From the Editor's Notebook: Cults

W. Ross Rainey

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Part 1

From The Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Capsule Comments on the Cults

Recently, a young sister in the Lord from my home assembly asked me if I would kindly visit her home on a certain afternoon. In her commendable zeal to witness to some adherents of the “Jehovah’s Witnesses” cult, she had inadvertently opened the way for them to come to her home and she wanted someone to be with her at the appointed time. I was happy to comply with her request and shortly after I arrived, three women, all devotees of this diaboliocal cult, were at the door. The women were courteous, refined, and articulate, and they put some hard questions to us, one of them centering on Mark 13:32.

Although I generally avoid “Jehovah’s Witnesses” in particular, mainly because of past encounters and many wasted hours, this experience made me realize that I was not as “up” on their teachings as I might have been at the time. This spurred me to do some reviewing, these capsule comments being the fruit of this profitable exercise.

Thus, in the next several issues of Focus I thought it might be helpful to our readers to capsulize the main teachings of some of the major cults abroad today. Possibly many of our readers are not really acquainted with the devious and deceptive doctrines of the mainline cults. For those who fall into this category, reading these articles will hopefully prove to be a practical learning

experience. For others who, like the editor, have through the years gleaned some knowledge of them, these articles will prove a review of their teachings.

What is a cult? This question is the title of a reprint article by Brooks Alexander which appeared in the July-August 1979 issue of Focus. Brooks pointed out that ten or twenty years ago this question was relatively easy to answer, but that “today the guidelines have become somewhat muddied.” Suffice it to say that the origin of the word is the Latin cultus, which, broadly speaking, means any system of religious worship, ritual, or liturgy. “A secondary meaning,” writes Brooks, “which has developed in recent times designates a teaching, group, or movement which deviates from orthodoxy while claiming to represent the true faith. In this sense, a cult can be recognized by defining it in relation to some standard of orthodox belief. In the Western world, that standard has usually been one of orthodox Christianity, though in principle it could be a standard of orthodox Islam, Judaism, Zen, or witchcraft. In fact, there are ‘cults’ within all of these groups, and more. It is worth observing that when the Christian Church first appeared as such on this planet, it was technically a ‘cult’ of Judaism insofar as it differed from the dominant ‘orthodoxy’ of its day. In any event, this concept of ‘cult’ as an unorthodox deviation has prevailed until recently.”

The Lord Jesus Christ anticipated the rise of cults, heresies, and all pseudo-Christian systems in Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43. In these verses our lord revealed the source of all false teachings — Satan (13:25, 28 & 39; see Matt. 24:11; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 1 John 2:18).

Also, Satan's subtlety is revealed (13:25; see 2 Cor. 11:13-15), coupled with the confirmation of his success (13:38) and the ultimate sequel to it all (13:28-30, 39-43).

The Christian's responsibility is clearly set forth., It is not to try and root out all false teachings in the world, but rather to diligently sow the truth and seek to inform the dupes of Satan of his subtle ministry. In so doing the true Christian should have at least three things in his command: 1. a sound and thorough knowledge of the great doctrines of the Scriptures; 2. a reasonably good acquaintance with the literature and theology of the cult, or cults, he encounters; and 3. love and prayer for, as well as patience with, the person, or persons, with whom he is dealing, and this, even when he is contending for the faith.

Also, we should realize that there are three basic weaknesses in every non-Christian cult as to their theological superstructure: 1. the Trinity and deity of Christ; 2. the vicarious atonement; and 3. the bodily resurrection of Christ.

Jehovah's Witnesses (1)

The most zealous and energetic of all the cults extant in America today (and throughout the world) is probably "Jehovah's Witnesses," variously called the "International Bible Students Association," the "Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society" of Brooklyn, N.Y., or just plain "Russelism." This formidable organization had its beginning in 1884, when its founder, "Pastor" Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916), known variously as "The Creed Smasher," "the man who turned the hose on hell," and "the great paraphraser," devoted his fortune and

talent to propagating his new “revelation” entitled “Millennial Dawnism.”

Russell was from a Congregationalist background and was haunted by the Bible’s pronouncement of eternal punishment. As a result, he set about denying all that the Bible taught on hell, as well as denying other cardinal Christian doctrines and launching a vigorous campaign denouncing orthodoxy and many of the historic teachings of the Christian Church.

The name “Jehovah’s Witnesses” was bestowed on the organization by Russell’s successor, Judge J. F. Rutherford, in 1931, Russell having died in 1916. Rutherford died on January 8, 1942, but had reigned with absolute authority and by his prolific writings, coast to coast radio broadcasts, and massive convention rallies he built “Jehovah’s Witnesses” into what they are today. He retained most of Russell’s teachings, though modified some and discarded others when necessary. It may be safely said that at least 90 percent of Russell’s teachings have been kept.

Where “Unitarianism” and “Christian Science” appeal to man’s intellectual pride, “Jehovah’s Witnesses” appeal to the inferiority complexes of certain types of individuals.

Walter R. Martin has stated: “These earnest souls, dissatisfied with religion and often oppressed by weakend churches and complex theological doctrines too often mouthed and seldom properly expounded, eagerly turn to Watch Tower’s flamboyant Theocracy. The ever-obliging Watch Tower then ‘simplifies’ doctrine, gives a real psychological sense of ‘belonging,’ and, at the same time, provides an opportunity to ‘strike

back. at ‘creed-ism’ which the Watch Tower convinces them they have been enslaved by, and are now delivered from.”1 Some of “Jehovah’s Witnesses” chief erroneous and blasphemous teachings are as follows:

1. They do not believe in the Trinity, that is, in the three Persons of the Godhead. They infer that the devil himself originated this doctrine.

2. They deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, teaching that Jesus was the first “created” being.

3. They deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, asserting that He was raised an invisible spirit.

4. They deny the existence of hell, stating that hell is an invention of the devil, who will ultimately be annihilated.

5. They deny the immortality of the soul, teaching that the soul sleeps in unconsciousness at death and will never suffer in hell.

6. They claim that the Second Coming of Christ is past, teaching that it was an invisible coming, dating from 1874 and that in 1914 “the times of the Gentiles ended” (see “The Watch Tower,” 7/15/50).

7. They teach that the Lord Jesus Christ, prior to His becoming a perfect man, was actually Michael the archangel.

8. They teach that the personality of the Holy Spirit is a pagan doctrine.

9. Charles Taze Russell vigorously contended that the atonement of Christ on the cross only brought back what Adam had lost in the fall -namely, a perfect human life.

