Character of the Cults: A Christian Perspective

Written by Patrick Zukeran

Dr. Zukeran compares the beliefs of several modern cults against a conservative biblical worldview. This analysis makes it readily apparent that cults are not representing a scriptural view of true Christianity.

Challenge of the Cults

This church is growing so rapidly, sociologist Rodney Stark predicts that by the year 2080, it will become the most important world religion to emerge since the rise of Islam.{1} What church is Dr. Stark describing? It is not a Christian church but the Mormon Church, an organization labeled as a cult. The rise of the Mormon Church represents the growing challenge facing the church, the kingdom of the cults.

What is a cult? The greatest authority on the cults, the late Dr. Walter Martin, described a cult as "A group of people gathered around a specific person's misinterpretation of the Bible."{2} Cults are groups that claim to be in harmony with Christianity but deny foundational Christian doctrines such as the Trinity or the unique deity of Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 7:15-17, Jesus gives us a warning about the coming of the cults. He states, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them." What Jesus was warning was that cultists will look, act, and sound like Christians. However, that is only in external appearance. One can parade as a true believer for a time, but eventually one's words, actions, and especially one's beliefs—their "fruit"—will give one away as a counterfeit.

The growth of the cults can be attributed to several factors. First, it is a fulfillment of the warning given by Jesus and the apostles. In Matthew 24:23-26, Jesus warns us that as His return draws near, there will be an increase in false prophets who will ensnare many in their false teachings. In 2 Peter 2:1-3, Peter warns us that false teachers will arise from within the church.

The second factor in the growth of the cults is the breakdown of the family. Cults provide the family atmosphere many from broken homes long for; the cult leader often takes the place of a father figure.

Finally, we can attribute the growth of the cults to the failure of the church. As my mentor repeatedly stated, "The cults are the unpaid bills of the church." The cults thrive because Christians are lacking in biblical and theological understanding. Dr. Martin stated, "The rise of the cults is directly proportional to the fluctuating emphasis which the church has placed on the teachings of biblical doctrine to Christian laymen. To be sure, few pastors, teachers, and evangelists defend adequately their beliefs, but most of them – and most of the average Christian laymen – are hard put to confront and refute a well-trained cultist of almost any variety."{3} If the church engaged in solid and in-depth Bible teaching, the cults would not flourish as they do today.

Doctrinal Character of the Cults

How do you know if a religious group is a cult? Jesus said that you will know false prophets by their fruits. In stating this he was not only speaking of their words and actions but of their doctrinal beliefs as well. Cults deviate from biblical Christianity in several key areas of doctrine.

Cults promote false teaching on the nature of God. The Bible teaches there is one God revealed in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The central feature

that distinguishes cults from biblical Christianity is the doctrine of the Trinity. All cults have a distorted view of this doctrine. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses condemn the doctrine of the Trinity, and Mormons teach tritheism, three gods who make up the godhead.

Second, cults teach a false view of Jesus. The Bible teaches that Christ is 100 percent man and 100 percent God. This has been called the *hypostatic union*. In 2 Corinthians 11:4, Paul warned about false teachers teaching another Jesus. A modern-day example of false teaching is Christian Science which teaches that Jesus was not God but a man who displayed the Christ idea. He neither died for sins, nor was He resurrected.

Third is a false teaching on salvation. All cults have a works-oriented Gospel. The death of Christ is believed to give followers the *potential* to be saved. So after believing in Christ, one must serve the organization to attain salvation. Salvation is found in the organization and one is never really sure if one has done enough to be worthy of salvation. In the International Church of Christ, for example, disciples are scrutinized by their discipler daily to determine if they performed as worthy disciples. Failure to meet the standards may result in discipline. Disciples can never be certain they have done enough for salvation.

Fourth, there is extra-biblical revelation and the denial of the sole authority of the Bible. Cults claim that extra revelation is given to the leader whose words are seen as inspired by God and equal to the Bible. If there is a conflict between the Bible and the leader's words, the latter takes precedence. So in reality, the leader's writings take precedence over the Bible. When interacting with cultists, I often hear them claim their teachings are consistent with the Bible. However, when I point out where their teachings deviate from the Bible, they eventually claim the Bible to be in error. In most cases, cultists claim the Bible has somehow been corrupted by the church.

