal of pleasure or enjoyment, particularly through love and sexual desire. This is called *kama*. The second legitimate aim in life is for wealth and success. This is called *artha*. The third aim in life is moral duty or *dharma*. One who gives himself to dharma renounces personal pleasure and power, to seek the common good. The final aim in life, however, is *moksha*—liberation from the cycle of lives in this material world, and entrance into Nirvana.

Hindus recognize three possible paths to moksha, or salvation. The first is the way of works or *karma yoga*. This is a very popular way of salvation and lays emphasis on the idea that liberation may be obtained by fulfilling one's familial and social duties thereby overcoming the weight of bad karma one has accrued. The Code of Manu lists many of these rules. Most important among them are certain rituals conducted at various stages of life.

The second way of salvation is the way of knowledge or *jnana yoga*. The basic premise of the way of knowledge is that the cause of our bondage to the cycle of rebirths in this world is ignorance or *avidya*. According to the predominant view among those committed to this way, our ignorance consists of the mistaken belief that we are individual selves and not one with the ultimate divine reality called Brahman. It is this ignorance that gives rise to our bad actions which result in bad karma. Salvation is achieved through attaining a state of consciousness in which we realize our identity with Brahman. This is achieved through deep meditation, often as a part of the discipline of yoga.

The third and final way of salvation is the way of devotion or *bhakti yoga*. This is the way most favored by the common people of India; it satisfies the longing for a more emotional and personal approach to religion. It is self-surrender to one of the many personal gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Such

devotion is expressed through acts of worship, *puja,* at the temple, in the home, through participation in the many festivals in honor of such gods, and through pilgrimages to one of the numerous holy sites in India. In the way of devotion, the focus is one obtaining the mercy and help of a god in finding release from the cycle of reincarnation. Some Hindus conceive of ultimate salvation as absorption into the one divine reality, with all loss of individual existence. Others conceive of it as heavenly existence in adoration of the personal God.

A Christian Response to Hinduism

The editor of the periodical *Hinduism Today* said not long ago that a "small army of yoga missionaries" has been trained to "set upon the Western world." And in his own words, "They may not call themselves Hindu, but Hindus know where yoga came from and where it goes."

What should be the appropriate Christian perspective on this religion of the East that is making such an impact in the West? At the outset we must say that as Christians we concur with Hindus on a couple of points. Hindus are correct in their recognition that all is not right with the world and with human existence in it. They are correct as well in suggesting that the ultimate remedy to the human dilemma is spiritual in nature. Beyond these two points, however, there's little common ground between Hinduism and Christianity. Let's note just a few of the more important areas of divergence.

First, Hinduism lacks any understanding that God created this world for a good purpose. It is common for Hindus to speak of God bringing the universe into existence simply as a "playful" exercise of His power. Also lacking is a conception of God as infinitely holy and righteous and as the One to whom we as His creatures are accountable for the way we conduct our lives.

The second major area of contrast between Hinduism and

Christianity is the conception of human nature and of the source of our estrangement from God. According to Hindu teaching, man is divine at the core of his being. He is one with God! The problem is that man is ignorant of this fact. He is deceived by his focus on this temporal and material world, and this ignorance gives rise to acts that result in bad karma and traps us in the cycle of reincarnation.

According to the biblical teaching, however, the source of our alienation from God (and ultimately of all that is imperfect in this world), is not ignorance of our divinity, but our sinful rebellion against God and His purpose for our lives.

This leads to the third and final point of contrast—the way of salvation. According to most Hindu teaching, salvation from the cycle of reincarnation is achieved by our own efforts—whether through good works, meditation, or devotion to a deity. According to the Bible, however, our spiritual need is for deliverance from God's judgment on our sin and for restoration to a life under His direction and care. This salvation can be provided only by God's gracious and undeserved action in our behalf.