10. They claim that they are the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14, and that this number will reign with Christ in

heaven. All others must live on the earth with the exception of the wicked who, with Satan, will be annihilated in consuming fire.

11. They claim that God began to set up His righteous theocratic kingdom on the earth in 1914, believing that all who are outside this theocratic kingdom (made up of "Jehovah's Witnesses," of course!) must suffer eternal annihilation.

12. They denounce all organized religion and teach that all preachers, except themselves, are frauds and imposters.

13. They discourage marriage and having children because the time is so short.

14. They do not recognize the government of any country and they refuse to salute the flag or have any part in war.

"Jehovah's Witnesses" do not believe a soul can live apart from the body. Therefore, they teach that the primary purpose of Christ's ransom is to give the right either not to die physically or to be restored by resurrection. Salvation, according to their teaching, is through faith in the ransom, through baptism by "Jehovah's Witnesses," and through proclamation of their message, together with a moral life. Of particular interest is that the Lord's Supper is celebrated once a year only at the Passover, and only those who have the inner witness that they are members of the 144,000 elite may partake. As a movement they are probably the most authority-ridden religious body in the world. They are told by their central government what they must find in the Bible, and they may not deviate. Thus blood transfusion must be rejected as though it were banned

by Scripture.2 “Jehovah’s Witnesses” have over one million active members with more than a million interested followers. Some 30 percent are found in America, 8 percent in West Germany, and 5 percent in Great Britain. Since their theology turns on the assertion that Jesus Christ is not Jehovah, it is important to note that John 12:39-41 states that He was the one whom Isaiah saw in the Temple, and Isaiah 6:5 says this was Jehovah. In Revelation 1:17 the Lord Jesus Christ describes Himself as “the First and the Last,” which is the unique title of Jehovah in Isaiah 44:6 (see 1 Pet. 2:8 with Isa. 8:13-14; Rev. 2:23 with Jer. 17:9-10).3 It seems that few are ever delivered from the clutches of this cult. Nevertheless, their zeal and determination often put evangelical Christians to shame, and if ever there was a day when we should by our walk and talk “Preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2) and “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3), it is today.

1 The Christian and the Cults, p. 30.

2 The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, pp. 527-8.

3 Ibid., p. 528.

Part 2

From the Editor's Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Capsule Comments On The Cults (Part 2)

Christian Science

Of Christian Science, Walter R. Martin has said, "This unusual system of theology is a mixture of absolute Idealism, Hinduism, Hypnosis, auto-suggetion and metaphysics all rolled into one homogenized unit, welded together by its extremely clever 'founder,' Mary Baker Eddy, and dressed up in Christian terminology for consumption by the gullible."1 The very name of this cult is a deception, A. C. Gaebelein having said of Christian Science that "It is neither Christian, nor scientific."

Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) emerged from a humble New England background and became a remarkable woman. She cleverly pyramided the teachings of an "old Main healer," P. P. Quimby, into a personal multi-million dollar fortune and developed a religion all her own that today deifies her writings and reveres her memory as few persons have ever been revered.

She was a sickly child from her youth, and early she relied on hypnosis for relief from spasms of neurotic rage and emotional upsets. She had three husbands. The first one died after only six months from the time they were married.

The second marriage ended in divorce ten years later, and it was during this second marriage to Dr. Daniel

Patterson, a dentist, that she became interested in Spritivalism and first visited P. P. Quimby. Her third husband, Asa G. Eddy, died in 1882. Thus her full name was Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy.

In 1875 she published what has become the Christian Science Bible — Science and Health, With a Key to the Scriptures. Though utilizing one of his manuscripts, she abandoned allegiance to P. P. Quimby, changing his system's name from "the Science of Christ" to "Christian Science." She claimed that her system of religion came to her by direct revelation and, that her book was written under divine dictation, though she conceded that a minister edited its poor grammar. While Mrs. Eddy affirmed the inspiration of the Scriptures, she made the same affirmation for her own book "which takes priority over Scripture with its not-to-be-changed-or-doubted key to the Scriptures. There are more than 2,000 Church of Christ, Scientist groups in the USA, and fewer than 1,000 in the rest of the world. The Mother Church is in Boston."2 It has been estimated recently that the average age of present-day members of Christian Science is 60, this having come about simply because today's young people are not attracted to its fold.

Mrs. Eddy died on December 3, 1910, in her 90th year, leaving a potential of a million followers, the adherents of this cult being among the proudest people to be found anywhere in the world.

Some of the chief errors of Christian Science are as follows:

1. Mrs. Eddy denied the existence of a personal God. Instead He is defined as a divine principle, harmonious

mind, divine metaphysics, or as stated in her book, “God is mind.”

“Christian Science’s one truth is that God as Spirit is All in All. Everything is Mind or Spirit — or, rather, there is no reality except Mind or Spirit. Mind, or Spirit, is Truth, Love, Power, Life, Goodness. Materiality is evil, sin, sickness, death, unreality. Since God is All, man is coexistent with God and His being, therefore, resides eternally in, and is not to be differentiated from, God’s being.”3 2.Christian Science teaches that Christ was “an idea in the bosom of God, his birth was merely an idea of communion in the mind of Mary.” Therefore, Christ is looked upon only as a divine idea.

3. The Church of Christ, Scientist teaches that Jesus as a man is forever dead, and only divine principle remains. Because Jesus was a physical man, He is not to be identified with God at all, for only Christ, as the Principle of Mind, is identified with God. It is also taught that Jesus neither died on the cross or arose from the dead, and that He left the grave knowing that He had not died, and that no man can die. As to the resurrection, Jesus simply ascended “above the physical knowledge of His disciples.”

4. It is taught that the Holy Spirit is the “divine idea of God,” and that the Jehovah of Israel was a “tribal God.”

5. Mrs. Eddy claimed that sin does not exist. “Sin has no reality — it is simply a belief, an illusion of material sense.”

6. Satan is an illusion, “an illusive personification,” therefore, not a real person.

7. Angels are “exalted thoughts.”

8. Man is the expression of infinite mind, and he was not created as Genesis records his creation. He is God's spiritual idea.

9. Heaven is not an actual place, but "a divine state of mind, harmony, the atmosphere of the soul."

10. Hell is not a place, but "mortal belief."

11. Sickness and disease are not real, but merely "mental error." Therefore, there is no sickness. Man can never be sick, for "Divine mind" cannot be sick.