Sociological Structure of the Cults

Not only do cults deviate doctrinally from biblical Christianity, they have distinctive sociological characteristics. The first is authoritarianism. The leader or organization exercises complete control over a follower's life. The words of the leadership are ultimate and often considered divinely inspired. Going against the leadership is equivalent to going against the commands of God.

The second characteristic is an elitist mentality. Most cults believe they are the true church and the only ones who will be saved. This is because the group believes they have new revelation or understanding that gives them superior standing.

Third is isolationism. Due to their elitist mentality, cultists believe those who do not agree with them are deceived or under the influence of Satan. Therefore, many feel their members must be protected from the outside world, and physical or psychological barriers are created. Members are prohibited from communicating with those outside the organization who do not agree with the teachings of the group.

Fourth, there is closed-mindedness and the discouragement of individual thinking. Because of its authoritarian nature, leaders are the only ones thought to be able to properly interpret the Bible. All members are to turn to the organization for biblical interpretation and advice on life decisions. Therefore, individual thinking and questioning is discouraged. There is an unwillingness to dialogue and consider other viewpoints.

Fifth is a legalistic lifestyle. As mentioned earlier, salvation is not based on grace; cults teach a works-oriented gospel. This leads to a lifestyle of legalism. Followers must live up to the group's standards in order to attain or maintain their membership and hope for eternal life. Followers are required to faithfully serve, and attend meetings,

studies, and services. As a result, there is tremendous pressure to live up to the requirements of the organization.

Finally there is a difficult exit process. Since salvation is found in the organization, leaving the organization is considered by many to be leaving God. All former members who leave cults are shunned by members which often includes members of their own family. Many are warned that if they leave, they will be condemned to hell, or seduced by Satan. Many ex-members are harassed by the organization even after they leave. Exiting members often end up distrusting any religious organization and end up feeling isolated and alone.

Life in the cults is marked by fear of judgment, pressure, and legalism. This is a far cry from what we are taught in the Bible. Jesus and the apostles taught that the new life in Christ is one of grace, love, and freedom from the law. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus said, “Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.” The peace and rest promised by Christ is seldom experienced by those in the cults.

Cultic Methodology

When you receive a knock on your door in the mornings, who do you assume it to be? A salesman? A Girl Scout selling cookies? For many of us, we assume it to be a Jehovah’s Witness or a Mormon missionary looking to tell us about his or her organization. One of the reasons cults have grown is their methodology.

The methods cults use to win converts are moral deception, aggressive proselytizing, and Scripture twisting. By moral deception I mean cults use Christian terminology to win converts. For example, New Agers use the term *born again* to support reincarnation. Mormons use terms like the *Trinity* and *salvation by grace* but these terms have different meanings than what the Bible teaches. Therefore, many untrained

Christians are deceived into believing these groups are actually Christian.

Aggressive proselytizing is another method of the cults. Although many Christian groups use aggressive evangelism, they do so out of a love for God and a desire to see others come to know Christ. Many cultists proselytize for much the same reasons but added to this is the desire to win God's approval. They work *for* grace rather than *from* grace. The cults require their members to evangelize. Many groups hold their members accountable for the number of hours they spend witnessing for the organization. Many members feel guilty if a day or so goes by without them proselytizing.

Scripture twisting is another method of the cults. Cultist quote verses in the Bible that support their position, but skip over the verses that do not. Often, there is gross misinterpretation of Scripture so that contradictory verses will better fall in line with their views.

For example, Jehovah's Witness and Mormons try to use verses to show Jesus is a created being. However, their position is easily shown to be incorrect when you explain the context and correct meaning of the terms. Also, when you show additional verses that contradict their position, they are often surprised and realize they have never seen those verse before or that the organization's explanations of those verses are unable to be supported.

To successfully engage in conversation and effectively witness to those in the cults, Christians must be prepared in the following ways. First Peter 3:15 states that we must always be "prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." We must be prepared by knowing the word of God through diligent study of it. Second, we must be prepared to overcome our fears and lovingly reach out to cult members, exercising the fruits of patience and gentleness as

we share the truth.

Danger of the Cults

The rise of the cults pose a serious challenge to the church because they present several dangers to the church and families involved. First, there is a spiritual danger. First Timothy 4:1 states "…that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." Ultimately the spirit behind all lies and deception is the devil, so the ultimate force behind the cults is the evil one.

Galatians 1:8 states, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other that than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned." The false gospel of the cults cannot lead anyone to salvation. There are eternal consequences for false beliefs. For this reason Jesus and the apostles are very harsh on false teachers.