It is true that in certain Hindu groups there is a similar emphasis on God's grace (probably as a result of past Christian influence). But even here, there is a major distinction. The Hindu teaching about grace sees no need for an atonement for sin, but simply offers forgiveness without any satisfaction of the judgment on sin required by a holy God.

In contrast, the Christian gospel is this: God the Son became a man, died a sacrificial death on the cross, making real forgiveness of real sins against the real God possible to those who place complete trust in Christ. All who do so can experience true forgiveness, know God and His purpose for their lives, and have the certainty of eternal life with Him!

For a list of resources on Hinduism, and on sharing the gospel with our Hindu friends, contact us here at Probe!

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What is Islam? – And a Christian Response

The history, current status, basic beliefs and practices of Islam are surveyed; as well, a Christian response to Islam is offered.

This article is also available in Spanish.

It's not every day that religion appears as a front page story in today's newspapers, particularly on a regular basis. But over the past 20 years one religion has made the front page perhaps more than any other . . . the religion of Islam. Islam claims up to one billion followers worldwide. It is not only the fastest growing religion in the world, but its influence touches virtually every area of life—not only the spiritual, but the political and economic as well. What is more, its influence is being felt closer and closer to home. There are now up to 5 million Muslims in the U.S., and over 1,100 mosques or Islamic centers.

What does Islam teach? How are the teachings of Islam similar to those of Christianity? How are they different? What should our attitude be toward Islam, and toward those who follow this powerful religion? These are some of the questions we want to address in this essay.

The History of Islam

First, we want to take a look back at the history of Islam. Islam was founded in the early seventh century by Muhammed. When he was 40 years of age, in A.D. 610, Muhammed claimed to be receiving messages from God. These messages were later compiled and recorded in the Koran—Islam's holy book.

About this same time, Muhammed began preaching against the greed, economic oppression, and idolatry that plagued the Arab peoples. He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah, the chief god of the Arab pantheon of deities. Though his message was ini1tially rejected, by the year 630 he had succeeded in gaining control of Mecca, the economic and religious center of the Arabian peninsula.

Though Muhammed died two years later, the religious/political movement he founded rapidly spread throughout the Arab world, and far beyond. By A.D. 750, the Muslim empire spanned from Spain in the west to India in the east. In the centuries that followed, Islam penetrated deeper into Africa and Asia, extending as far as the Philippines. During its "golden era" Islam claimed some of the world's finest philosophers and mathematicians. It was during this time also that Islam and Christianity clashed as a result of the Crusades to reclaim the Holy Land from the Muslims.

Beginning around 1500, and accelerating after the industrial revolution of the 1700-1800s, Islam felt the increasing influence of the European powers. Eventually, large portions of the Muslim world were colonized by European countries. This political and economic domination by Europe continued until the end of WWII, after which Muslim countries began to attain political independence. With the discovery and development of the vast oil reserves in many Muslim lands, economic independence suddenly came within reach also. At last, Islam had in its grasp both the opportunity and the resources to

reassert itself as a powerful force in the world. After being on the defensive for many centuries, Islam was now on the offensive!

The Current Status of Islam

At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam. In doing so, it's important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system. Though all Muslims draw their inspiration from Muhammed and the Koran, there are many identifiable groups and movements within Islam.

The most obvious division is that between Sunni and Shia Islam. The Sunnis (who compose about 90% of all Muslims) draw their name from the fact that they look both to the Koran and to the "sunna" in establishing proper Muslim conduct. The "sunna" is the behavior or example of Muhammed and of the early Muslim community. Of course, there are many sub-divisions among the Sunnis, but they all identify themselves as Sunni.

The other major group of Muslims are the Shi'ites (who compose about 10% of all Muslims and reside mainly in Iraq and Iran). The word Shi'ite means "partisan," and refers to the fact that Shi'ites are "partisans of Ali." Ali was the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammed and one of the early Caliphs or successors to Muhammed as leader of the Muslim people. Shi'ites believe that the leader of Islam should be among the descendants of Ali, whom they believe possess a special divine anointing for this task. The last of these divinely appointed leaders, or "imams" most Shi'ites believe to be in "hiding" in another realm of existence. The Ayatollah Khomeini was believed to have been a spokesman for this "hidden imam."