12. Death is only a "mortal dream" and has no reality.

13. Mrs. Eddy, though married three times and the mother of one son, denounced marriage as evil. She said some day marriage would be abolished by mind and the race perpetuated without sex. Children would be produced as a result of "mental operation" only.

The enumeration of the foregoing teachings of Christian Science are sufficient to demonstrate that everything true Christianity stands for and proclaims in terms of the Bible's teaching about creation, the fall of man, and redemption, Christian Science declares to be unreality.

An unusual feature of Christian Science is that it is never preached. The church has no preachers and, as a result, there are no sermons. Instead, each church has a First and Second Reader whose responsibility it is to read a selection of Scripture and a selection from Science and Health. Mrs. Eddy decreed that no comments, explanation, or interpretive remarks are permitted. She is the first and last word on Christian Science, and in this way she received and maintains its final meaning, as well as having protected her own special status by excluding the possibility of another

greater than she arising.4 As a close to his comments in The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, James Daane wrote:

“It is a mistake to think of Christian Science as a faith-healing religion. It does not claim to heal sickness, for it claims sickness is an illusion. Nor does Christian Science claim to save men, for it teaches that all which men could be saved from is unreal. It takes neither sickness nor sin seriously. One might add that if Christian Science took itself seriously, it could dispense not only with Readers as well as preachers, but also with its key to the Scriptures as well as with Scripture, and no less with Mary Baker Eddy herself. The latter’s claim to fame rests on her use of both these writings to overcome what by Christian Science’s own claim is really nothing at all. For God is All.”5 Two key Bible texts to keep in mind in relation to Christian Science, and for virtually all of the cults, are from the pen of the Apostle John:

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

“For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 John 7).

1 Martin, The Christian and the Cults, p. 24.

2 The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 221.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., p. 222.

Part 4

From the Editor's Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Capsule Comments On The Cults (Part 4)

Spiritism

Spiritism, sometimes referred to as Spiritualism, is as old as antiquity itself, issuing from man's desire to look beyond the grave. It can be traced back to the earliest books of the Bible (cf. Gen. 41:8; Ex. 7:11, 22:8:18). Thus, of all the cults, it is the only one mentioned in the Word of God and warned against (see Ex. 22:17; Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:10-11; 1 Sam. 28:7), being associated with witchery, trickery and deception. Demons are extremely operative in Spiritism, and Genesis 40:8 should serve as a warning to all Spiritists.

Modern Spiritism came into the spotlight in 1844 at Hydesville, N.Y., when two young sisters, Katie and Margaret Fox, claimed to have heard unusual and strange tapping sounds in their home indicative of supernatural manifestations. Though in later years they repudiated the whole thing as a "result of childish pranks," this did not discourage the wave of interest in Spiritism which by that time was a well organized movement in the United States. In turn, this Spiritism revival soon spread to England and Europe.

Adherents to Spiritism draw heavily on the teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, Franz Mesmer, and Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910). Davis became recognized as the Modern Apostle of Spiritism. Other noted

personalities who became witnesses to Spiritistic phenomena were Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Prof. Alfred Wallace (zoologist), William T. Snead (journalist and scholar), Sir William Crookes (chemist), Prof. Richard Hodgson (scientist), and Prof. William James (physician, psychologist and philosopher).

The scientific revolution in the nineteenth century served as a catalyst to the Spiritist movement which, at its height, claimed over ten million followers. Today the Spiritist movement is organized on a basis similar to denominationalism. In the United Stated the main associations are the International General Assembly of Spiritualists, the National Spiritual Alliance of the U.S.A., and the National Spiritualist Association of Churches. This last group is the orthodox body of American Spiritualism and the most prominent, even maintaining a seminary for the training of their ministers.1 Today there are in excess of 455 churches associated with the Spiritist movement, with a membership of over 166,000 in the United States, although the various groups claimed in 1971 that there were over one million believers in the U.S. South America boasts of over three million followers of Spiritism in spite of intense opposition by the Roman Catholic Church.

There is, of course, false or sham Spiritism, but true Spiritism is well attested, the Bible describing such supernatural manifestations as coming from demon forces and thus under the curse of God (see 1 Sam. 28:3, 9; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chron. 33:6).

The chief doctrines of the Spiritist movement are as follows:

1. A definite emphasis on clean living and keeping the "Golden Rule."

2. A leaning toward pantheism, believing in an Infinite Intelligence expressed in the phenomena of nature, both physical and spiritual. It is taught that there is no personal God.

3. A belief in life after death.

4. A belief in man's ability to communicate with the dead.

5. A denial of the Trinity.

6. A denial of the deity, atonement, resurrection and Second Advent of Christ. Christ, it is taught, was a medium.

7. A denial of man's fall, the authority of the Bible, and of a literal hell.

8. A belief that the doorway to reformation is never closed against any human soul, here and hereafter.

9. The teaching of God, or Infinite Intelligence, as love is central in their various doctrines.

10. Ultimately, say the Spiritists, we will all be absolved into Infinite Intelligence. It is taught that there are seven steps to this ultimate perfection for all, and the rapidity with which we reach the final step depends upon our conduct in this present sphere.

1 The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 926.

Part 5

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Capsule Comments On The Cults (Part 5)

Theosophy

Theosophy is closely akin to both Spiritism and Bahaism, being a mixture of Oriental occultism and Western liberalism. The term “Theosophy” is commonly identified with the Theosophical Society founded in New York City in 1875 by Colonel H. S. Olcott (1821-1907) and Madame H. P. Blavatsky (1831-1891). They claimed to have been prompted by the latter’s Himalayan Mahatmas. Helena Petrova Blavatsky was a native of Russia and an accomplished world traveler. At an early age she became interested in psychic phenomenon and Spiritism. She was the author of what is known as the Theosophist’s bible, a series of books entitled, The Secret Doctrine. In these books she unfolded in a compelling and winning manner the fruit of her years of research in the occult field. She won many followers, especially among the intellectual class. Today, Theosophy disciples number around 12,000 in the United States, all of whom revere Madame Blavatsky’s writings and assent to the highly complicated and illogical terminology that goes to make up a great part of Theosophical doctrine.

Mrs. Annie Besent (1847-1933), the ex-wife of a British minister and a brilliant exponent of Theosophical thought, was Madame Blavatsky’s successor. She was

converted to the movement in 1889 and for a while was assisted by C. W. Leadbeater.