There is also a psychological danger. The mind controlling techniques used by the organizations can cause immense damage mentally and emotionally. Living under the pressure, guilt, and dependence on the organization has proven to have tremendous negative effects on individuals.

Third, there is domestic danger. Individuals are taught that loyalty to the organization is equivalent to allegiance with God. Therefore, loyalty to the organization supercedes loyalty to family. Thus, if a family member begins conducting himself in a way the organization does not approve of, the cult will often separate the family from the individual member. Isolation can be emotional or physical. Numerous families have been separated as a result.

In some cases there is a physical danger. The teachings of David Koresh cost the Branch Davidians their lives. Hobart Freeman taught that believers did not need medicine for

illnesses, and told his followers to throw all theirs away. As a result, he and fifty-two of his members died from curable conditions.

In light of this threat, what are Christians called to do? First, we are called to study and know the Word of God. Paul writes to Timothy and all saints saying, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” Christians should master the Bible so that they will not be deceived by any false teaching. Second, Titus commands us to be able to confront and refute false teachers. Finally, in Acts 20, Paul exhorts the leaders of the church to protect their flock from the false teachers that will prey upon the sheep. Every Christian is called to know the truth so well they can confront false teaching, and protect their church and family from it.

Notes

1. Richard Ostling, *Mormon America* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper Collins Publishing Inc. 1999), p. XVI.

2. Walter Martin & Hank Hannegraph, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis, Mich.: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), p. 17.

3. Norman Geisler, *When Cultists Ask* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997), p. 15.

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3. Oslting, Richard & Joan. *Mormon America*. San Francisco, Cal.: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.

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1. Bowman, Robert. *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1989.

2. _____. *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1989.

3. Rhodes, Ron. *Reasoning From the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1993.

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Christian Science: Mary Baker Eddy and the Bible

Introduction

The First Church of Christ, Scientist is a towering presence in the city of Boston. It owes its centrally located architecture and nationwide Christian Science "reading rooms" to the ingenuity of Mary Baker Eddy. She's credited with being an entrepreneur in religion, journalism, education, and

women's rights. Her innovation as a religious leader remains impressive to this day, being that she began such a large movement before women were even allowed to vote. But what of this faith she's so known for?

Mary Baker Eddy grew up in 19th century New England, a time and place that saw tremendous religious dissatisfaction. Out of this same time and locale Joseph Smith started Mormonism and Charles Russell founded the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Eddy was a sickly woman from early on. She was well versed in general Bible knowledge. At the age of seventeen she joined the Congregational Church. She had somewhat of a rocky social life. She had three husbands by the time she was in her fifties. In her early forties, after her second marriage, Eddy met a man named Phineas P. Quimby.{1} She seems to have learned at least some of her healing concepts from Mr. Quimby.

Her adult life appears to have been characterized by great paranoia and outrageous allegations. She even blamed her third husband's death from heart disease on poisoning from enemies of the Eddy's.{2} She also related to one of her associates just before her death that she wished to be remembered as being "mentally murdered."{3}

The followers of Mary Baker Eddy say she loved God and His word so vastly that she was given revelation about the truths of scientific healing hidden beneath the surface of the Bible. She recorded these truths in her *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. With this newfound ability to heal came the birth of Christian Science. Christian Scientists claim to possess basic spiritual methods for healing and comfort for participants of any and all religions.

Eddy founded the Church of Christ, Scientist in 1879. She established such periodicals as *The Christian Science Journal*, *The Christian Science Sentinel*, and the Pulitzer Prize winning *Christian Science Monitor*. By the time of her death in 1910,

she had even founded the Massachusetts Metaphysical College. Her amazing initiative in the face of poor health for most of her life is not to be questioned. However, what ought to be challenged are the conclusions she arrived at due to such extreme initiative Eddy claimed that "the Bible was her sole teacher" for developing the methodical treatments for sickness as well as sin.{4} If this is so, then it's appropriate to use that same source as a measure of her claims. Here we will examine the claims of Christian Science and weigh them with the established standard of God's word. We will see that Christian Science is neither Christian nor science. Let's see how Christian Science measures up to biblical Christianity.

Prayer

Mary Baker Eddy founded the First Church of Christ, Scientist upon the notion that everything she taught came from her examination of the Scriptures. Today we'll begin evaluating her assertions according to the standard of those same Scriptures. Let's first look at the subject of her first chapter in *Science and Health*: prayer.

