

**SOME MODERN CULTS  
AND HERESIES**

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by  
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**THE PROTESTANT FAITH**

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The reader of the New Testament will recognise that deviations from the apostolic gospel were already numerous in the life-time of the apostles. The same phenomenon has accompanied the preaching of the gospel through the centuries and the modern scene is characterised by numerous religious groups which claim to be based on Christianity but which in fact deviate quite widely from biblical revelation. The details of their doctrine systems are conflicting and confused, but there is a simple touchstone by which they may be assessed, namely the centrality they give to Jesus Christ, His Person and His work, and His Lordship over the life of the believer and over the whole of God's creation. In the New Testament, Jesus is Lord, the very centre of the religious life and the hope of the Christian. The New Testament testifies that in Jesus the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily. With Thomas the apostle, Christians acknowledge Jesus as

their Lord and God, so that the place the cults give to Jesus is a test of their Christian character.

FREE MASONRY is not often thought of as a heresy, but insofar as its members engage in religious activities in their lodges, this can be assessed as to whether it conforms to full Christianity. An examination of the religious ideas reflected in Masonic religious activities shows that the Masonic concept of God is deistic. Christ is not the centre in its approach to God, in fact Christ is completely ignored in the Masonic worship of the Grand Lodge, and religion is not allowed to be discussed as a topic of conversation within the Lodge.

This by-passing of Christ enables the rites of freemasonry to be participated in by men who hold very divergent religions. In this way a brotherhood is created which over-arches divergence of religion, but it is at the expense of the Christian

religion; for if we believe with the New Testament that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19) then Christ must be central in true religion and we must always be ready to confess Him in our words and conversation. To worship the great architect of the universe while deliberately not honouring the Son is not to worship God, for God is one - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and as Scripture says "He who honours not the Son honours not the Father who sent Him" (Jn. 5:23).

It is true that Masonry teaches no specific religious doctrines, but doctrines are expressed by practice. To worship God apart from Christ certainly implies that Christ was not that central position which Scripture indicates that He has. For Christians, He is our Great God and Saviour. It is impossible for an instructed Christian to pray to God apart from Christ, for Jesus said, "No man comes to the Father but by Me" (Jn. 14:6) and He is the

only mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5).

The same test of the centrality of Christ may be applied to CHRISTIAN SCIENCE, which though taking the name of Christian, teaches many doctrines contrary to the Christian revelation. Christian Science teaches that "God's fulness cannot be reflected by a single man or else God would be manifestly finite, lose the deific character and become less than God" (Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, Mary Baker Eddy, p.336).

Jesus is therefore not the Incarnate God. "Jesus is the human man and Christ is the Divine idea" (Ibid p. 473). "The virgin mother conceived this idea of God and gave her ideal the name of Jesus. Jesus was the offspring of Mary's self conscious communion with God" (Ibid. p.29).

Christian Science resembles Pantheism. It reduces God to something less than personal

and reduces the distinction between the Creator and the creation. It also denies the reality of matter and of sin or sickness. "Man is incapable of sin, sickness and death... God is the principal of man and man is the idea of God. Hence man is not mortal nor material. (Ibid. p.455, 476, author's italics.)

MORMONISM, or the religion of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, arose in America in the middle of last century through the leadership of Joseph Smith who claimed that he had received a revelation contained in the Book of Mormon, which purports to be the history of two ancient civilisations which were located on the American continent. The Mormons equate the Book of Mormon with Holy scripture, but it is not difficult to show that it is a fabrication by Smith.

In the teaching of the founders of Mormonism, Jesus is regarded as one god amongst many gods. Mormon theology is

polytheistic. The Mormons believe that the gods have a body of flesh and bones and that they marry. Thus Adam was one of the gods and he brought Eve, one of his celestial wives, with him. This was taught by one of the early Mormon prophets, Brigham Young. Of Christ is taught that "Christ is a fleshly being along with the Father... He is the son of the Adam-god... We say it was Jesus Christ who was married at Cana to Mary and Martha whereby He could see His seed before He was crucified". (Robert F. Boyd, article "Mormonism in Interpretation" October 1956, p.440.)

Mormons encourage their young people to spend two years as missionaries at their own expense. In 1964 there were 15,000 Mormon missionaries. The Mormons practise tithing, which supports an expansive building programme. They have a custom of going without two meals on the first Sunday of each month and of giving the cost of these as "fast offerings" to support and feed the

poor.

Mormons are active in education, conducting many schools as well as a large university in the Mormon State of Utah, U.S.A.

The JEHOVAH'S WITNESS movement began in America towards the end of last century. The founder was C. T. Russell who died in 1916 and his successor as the leader of the movement was J. F. Rutherford who died in 1942. The chief activity of the movement is publishing, chiefly through the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Most of the religious activity of their adherents is the sale of literature. For example, between the foundation of the movement and 1952 the number of books and booklets distributed totalled over five hundred million. As far as is known, no financial accounting is made to the rank and file, nor are financial statements ever made public.

The Jehovah's Witness movement does not conduct schools or engage in any community service.

In doctrine the Jehovah's Witnesses are anti-Trinitarian. This involves the further belief that Jesus is not truly divine and that the Holy Spirit is not personal. Jesus is thought of in an Arian manner as is the first of God's creation.

Russell identified Jesus with Michael the Archangel. Like the ancient Arians the Jehovah's Witnesses call Jesus a god, but for them He is a creature.

Jehovah's Witnesses have made their own translation of the New Testament in order to assist them in arguing their doctrines.

CHRISTADELPHIANS are simply Unitarians, that is, they deny the doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus is not truly God, and He did not pre-exist

before His birth. Thus there was no Son of God before the first Christmas Day. It was at His baptism that He became the Christ. Between His birth and His baptism He was simply a "body prepared". In this way Christadelphianism resembles early dynamic monarchianism just as in its christology the Jehovah's Witnesses resemble Arianism, and the Free-masons Deism, the Mormons Polytheism and the Christian Scientists Pantheism.

We may apply the same test of Christ centredness to the church to which we ourselves belong. Our church may be orthodox in its creed, but actual practice is what matters. The same is true of our own lives. What in fact is the centre of our thoughts, hopes, ambitions, activities? God is the centre of creation and Christ is the centre of God's revelation of Himself to us. If we are to know God in reality it can only be through Christ. For "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself".

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