At an early stage both Olcott and Blavatsky moved to India, where Annie Besant also spent several years. Besant's unusual personality and talents enabled her to popularize the movement, and here and there she even added a few innovations of her own. One of her innovations was the nominating of her adopted son, Krishnamurti, for the office of "World Messiah" on December 28, 1925 (see Matt. 24:5,24), both she and Leadbeater having believed him to be the reincarnation of the "Supreme World Teacher." On November 20, 1931, Krishnamurti personally acknowledged his failure to hold this office. On September 20, 1933, Mrs. Besant died at the age of 86 and ever since then the cult has sorely lacked for a leader of either Blavatsky's or Besant's caliber. The works of Annie Besant fill 24 columns in the British Museum catalog.

The stated aims of the society are: "1. To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour. 2. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science. 3. To investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man."1 Some of the main teachings of Theosophy are as follows:

1. God is not a person and is generally looked upon as an unknown God, or else God and the universe are treated in a pantheistic sense.

2. Matter is eternal; therefore, it is part of God.

3. Man is a part of God or "innate Divinity."

4. Devotees of Theosophy firmly believe in reincarnation, sin being simply a nasty and often bothersome twinge of conscience that must be atoned for by a series of reincarnations and purgings, finally culminating in the absorption of all personality into the great “World Soul.”

5. Through this long process of reincarnations one can become one of the supreme masters, called “Mahatmas.”

6. In itself matter is evil and must be eliminated by sacrifice.

7. Theosophists venerate all leading teachers of the great world faiths, the cult itself posing as the great unifier of world religions in general.

8. They teach the universal brotherhood of man.

9. They proclaim that all men in time will become individual Christs.

10. The Christian doctrines of prayer (it doesn’t matter to whom you pray — Buddha, Vishnu, Christ, or any other), the atonement, the resurrection, the deity of Christ and salvation by faith in Him alone are all repudiated by leading Theosophical writers without exception.

11. The Bible is rejected and the scriptures of Hinduism accepted instead.

12. They teach that there is no literal hell. Hell, like heaven, is in effect a spiritival state of mind.

A Useful Expository Note

A number of times now, and again just recently, I have come across a quaint story from the life of the great preacher and founder of Methodism, John Wesley. It seems that Wesley heard about a man named Tom who was both ill and poverty-stricken. Out of his busy schedule he took time to write a comforting letter to the man which read in part, “Dear Tom, I pray that you will soon be restored to health. ‘Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed’” (Psa. 37:3). With the letter, Wesley enclosed a five-pound note, a rather substantial sum in those days. Not long afterward he received a gracious reply from Tom who had been greatly blessed by his letter and generosity. He wrote: “Dear Brother Wesley, I have often been struck with the beauty of the Scripture passage you quoted, but I’ve never seen such a useful ‘expository note’ on it as the needed money you enclosed.”

All around us are people in need and among them are those who are destitute. As Christians we have a responsibility to assist those who are less fortunate than we are, particularly those who are our fellow believers (Gal. 6:10). It’s easy to rationalize and excuse ourselves by saying that the various federal, state and local governments provide for the poor today so that we need not be concerned. Nevertheless, one of the greatest failings among professing Christians today is the neglect of the poor. The Scriptures teach that needy saints have a right to expect practical help from their brethren in Christ (1 Cor. 16:1ff.). And for those motivated by the love of Christ to help their less fortunate fellow saints,

there is promised a rich reward by the Lord Himself (Prov. 19:17).

As we approach another Christmas season, let us look for opportunities in the name of Christ to minister in a practical way to those in need, remembering that living is giving. If we are not in a position to visit someone personally, we can always send a few cheery lines with some comforting words of Scripture, and at the same time enclose a useful “expository note.”

Conditions For Prevailing Prayer

Having been a man of great faith, George Muller was also a man of prevailing prayer. The following are five conditions he listed for such praying:

1. Entire dependence upon the merits and meditation of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only ground for any claim of blessing (John 14:13-14; 15:16).

2. Separation from all sin. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us, for it would be sanctioning sin (Psa. 66:18).

3. Faith in God’s word of promise as confirmed by His oath. Not to believe Him is to make Him both a liar and a perjurer (Heb. 11:6; 6:1-20).

4. Asking in accordance with His will. Our motives must be goodly; we must not seek any gift of God to consume it upon our lusts (1 John 5:14; James 4:3).

5. Importunity in supplication. There must be waiting on God and waiting for God, as the husbandman has long patience to wait for the harvest (James 5:7; Luke 18:1-8).

Editor’s Note

To help make room for a backlog of articles, it has been my decision to suspend, for a few issues, Dr. David Clifford’s series on the Holy Spirit.

1 The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 967.

Part 6

From the Editor's Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Capsule Comments on the Cults (Part 6)

Bahaism

As a religious movement Bahaism was founded in Iran and began with Mirza 'Ali Muhammad (1819-1850), a young Persian merchant, better known in the circles of the faithful as "The Bab" (or "Gate"). He assumed that title on May 22, 1844, claiming to be that greater prophet, "The Messiah," whom the Mohammedans of the nineteenth century expected would come in 1860. "The Bab" was martyred together with 20,000 of his followers in 1850, just ten years before he had claimed the world would be converted to his religion, the origins of which are to be found in Shi'a Islam.

The movement was continued and established by "The Bab's" follower, Bahaullah, under whose leadership it became the Bahai Faith, continuing to this day under that name. He died in 1892, whereupon his son, Abdul Baha, became the great promoter of Bahaism, traveling extensively in Egypt, Europe and America. He died in Palestine in 1921, after which Bahaullah's great-grandson led the movement.

Until 1957 the leadership of the movement remained within Prophet Bahaullah's family, although meanwhile his teachings have spread to many parts of the world.

"The basic teaching of the Bahai faith is that it is the crown and culmination of all the religions of the world,

which it does not seek to overthrow, but to fulfill. Bahai temples contain no accepted religious symbols; they are domed, circular, and have nine doors, representing the existing traditions … The movement's principles may be summarized thus: (1) the unity of mankind; (2) the duty of each individual to seek for truth independently; (3) equality between the sexes; (4) the essential unity of all religions; (5) science and religion are not contradictory; (6) religion must be the source of love and unity; (7) all prejudice should be abolished; (8) universal education; (9) the solving of economic problems; (10) the encouragement of international language; (11) peace; and (12) the setting up of an international court of justice."1 The followers of Bahaism today are active in over fifty countries, some placing their membership as high as 8,000,000, although this figure is probably exaggerated.