A third group that should be mentioned are the Sufis—those Muslims (among both Sunni and Shia) who seek a mystical experience of God, rather than a merely intellectual knowledge of Him, and who also are given to a number of superstitious

practices.

In addition to these divisions within Islam, mention must also be made of attitudes among Muslims toward their contact with the Western world in modern times. Though the situation is much more complex than we are capable of dealing with in this pamphlet, two broad trends have been evident within Islam.

One trend is toward some degree of accommodation and adjustment to the West and to modern ways of life. This has manifested itself most obviously in countries like Turkey, which have instituted largely secular forms of government and Western ways of life, while maintaining Islamic religious practices.

The opposite trend is toward a return to a more traditional approach to Islamic life and a rejection of Western and modern ways. The most extreme expression of this trend is manifest in the various forms of Islamic fundamentalism, which insist on the implementation of Muslim law (called the Sharia) in every area of life. Fundamentalists have been most successful in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Sudan; but they are active in virtually every Muslim country, at times resorting to violence and terrorism in attempting to implement their agenda.

In understanding this potent religious and political movement, it is important to understand the various divisions and attitudes within Islam and the basic beliefs at Islam’s core.

The Basic Beliefs of Islam

Though the beliefs of Muslims worldwide are about as diverse as those among Christians, there are six basic articles of faith common to nearly all Muslims.

The first of these is that there is no God but Allah. The pre-Islamic Arabs were polytheists. But Muhammed succeeded in leading them to devote themselves solely to the chief God of

the pantheon whom they called Allah (which simply means God). To worship or attribute deity to any other being is considered *shirk* or blasphemy. The Koran mentions numerous names of Allah, and these names are found frequently on the lips of devout Muslims who believe them to have a nearly magical power.

The second article of faith is belief in angels and jinn. Jinn are spirit beings capable of both good and evil actions and of possessing human beings. Above the jinn in rank are the angels of God. Two of them are believed to accompany every Muslim, one on the right to record his good deeds, and one on the left to record his evil deeds.

The third article is belief in God's holy books, 104 of which are referred to in the Koran. Chief among these are the Law given to Moses, the Psalms given to David, the Gospel (or Injil) given to Jesus, and the Koran given to Muhammed. Each of these is conceived to have communicated the same basic message of God's will to man. Obvious discrepancies between the Jewish and Christian Scriptures and the Koran (particularly with reference to Jesus and Muhammed) were accounted for by Muhammed in his suggestion that the Bible had been tampered with by Jews and Christians.

The fourth article of faith is belief in God's prophets, through whom Allah appealed to man to follow His will as revealed in His holy books. There is no agreement as to how many prophets there have been—some say hundreds of thousands. Among them were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. But all agree that Muhammed was God's final and supreme prophet—the "seal" of the prophets. Though Muhammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshiping him.

The fifth article of faith is belief in the absolute predestinating will of Allah. Though some Muslims have modified this doctrine somewhat, the Koran seems to support

the idea that all things (both good and evil) are the direct result of God’s will. Those who conclude that Islam is a fatalistic religion have good reason for doing so.

The sixth and final article of faith is belief in the resurrection and final judgment. At the end of history, God will judge the works of all men. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds will enter into paradise (pictured in rather sensual terms). The rest will be consigned to hell. The paramount feature of Islamic belief, aside from its strong monotheism, is that it is a religion of human works. One’s position with regard to Allah is determined by his success in keeping His laws.

The Basic Practices of Islam

Now we want to focus on the most important of those works. These are summarized in what are usually called the “Five Pillars of Islam.”