She deduces from Scripture that audible prayer is a meaningless attempt to draw attention to one's pretentiousness. Prayer changes nothing. True change comes from putting Truth into practice. Eddy robs prayer of its true effectiveness in communicating with God. For instance, Eddy says that prayer for the sick is not what will lead to one's healing, only enlightened understanding heals.{5} Otherwise, why would some people remain sick after prayer and others get well? Surely if God is consistent and willing to heal He wouldn't withhold healing from one and grant it to another.

But God's wisdom is infinitely beyond our attempts to understand why He heals some and doesn't heal others. Paul pleaded for God to take the thorn in his flesh from him and Christ responded, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). God

allows us to experience difficulty in order to fulfill His grander purposes, of which we often know very little (1 Peter 4:19).

Mary Eddy accentuated Jesus' call to "go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret."{6} To her, this was not a simple command to be humble in prayer. She believed this statement communicated that true prayer is not to be spoken or have anything to do with the physical senses. She said,

> *In order to pray aright, we must enter into the closet and shut the door. We must close the lips and silence the material senses. . . . Practice not profession, understanding not belief, gain the ear and right hand of omnipotence and they assuredly call down infinite blessings.{7}*

Not only does prayer become suspect in Christian Science, but so do the orthodox concepts of belief and confession, which are necessary components of prayer and the Christian faith. Eddy misses the point of prayer altogether. Christians don't pray to manipulate fate. We pray in order to verbally express our hearts to God and communicate our concerns. Jesus said that our Father already knows our needs before we ask of Him, but we are to pray nonetheless (Matthew 7:8-9). Eddy's Christian Science has its roots in Gnosticism, saying that salvation is obtained through some sort of secret knowledge. That flies in the face of the historic Christian truth that simple belief in Christ as Lord and confession of faith in Him leads to justification (Romans 10:9). This issue, of faith versus understanding, is what we will address in the next section of this article.

Belief and Disbelief

Basic to Christian Science is belief and disbelief in error. Once again, like the Gnostics the Christian Scientists see all

things in the physical world as an evil opposition to the virtue of the spiritual world. So error comes from an infiltration in the mind by the material. Eddy wrote, “We treat error through the understanding of Truth, because Truth is error’s antidote.”{8} If one denies the reality of pain, due to its material nature, one may be delivered from such pain. We read in Science and Health, “The dream that matter and error are something must yield to reason and revelation. Then mortals will behold the nothingness of sickness and sin, and sin and sickness will disappear from consciousness.”{9} Basically, Christian Scientists believe that pain is an illusion. If you deny the existence of this deception, it will go away.

As a matter of fact, material things are evil, because they don’t really exist. Remember, to a Christian Scientist error is the embodiment of evil. To think something exists that doesn’t is error. So anything resulting from the physical is also evil. This is the context for understanding sickness and death from a Christian Science perspective. It’s inaccurate to Christian Scientists to say only that sin, death, and sickness are results of a fallen world. They believe sickness and death are intrinsically evil themselves. This explains why Christian Scientists reject drugs and human medicine. Drugs are a material attempt at curing what only the spiritual can heal.{10}

Christian Scientists oversimplify sickness and death. Regardless of whether we like to admit it, death, brought on by sickness or suffering of some sort, is inevitable (Hebrews 9:27). Wouldn’t belief in spirituality or “disbelief in error” have rescued at least some from such human suffering? From what I can gather, even Christian Scientists still suffer and die. What about Eddy herself? If she was right, then why did she die?

Sickness and death result from the sin that we all answer for in Adam (Romans 5:12). Therefore, God has opted to rescue us

from this fallen world through the means of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Knowledge does not relieve one's sinful predicament. Faith in Christ is the sole deliverer from this condemnation (Ephesians 2:8-9). Even deliverance does not always come in this life, but we have a hope that in the life to come there will be no sickness, no pain, and no death (Revelation 21:4). We have this hope because of that one event in history to which all Christians ought to find unity, the death of Christ. Next, let's look at the Christian Scientist's perspective of the atonement.