Walter R. Martin has defined Bahaism as, "… — an oriental hodge-podge of Pantheism, Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism, clothed in Christian terminology and submitted to the uninformed and gullible as a new dispensation, complete with a false Messiah (Bahaullah) who denied categorically the authority and identity of Jesus Christ."2 Some of the major doctrines of Bahaism are as follows:

1. The existence of the Triune God is denied.

2. Jesus Christ is just another prophet.

3. Christ's vicarious atonement, bodily resurrection, ascension and Second Advent are denied.

4. God alone really exists and is "unknowable" except through Bahaullah.

5. Divine revelation is continuous and progressive.

6. The evolution of man's spiritual and social position occurs in cycles of one thousand years.

7. The mission of Bahaism is to unite all men in one faith and one religion — Bahaism.

8. Heaven and hell in the Biblical sense are symbolic.

9. Salvation is not through Christ alone, but through Bahaullah.

10. The final age of peace will come through God's prophet, Bahaullah.

11. Evil is non-existent.

1 The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 96.

2 The Christian and the Cults, p. 33.

Part 7

From the Editor's Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Capsule Comments on the Cults (Part 7)

Unitarianism

Unitarianism is a "system of religious thought which rejects the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ, and seeks to show that a genuinely religious community can be created without doctrinal conformity. It has evolved from emphasis on scriptural authority to a foundation on reason and experience. Unitarians believe in the goodness of human nature, critize doctrines of the Fall, the Atonement, and eternal damnation, and require only openness to divine inspiration. In policy they are congregationalists."1 As an organized movement Unitarianism, first in Poland and Hungary, dates from the Anabaptists of the Reformation, but only recently have there been Unitarian denominations.2 Unitarians like to trace their history back to Apostolic times, especially to the great Arian heresy condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. However, it was not until the 14th and 15th centuries that the teachings of Unitarianism actually gained any popular support. None of the leading theologians down through the centuries ever held Unitarian teachings and remained in fellowship with the Christian Church, and this is true right to the present moment.

The first noteworthy Unitarian writer was Martin Cellarium (1499-1564), a friend of Martin Luther who

advanced Unitarian views in 1527. Ludwig Haetzer (1529) and Michael Servetus (1531), the latter having been martyred for his views (1533), were anti-Trinitarian followers of Cellarium. Following these came Fausto Sozzini, better known as Socinus (1539-1604), Socinianism having found strong roots in Hungary, Poland and Transylvania, then finally in Holland, England and the United States.

Early in American history, Unitarianism was made known through the work of such preachers as Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1766), Joseph Priestly (1794), William Ellery Channing (1803), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1838). Unitarians also claim such distinguished followers as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Russell Lowell, and many others, even daring to claim Sir Isaac Newton and Abraham Lincoln, the evidence all being to the contrary in the last two cases.

During its American development, Unitarianism passed through three stages, the first being from 1800-1835, having been strongly influenced by English philosophic rationalism during these years. Its second stage was from 1835-1885, having been strongly influenced by German Idealism and rationalistic theology during this period. The final stage, having begun in 1885 and continuing on to the present time, is characterized by the acceptance of evolution, the empirical methods of science in religion, a recognition of Universal Religion and “an ethical attempt to realize the higher affirmations of Christianity.”

Over the years Unitarianism has grown along rational, not Biblical lines. Having been started by anti-

Trinitarians, many of whom were otherwise orthodox, it has developed into a creedless movement emphasizing the many forms of divine revelation and man's presumed inherent goodness. Many today hold Unitarian ideas, of course, without belonging to a Unitarian church. Presently Unitarians stress the religion of the Sermon on the Mount and the oneness of the human family.3 Today the Unitarian Universalist Association numbers 1,000 churches with a membership of 185,000.4 As to Unitarianism's major doctrines, three important tenets should be noted:

1. Unitarianism rejects the authority of the Bible in spiritual, moral and doctrinal matters, yet it freely quotes the Bible (mostly out of context) to substantiate many of its own teachings.

2. Unitarianism claims to be Christian, yet it denies such historic doctrines of Christianity as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the vicarious blood atonement, Christ's bodily resurrection and His Second Advent.

3. Unitarianism rejects the doctrine of everlasting punishment.

As Walter R. Martin has said, "Unitarianism is the product, then, of the deification of reason, the rejection of Biblical authority, and a fierce pride in one's ability to save himself. In effect it is 'Glory to man in the highest' — long live father Adam!"5 1 The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 995.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., p. 996.

4 Reader's Digest 1979 Almanac and Yearbook, p. 708.

5 The Christian and the Cults, p. 17.

Part 8

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Capsule Comments On The Cults (Part 8)

Seventh-Day Adventism

The Seventh-Day Adventist movement is one of the fastest growing groups today, as well as one of the most deceptive of all false religions. On, the surface it might seem uncharitable to place this group among the cults, but after examining their teachings it seems to me that it is proper to so label them, in spite of the fact that the editors of Moody Monthly chose to remain silent about Seventh-Day Adventists when they published material on the cults in their 1979 July-August issue.

On a public level Adventists appear to preach the gospel, but it is particularly in their follow-up that they interject their erroneous and evil doctrine. In 1956 the Barnhouse-Martin episode claimed the attention of multitudes of evangelical Christians, including the writer, but the statements then made to the effect that the Adventists had renounced many of their errors proved to be unfounded.

The beginning of the Seventh-Day Adventist movement goes back to the mistake of William Miller (1782-1849) who predicted that the end of the world was near, and that the date for this would be sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. When the deadline passed, Miller changed the date for Christ’s return to October 22, 1844. A widespread apocalyptic fervor

aided the group's growth at that time, and it soon had between 50,000 and 100,000 adherents. However, when the new date passed, the early Millerite enthusiasm was greatly diminished. Nevertheless, his followers refused to admit his error and thus invented the false teaching that Christ did come on October 22, 1844, but instead of coming to the earth, He went into the second compartment, or sanctuary, of heaven. Later, this explanation was accepted and was greatly enlarged upon by Seventh-Day Adventism's supposedly inspired prophetess, Mrs. Ellen G. White. All subsequent errors have sprung from a vision which Millerite, Hiram Edson, received, plus later visions which Mrs. White claimed to have received.

Certain Adventists believed that Christ's Second Coming had been hindered by their failure to maintain the Biblical law of keeping the seventh day as the Sabbath. The importance of Sabbath-keeping to the movement cannot be overstressed.1 At any rate, Mrs. White asserted that she saw in heaven the Ark of the Covenant, and in the Ark the Tables of the Law, but with the Fourth Commandment of the Sabbath standing out above all the others, surrounded by a halo of light. Therefore, upon a false prophecy of Christ's Second Coming, coupled with supposed visions of a man and a woman, rests the Seventh-Day Adventist movement.