The first pillar is recitation of the creed: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammed is his prophet.” It is commonly held that to recite this creed in the presence of two witnesses is to constitute oneself a Muslim—one in submission to God. Of course, the word Islam simply means “submission.”

The second pillar is the regular practice of prayers. Sunni Muslims are required to recite specific prayers accompanied by prescribed motions five times daily. (Shi’ites do so only three times a day.) All male Muslims are also enjoined to meet for community prayer (and sermon) each Friday at noon.

The third pillar is almsgiving. Born an orphan himself, Muhammed was deeply concerned for the needy. The Koran requires that 2.5% of one’s income be given to the poor or to the spread of Islam.

The fourth pillar of Islam is the fast during the month of Ramadan (the ninth lunar month of the Muslim calendar, during

which Muhammed is said to have received the first of his revelations from God, and during which he and his followers made their historic trek from Mecca to Medina). During this month, Muslims in good health are required to forego all food and liquid during daylight hours. This fast promotes the Muslim's self-discipline, dependence on Allah, and compassion for the needy.

The fifth pillar is the Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca. If possible, every Muslim is to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once during his life. It can be made properly only on a few days during the last month of the Muslim year. The Hajj promotes the ideas of worldwide unity and equality among Muslims. But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin.

A sixth pillar, that of jihad, is often added. (The term means "exertion" or "struggle" in behalf of God.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or "holy war." The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!

Muslims around the world look to these pillars for guidance in shaping their religious practice. But in addition to these pillars, there are numerous laws and traditions contained in the Hadith—literature that was compiled after the completion of the Koran, that reportedly contains the example and statements of Muhammed on many topics. Because the laws of the Hadith and Koran cover virtually every area of life, Islam has well been referred to as an all-encompassing way of life, as well as a religion.

A Christian Perspective on Islam

At this point it is appropriate to offer a brief evaluation of Islam from a Christian perspective.

At the outset, it must be stated that there is much in Islam that the Christian can affirm. Among the most significant Islamic doctrines that can be genuinely affirmed by the Christian are its belief in one God, its recognition of Jesus as the virgin born, sinless prophet and messiah of God, and its expectation of a future resurrection and judgment.

There are, however, some very significant areas of difference. We will mention just a few. First, the Muslim perception of God is by no means the same as that revealed in the Bible. Islam portrays God as ultimately unknowable. In fact, in the Koran, Allah reveals His will, but He never reveals Himself. Neither is He ever portrayed as a Father to His people, as He is in the Bible.

Second, though Jesus is presented as a miracle working prophet and messiah, and even without sin, Islam denies that He is the Son of God or Savior of the world. Indeed, it is denied that Jesus ever died at all, least of all for the sins of the world.

Third, though mankind is depicted as weak and prone to error, Islam denies that man is a sinner by nature and in need of a Savior, as the Bible so clearly teaches. People are capable of submitting to God’s laws and meriting his ultimate approval. According to Islam, man’s spiritual need is not for a savior but for guidance.

This leads to the fact that since in Islam, acceptance by God is something we must earn by our works, it cannot possibly provide the sense of security that can be found in the grace of God as taught in the Bible.

Many of us will find opportunities to befriend Muslim neighbors, co-workers, or friends. As we do, we should be aware of some of the barriers that exist between Muslims and Christians, due to past and current animosities.

The attitude of many Muslims toward Christianity and toward

the West is colored by the history of conflict that has found expression in the Crusades of Medieval times, European domination and colonialism, as well as Western support for Zionism in most recent times. We must allow the love of God to overcome our own fear and defensiveness and to penetrate these barriers.

In the past several years many Muslims have been deeply impressed by the compassion shown by Westerners (and particularly the United States) toward Muslim countries that have endured severe hardship. This kind of compassion can be shown on an individual level as well. As we do, we can then invite our Muslim friends to join us in a study of the New Testament, which reveals the only source of acceptance before God in His love and grace, expressed through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ and His gift of the Holy Spirit.

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