The Atonement

As we look at Christian Science we are measuring it according to the standard of God's Word, which it claims to use as the source for its beliefs. In this section, we will discuss Christian Science's perspective on the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Mary Baker Eddy's unique view of the atonement of Christ has supreme bearing on the supposedly biblical nature of Christian Science. To Eddy, the cross of Christ was not meant to save sinful people from death by Christ's death in their place. She stated "The material blood of Jesus was no more efficacious to cleanse from sin when it was shed upon 'the accursed tree,' than when it was flowing in his veins as he went daily about his Father's business."{11} Instead, Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection was a sign to His followers that the type of life He lived was effective in overcoming death.

To Eddy death is an enemy to Truth, another deception. Jesus was not subject to death, nor are we. She writes, "To him, therefore, death was not the threshold over which he must pass into living glory."{12} Jesus is alleged to have survived the cross through the mastery of mind over matter.{13} This was the ultimate example of Christian Science in practice. Jesus healed Himself with no medicine, bandages, or surgery. Only the disciples thought that Jesus was dead.{14} But Jesus

overcame all laws of matter in healing Himself from a near-death experience and He shed His material existence to reveal only the "Soul."

Eddy contends that the disciples originally misunderstood Jesus' appearance after the crucifixion by calling Him a ghost. But soon after they realized that He never died at all. If this is so then why is the tradition passed on to Paul by those same apostles in a sequence of events detailed here in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4?

> *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day. . . .*

In that same chapter Paul defends the idea that Christ was raised *from the dead*, and that if this were not so then we're all still in our sins and of all people most to be pitied (15:17,19). Hebrews 8:12 says of Jesus "he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." To imagine that Jesus did not die, but simply healed Himself, is biblically and historically preposterous.

To Mary Baker Eddy, Jesus' death is no longer the redemptive sacrifice that gives life to all who believe. Instead, she establishes Jesus as the first Christian Scientist, a sort of "way-shower," leaving a prime example of how we *all* can conquer sin, suffering, and death.{15}

Human Suffering

As we've been discussing the biblical nature of Christian Science, we conclude with some final thoughts. The central issue in Christian Science seems to be human suffering. Sin, sickness, and death are real threats to the human condition.

Mary Baker Eddy was truly bothered by this. Instead of leaning on the God of the Bible for His comfort in times of crisis (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), Eddy devised her own plan to serve as an immediate solution to the burdens she carried.

Contrary to Eddy's charges, Christianity does *not* deny the reality of Jesus' healing ministry. In fact, healing is *still* a valid way for God to show Himself to a generation of hurting people. Nevertheless, healing, even in Jesus' ministry was never intended to be the end all. It was a means for all who witnessed the event to credit Jesus with the Father's seal of approval. The kingdom of God had come. Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 11:4 when He sent John's messengers back to him to respond to the question of whether He was the Messiah with the message, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

Healing of suffering, as well as sin must be recognized for what it truly is: God bringing glory to God. When we put humans and their suffering at the center of Jesus' ministry or even our own ministries we are doomed to misunderstand God's mercy and compassion in relation to human suffering. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). The Master Architect who is also orchestrating all of history to end the way He planned it has to have latitude in bringing this about. That means many of the problems that may not make sense to us will go unanswered until He has the final word.

Compassion is an essential requirement of the Christian message. But too many, like Mary Baker Eddy, have confused godly compassion for humanistic ideology. We ought to pray that none of us are found guilty of imposing our own circumstances upon the Word of God, in order for it to better address our perceived problems. God is faithful. He won't do anything without purpose. But His purpose in our suffering

cannot always be obvious. Remember, He loves His creation and will do all that's necessary to bring about "good, for those who are called to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Often pain, suffering, and death are a means of God's character development in His children. "[H]e disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). It takes eyes of faith to see His good in our difficulties. He who has eyes to see, let him see.

Notes

1. She credited Quimby with healing her. She became a huge proponent of Quimby's abilities. Quimby claimed to have rediscovered Jesus' very own methods for healing. Later this relationship went sour. There is a great deal of controversy over whether Eddy taught the same things as Quimby or not. Both Quimby and Eddy claimed originality and that the other was borrowing his or her ideas. Hoekema, Anthony A., *Christian Science*.(Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), 10-11.
2. Hoekema, 16.
3. Hoekema, 17.
4. *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures,* viii.
5. Ibid., 12.
6. Matthew 6:6.
7. *Science and Health,* 15.
8. Ibid., 346.
9. Ibid., 347.
10. Ibid., 345.
11. Ibid., 25.
12. Ibid., 39.
13. Ibid., 44.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 26.

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See Also *Probe Answers Our Email*:

"You Got Christian Science Wrong"

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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