Although she had only a third grade education, Mrs. White wrote 45 major books and over 4,000 articles. One of her works, Steps to Christ, sold more than five million copies and was translated into 85 languages. The early Adventists were pocketed chiefly in the New England states, but by 1855 their westward expansion was marked by the establishment of a headquarters in

Battle Creek, Michigan. The denomination was organized in 1863, and by 1874 their first missionary, J. N. Andrews, was sent out. Today they have a membership of some two and a half million with about four-fifths of that number outside North America.2 A recent almanac indicates that in the United States there are 3,450 Adventist churches with a membership of 510,000.3 Some of the unscriptural doctrines held by Seventh-Day Adventists are as follows:

1. They teach that Christ came back in 1844 and has been in heaven since to complete the atonement He began at Calvary.

2. They believe that Sunday observance will be the "mark of the beast."

3. They believe that keeping the Jewish Sabbath is an indispensable condition of salvation.

4. They hold that they are the only true remnant church; all others are false and belong to Babylon.

5. Adventists maintain that they are the 144,000 of Revelation 7, and that they alone have the message of the last days. They also assert that the three angels of Revelation 14:6-11 are a prophecy of the Seventh-Day Adventists of the "latter days."

6. They believe that the "scapegoat" in Leviticus 16 symbolizes Satan, upon whom the sins of the people were laid, thereby making Satan our sin-bearer.

7. They teach that the Lord Jesus Christ inherited Adam's sinful nature and, therefore, possessed an inborn inclination to sin.

8. Adventists teach that the soul sleeps and is unconscious after death.

9. They believe that there will be no conscious suffering in hell, but that the wicked will be annihilated after their resurrection.

10. They maintain that there will be no millennial reign of Christ, but that during the millennium the earth will be waste and void, the prison house of Satan.

11. They teach that Israel will not be restored to Canaan as a nation.

12. They believe it is wrong to eat certain unclean foods, especially pork.

13. Adventists maintain that Mary Ellen White was an inspired prophetess of God, and that her writings, at least in part, are inspired and on a par with the Holy Scriptures.

In dealing with Seventh-Day Adventists several things should be diligently pressed upon them from the Scriptures:

1. Show that by the death of Christ, Christians have become dead to the law (Rom. 7:1-4; see 10:3-9).

2. Show that the law, including the Sabbath, has been done away (2 Cor. 3:7-11).

3. Know at least some of their favorite passages (e.g., 1 John 2:4). Show from 1 John 3:23 that the commandment referred to is love and faith, not Sabbath-keeping (the ASV omits the words, “do His commandments,” from Rev. 22:14).

4. Stress the fact that every one of the Ten Commandments, except the fourth, is reaffirmed in the New Testament. Nowhere in the New Testament is the Church commanded to keep the Jewish Sabbath,

5. Stress what Christ Himself said about those who would set dates regarding His Second Coming (Matt. 24:36).

6. Stress the blessed truth that Christ's redemptive work is FINISHED (John 19:30: Heb. 1:3; 9:26).

7. Show that there is no Scriptural warrant for their theory that the soul sleeps between death and the resurrection (2 Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:20-23). Some of their favorite texts (e.g., Eccles. 9:5-10; Dan. 12:2; Acts 2:34) are readily answered and clarified when taken in their context and compared with other Scriptures.

8. Show that the Scriptures clearly teach that the spirit and soul do not die when the body dies (Eccles. 3:21; 12:7; Matt. 10:28; Luke 23:43-46; Acts 7:59; 1 Cor. 5:5).

9. Show that the Sabbath is purely a Jewish institution, never meant to be binding upon Christians (Deut. 5:12-15). The Sabbath was a sign between God and Israel (Ex. 31:13-17).

Seventh-Day Adventists refer to the observance of the first day as stemming from heathen or Romish practice, laying this change at the door of the Roman pontiff. However, the New Testament Scriptures clearly indicate the habit of the early Christians to gather on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), and the writings of the early church fathers (e.g., Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Clement) testify that the observance of the first day was general.

Contrary to cults in general, Seventh-Day Adventists teach the deity of Christ and believer's baptism by immersion. Holy Communion is observed four times a year, preceded by a foot-washing service. Their insistence on tithing has led to the church's being

among the leading churches in per capita giving, and this, in spite of the relatively low economic status of its membership.4 Adventists operate parochial schools from primary through university level. They also insist on proper care of the body, abstaining from foods forbidden in the Old Testament such as pork, ham, and shellfish; they do not smoke or drink; and they conduct an extensive medical program with hospitals and clinics centering at Loma Linda University in California. The group also opposes secret societies, card playing, gambling, and the use of jewelry and cosmetics. They also avoid “worldly entertainments” such as motion pictures, television, the theater, and dancing.5 Adventists operate a large publishing industry. Their leading paper, Review and Herald, is one of the oldest continuously published religious periodicals in America. Also, they have a congregational form of church government which is tied to a series of local and national conferences.

Recently, a disruption in the Seventh-Day Adventist ranks has centred on the divergent teaching of one of their scholars who has challenged the movement’s position on one of its cardinal doctrines. The scholar, Desmond Ford, an Australian theologian and visiting professor at the U.S.’s Adventist Pacific Union College lost his credentials after challenging the official Seventh-Day Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:4 — used as a basis for a doctrine held uniquely by Adventists which deals with the “cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary.” The doctrine is based on the “day-year” principle in understanding certain prophetic references in Scripture such as the Daniel passage, and

deals with the significance Adventists attach to the year 1844.

Some observers couple this incident with what has been described as a more traditional evangelical approach to Biblical interpretation by some Adventists, mostly young people.

Theologian Ford, by the way, studied under the noted British scholar, F. F. Bruce, at the University of Manchester.

1 The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 899.

2 Ibid.

3 Reader's Digest 1979 Almanac Yearbook, p. 705.

4 The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 899.

5 Ibid.

Part 9

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Capsule Comments On The Cults (Part 9)

The Charisma Of The Cults

According to George Gallup, the American pollster, some 16 million Americans have been involved with cultist religions and Eastern mysticism. It is estimated that most of these mesmerized followers are between the ages of 16 and 25.

In previous articles we have surveyed eight cults, most of which are well known and firmly established. They are: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism, Christian Science, Spiritism, Theosophy, Bahaism, Unitarianism, and Seventh-Day Adventism. There are, of course, many other more recent and flourishing cultist religions, particularly of an Eastern mystical flavor. In fact, they are so numerous that it is not the writer’s intention or desire to research in detail their various titles and teachings. However, among the more prominent ones are the following:

1. Children of God. The leader of this group is David (Moses David) Brandt Berg. The cult is characterized by belief in the occult, reincarnation, and sexual permissiveness. Berg’s followers believe him to be the only end-time prophet, that the group represents the remnant church of the last days, and that its authority is absolute.

2. The Church Universal and Triumphant. The leader of this group is Elizabeth Claire. The movement also goes under the names of Summit International and Summit Lighthouse. It is characterized by a mixture of Eastern religions, Theosophy, Christianity, and several other influences. Elizabeth claims to be one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11, while her late husband, Mark, claimed to be the other. Jesus is viewed as a man who had the Christ consciousness within him.

3. Divine Light Mission. The once boy-leader of this group is Guru Maharaj Ji. Having eminated from India with a following of over six million, DLM established its headquarters in Denver, Colorado, in 1971. With some 10,000 adherents in the United States, its beliefs centre in a sometimes personal and sometimes impersonal God, teaching that he has appeared in a body at different times through such leaders as Krishna, Jesus, and Buddha. The latest incarnation is, of course, Ji himself. It is taught that oneness with God is the goal of human life. As might be imagined, it is a mixed bag of religious rubbish.

4. Krishna Consciousness. The leader of this western brand of Hinduism is His Divine Grace, A. C. Bhaktivedants Swami Prabhupada, a Hindu monk in his 60’s, who moved to the United States in 1965. This cult claims a following of 10,000 in the United States and 5,000 abroad. Krishna doctrine is based on the writings of Swami Prabhupada and on his translations and commentaries of Hindu scripture. The group teaches the worship of a personal god, who is everything and can be present in anything, including the images of wood or marble constructed and cared for by Krishna followers. It is also taught that Krishna has been incarnated in

people, the first of these having been 5,000 years ago, though there have been at least 25 since then. Swami Prabhupada is the guru of ISKON and is treated with god-like devotion.

5. Scientology. The leader of this group, L. Ron Hubbard, claims to have found the spiritual technology to dispense the one “true way” to man. It is a process working through levels of self-knowledge and knowledge of the past lives to awaken primoidial deity within until a person is able to regain total godhood. Christ is viewed as a man who achieved a “state of clear” but not the higher state of “Operating Thetan” (whatever that may be!).

6. Transcendal Meditiation. When the people of India wouldn’t buy the teachings of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, he came to America to sell his system to people that he said “are in the habit of accepting things quickly.” Initially, he spent two years in a cave in India, having developed TM, a new method for an old Hindu result. TM is a technique of deep meditation that anyone can practice in order to achieve “bliss consciousness of Absolute Being.”

TM was incorporated by Maharishi in California in 1959, the slow start of the movement having been turned around in 1960 when the Beatles, Shirley McLaine, Mia Farrow and the Rolling Stones took an interest in it. When its popularity subsided, the resourceful Maharishi dumped the religious jargon and wrapped TM in scientific and psychological terms, claiming that TM was a “scientific technique helping a person to achieve a high rate of mental relaxation and simultaneously to attain his full potential.” The results were phenomenal.

By 1976, TM claimed 6,000 teachers and an annual income of 20 million dollars.

TM teaches that the purpose of life is happiness sought through an endless cycle of incarnations and reincarnations. To find happiness we must bypass our mind and through the liturgy of the mantra (i.e., a hymn or portion of text chanted or intoned as an incantation or prayer), we ultimately discover “bliss consciousness.”

7. The Unification Church. Originally, The Unification Church was called the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity. It was founded in Korea in 1954 by millionaire industrialist Sun Myung Moon. As a boy 16, Moon claimed to have had a mountain-top vision of Jesus Christ that changed his life through which he says he was instructed to carry out the work that Jesus had failed to accomplish while on earth.

From South Korea, where true Christians denounced his work as non-Christian, Moon established his work in Japan and in the United States by 1958. In 1965, Moon made his first world tour, and in 1973 he moved his church’s world headquarters to the United States. Today the “Moonies” or “Moon People,” as they are called, claim a worldwide following of two million, with 30,000 members and 7,000 core members in the United States. Moon, however, still finds time to carry on his massive business ventures.

The teachings of The Unification Church are nothing short of blasphemous. It is taught that man’s fall in the garden was the sin of adultery: Eve had sex with Satan, thereby corrupting the entire human race. Jesus, who it is taught is not God, was sent to start a new sinless line

of humanity. He was supposed to have married the perfect woman, have perfect children, and adopt perfect people into his family. Unfortunately, he failed in his assignment and ended up on the cross — dead. The result? Jesus accomplished spiritual salvation only. Because of his failure, Jesus was dismissed from the Trinity, and God went looking for a new saviour. Finally, after centuries of searching, he found Moon. This explains why Moon's followers reverence him as "Father," and his wife as "Mother," and together as "True Parents." Through Mr. & Mrs. Moon all humanity will be saved, freeing God to abolish hell.

8.The Way International. This group is led by Victor Paul Wierwille, The Way being a very close counterfeit of Christianity. They believe in God, the Bible, Jesus Christ, salvation and eternal life, but deny the Trinity. They also teach that Jesus is not God, and that the Holy Spirit is a synonym for God.

In 1950 Wierwille resigned as a minister of the United Church of Christ to begin what he claims is a non-denominational Biblical research and teaching ministry, a rather materialistically oriented class often taught by video tape and called "Power for Abundant Living."

Why have so many of the cults realized such great success, particularly in the United States? In answer to this question many reasons have been given, and among them are the following:

1. Many of the cults have highly trained, efficient representatives whose confidence and charisma attract the unwary.

2. Cults play upon the ignorance of multitudes of people who know little or nothing at all about true Christian doctrine.

3. Numerous cults carry a Biblical or Christian name (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Children of God).

4. False teaching in local churches has laid a foundation for many people to become intrigued with "new teaching" and thus be misled into error.

5. Various cults propagate teachings that are acceptable either theologically or ethically to the natural mind.

6. Some cults offer what multitudes of people in our callous, confused, chaotic society are desperately seeking: friendship, a sense of belonging, hope, and an awareness of worth and meaning to life.

7. Obviously, Satan and his demons are behind the growth of today's cults (see 2 Cor. 4:3-4: 1 Tim. 4:1).

8. The intense zeal, devotion and commitment on the part of adherents to various cult groups, especially young devotees, have done much to further their teachings in the lives of those who have become bitter, disillusioned and unfulfilled in their religious experience.

On this last point I am sadly reminded of what one cultist said, "Looking at Christianity, I didn't see the devotion there that I did in the Hare Krishna movement." No matter how anyone may try to rationalize that statement, it should cause true Christians to do some soul-searching.

(The Editor wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness and appreciation to the Detroit Metropolitan Youth for Christ

for their pamphlet, “Report on the Cults,” from which various statistics and other information have been obtained and incorporated in the foregoing article.

Part 10

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Capsule Comments On The Cults (Part 10)

Communicating With Cultists

In this final study on the cults we want to consider something of the important matter of communicating with those who have become entangled in today’s proliferating web of cultic doctrine. When dealing with any professed member of a cult, we are not only well advised but also forearmed if we keep in mind Jude’s sound counsel in verses 22 and 23 of his letter: “And refute so as to convict some who dispute with you, and on some have mercy who waver and doubt. Strive to save others, snatching them out of the fire; on others take pity with fear, loathing even the garment spotted by the flesh and polluted by their sensuality” (The Amplified Bible).

As we have opportunity to talk with deceived individuals, it is of utmost importance that we maintain an attitude of genuine Christian love and concern. At the same time, as we seek to proclaim God’s truth in love, our love must always be in the truth, and thus safeguarded by the truth. In other words, we must never compromise the Word of God for the sake of love. Furthermore, a spirit of prayer and humility should characterize our approach and dealings with a cultist, realizing that the grace of God has been extended to all (see Matt. 23:37; John 1:9; 5:40; Rom. 1:20; Tit. 2:11).

Also, whenever and wherever possible, we should try and find some point of agreement or common ground. For instance, this may be in the area of the Person of God, the Person of Christ, or in the inspiration and infallability of the Scriptures. Such an approach, if at all possible, is basic and vital.

Having just mentioned the Scriptures, it is important and helpful right from the beginning of our conversation with a cultist to stress our recognition of the Bible as the final authority in all spiritual and religious matters. Along this line there is no problem with some of the mainline cults (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism — although Mormons do place The Book of Mormon on a par with the Bible), but the followers of Christian Science, Unity, Spiritism, and Theosophy, among others, do not recognize the Bible as the final authority, so another method of approach is called for. "This method," says Walter R. Martin, "involves arguing for the Bible and its God, the prerogative of sole authority over the temporal and spiritual affairs of men and bears directly upon a comparison of Scripture and all evidences for its validity, with those of the other major religions. It should be pointed out to such cultists that they themselves partially recognize the authority of Scripture in that they quote it to prove some of their own teachings, and further that the Bible alone has stood the test of time in transmission and is remarkably error-free and devastatingly accurate as opposed to the innumerable historical and theological contradictions apparent in any study of the Scriptures of the other great world religions."1 It has been pointed out that there are basic weaknesses in every non-Christian cult as to their theological superstructure. The leading basic

weaknesses are the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the vicarious blood atonement of Christ, and the bodily resurrection of Christ. Frankly, when dealing with a cultist, these foundational and essential doctrines of Christianity are what I try and press home first. Usually my initial inquiry of any cultist is to ask what his or her view is of the deity of Christ. Through the answer to this question alone, much can be learned or at least surmised about the individual with whom you are dealing.

While it's not expected that we should be some sort of walking dictionary of the various cults and their teachings, it's important for us to know something of their historical background. In this way we can point out that if "final truth" was revealed only when the cult came into existence, then it was a long time coming, and this poses a great problem relative to the eternal destiny of those who died before the cult started.

Still another approach is to point out to certain cultistst the importance of always taking Scripture in its context. It goes without saying that Just about anything can be proved from the Bible by taking various verses out of context. This, then, involves the application of hermeneutics (i.e., the science of Bible interpretation) and exegesis (i.e., the critical analysis of a word, or words, of the Bible).

Out of his wide experience, Walter R. Martin, to whom we have appealed several times in these studies and who was a high school classmate of the writer, has suggested some "do's" and "don'ts" in the attempt of a Christian to communicate the gospel to a cultist.2 They are as follows:

Do's

1. Do make every effort to understand the doctrinal, historical and psychological components in the background of the cultist.

2. Do labour patiently, if need be, exhaustively, with a cultist who is really interested in finding out the truth; never give up unless he openly and decisively refuses further contact.

3. Do make every effort to answer the questions the cultist asks, and if the answer is not readily available, then seek to meet again at a further date to present it.

4. Do let a cultist "save face" in the course of your discussion with him, especially if you both know he has lost the point.

5. Do lend every effort to convince the cultist that you are not out to convert him per se, but to help him to understand your position which you believe, in the light of Scripture, to be the only valid one.

6. Do radiate, at every opportunity, the true Christian spirit of concern for the cultist.

7. Do spend much time in prayer and with the Bible, seeking thereby to become adept in using the various methods in dealing with cultists.

8. Do emphasize that "good. works," "miracles" or the apparent accomplishments of a cult do not necessarily mean that God is its author. Saving faith in Christ is the first requisite for favor with God (see John 1:1, 14; 6:28-29).

9. Do approach every cultist as an ambassador for Christ, not as a challenger for a boxing championship of the world!

10. Do preach positively the great cardinal truths of the gospel at every opportunity and never pass by an opportunity to contend earnestly for the faith “once delivered unto the saints,” but always with great tact and a careful choice of words and expressions.

Don’ts

1. Do not approach a cultist with a “spiritual chip” on your shoulder.

2. Do not attack directly the founders of any particular cult, either on moral or intellectual grounds.

3. Do not attempt to “overpower” the cultist with Bible quotations or trite evangelical cliches.

4. Do not become antagonistic or impatient no matter how “dense” or ignorant a cultist may be to the truths of Scripture.

5. Do not cast aspersions or doubt upon the sincerity or motives of the cultist.

6. Do not humiliate a cultist, however much justification there may be.

7. Do not dodge questions for which you do not have a ready answer.

8. Do not pretend to understand the doctrines of a cult.

9. Do not expect that all cultists will understand fully the implications of their doctrinal positions.

1 The Christian and the Cults, pp. 92-93.

2 Ibid., pp. 99-102.