



AN EXAMINATION OF THE CULTS
FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE
TO AID THE BELIEVER IN FACING
ONE OF THE GREATEST DANGERS
CONFRONTING THE CHURCH TODAY

WHAT IS A CULT?

- The media views such groups as Jim Jones' People's Temple and Rev. Moon's Unification Church as cults, but not groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).
- Psychologists define a cult as a group which deviates from cultural norms.
- The dictionary defines a cult as "a group of followers."
- For the Christian, Dr. Walter R. Martin states:
"A cult, then, is a group of people polarized around someone's interpretation of the Bible and is characterized by major deviations from orthodox Christianity relative to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, particularly the fact that God became man in Jesus Christ." (The Rise of the Cults, page 12).

THE MARKS OF THE CULTS

The four basic operations of math, when applied in the following manner to any religious group, will aid Christians in detecting theological errors which characterize a cult.

+ ADDITION +

Does the religious group under consideration *add* to the Word of God through indispensable publications that claim to give the Bible's clear meaning or through present-day direct revelation from God?

- SUBTRACTION -

Does the examined group *subtract* from the person of the Lord Jesus Christ by making Him less "God" than His Father or by elevating man one day to become like Him?

x MULTIPLICATION x

Does the sect under consideration *multiply* the requirements for salvation by making works a necessary condition for redemption?

÷ DIVISION ÷

Does the religious group in question *divide* the loyalty of its members between God and itself and its leaders? Also does the sect make devotion to the organization a test of faith and consider adherence to itself the vehicle of salvation for the follower?

ADDING TO THE WORD OF GOD — Christians regard the Bible as the sole final authority in God's revelation to mankind and its meaning clear. While most cults will regard the Bible as the Word of God, a major pattern in these sects is their addition to the Word of God.

• *Jehovah's Witnesses* claim that one cannot understand the Bible without their publications. The May 1, 1957 *Watchtower* magazine states: "God has not arranged for that Word to speak independently or to shine forth life-giving truths by itself." (page 274).

• *Mormons* in their publication *The Pearl of Great Price* announce, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly." (page 64). The Mormons further regard their *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price* as more reliable Scriptures than the Bible.

• *The Unification Church* claims, in its *Divine Principle*, that "The Bible, however, is not the truth itself, but a textbook teaching the truth... we must not regard the textbook as absolute in every detail." (page 9).

• *Christian Scientists* believe that "a material and mortal sense stole into the divine record, with its own hue darkening to some extent the inspired pages." (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, page 139). Thus the writings of Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy are used to remove the hue that "darkens the inspired pages."

SUBTRACTING FROM THE PERSON OF CHRIST — The hallmark of the Christian faith is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament authors wrote, the Apostolic Fathers believed and the Church today affirms the Deity of Jesus Christ. A re-occurring major deviation from biblical Christianity, adhered to by the cults, is a defective Christology. Some sects attempt to have a "Jesus" who worked his way to Godhood, while others only give him the status of an angel.

• *Jehovah's Witnesses* claim that the Lord Jesus is not Almighty God, but rather may be called "a god" because of His divine-like qualities. *The Truth Shall Make You Free* states: "Being the only begotten Son of God and 'the firstborn of every creature,' the Word would be a prince among all other creatures. In this office he bore another name in heaven, which name is Michael." (page 49).

• *Mormons* appear to announce the Christian teaching that Jesus is God, however, a radical twist is presented. Namely that Jesus was both spiritually and physically begotten by God the Father. Jesus supposedly worked His way to Godhood as His Father before Him and as thousands will do after Him. *The Articles of Faith* states: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be." (page 430).

• *The Way International* emphatically makes known its Christology through the title of its founder's book, *Jesus Christ Is Not God*. This publication states that, "Jesus Christ is not God, but the Son of God. They are not 'co-eternal, without beginning or end, and co-equal.' Jesus Christ was not literally with God in the beginning; neither does he have all the assets of God." (page 5).

• *The Unification Church* also looks to a "Jesus" who is less than very God. Rev. Moon, in *The Divine Principle*, announces, "Jesus, being one body with God, may be called a second God (image of God), but he can by no means be God Himself." (page 211).

MULTIPLYING THE REQUIREMENTS FOR SALVATION —For the Christian, God's grace is the vehicle for salvation. The Bible declares, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*" (Ephesians 2:8,9). However, in the cults, works play a major role in achieving salvation.

The system of salvation for many of the major non-Christian groups can be better understood by the formula:

$$\text{FAITH} + \text{WORKS} = \text{SALVATION}$$

The Biblical plan can be described by the formula:

$$\text{FAITH} = \text{SALVATION} + \text{WORKS}$$

- *Mormons* achieve their ultimate salvation through a series of work-related actions. For a person to enter the highest degree of glory (where one becomes a "God") one must, in addition to faith and repentance, be baptized, tithe, perform temple duties, be married in a Mormon temple and rid from their life such things as the drinking of coffee and alcoholic beverages.
- *Jehovah's Witnesses* are taught to look to "anointed" brothers (and leaders) of its organization to gain eternal life (see *The Watchtower*, August 1, 1981, page 26). They must do this because the Watchtower has removed from them Christ's role as mediator. The April 1, 1979 *Watchtower* states: "*Jesus is the mediator only for anointed Christians.*" (page 31).
- *The Unification Church* employs a concept similar to the Hindu teaching of Karma. This "paying of indemnity" is stressed in *The Divine Principle and Its Application*, in stating that, "*God is constantly urging and inspiring man to pay off his debt quickly so that man can return to him.*" (page 48).
- *Christian Scientists* also disparage the atoning work of Christ. *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* announces: "*Final deliverance from error, whereby we rejoice in immortality, boundless freedom, and sinless sense, is not reached through paths of flowers nor by pinning one's faith without works to another's vicarious effort.*" (page 22).

DIVIDING THE FOLLOWER'S LOYALTY — A Christian's allegiance is to be directed to none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul instructs "*You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.*" (1 Corinthians 7:23). Those who are followers of the cults will be repeatedly required to divide their loyalty between their church and its leaders and God.

- *Jehovah's Witnesses* frequently utilize "double think" — that is saying one thing but meaning the opposite. The call for faith in God (see *The Watchtower* magazine cover, March 1, 1979) is overshadowed by the true nature of the Watchtower, namely placing one's faith in the Jehovah's Witness organization (see *The Watchtower* magazine cover, May 15, 1979). *The Watchtower* magazine for November 15, 1981, leaves little doubt as to the necessity of the organization for its followers by declaring that the mission of Jehovah's Witnesses "*includes the invitation to come to Jehovah's organization for salvation.*" (page 21).
- *Unification Church* followers are to direct their faith to Rev. Moon. Moon declares that Christ failed His complete mission while here on earth, and Moon himself has accepted to undertake this aborted messianic role. *The Unification*

Church's 120-Day Training Manual states, "This is salvation, in Unification Church. Through Father and Mother [meaning Moon and his wife], we can be born anew, sinlessly." (pages 41-42).

- Mormons direct their ultimate devotion to a church which declares all other churches or denominations as apostate and corrupt in their ways. Joseph Smith, Jr., founder of the Mormon Church, claimed to have sought of God as to which of all the churches was right. Smith then asserted that God the Father and God the Son appeared to him and instructed him that he "must join none of them, for they were all wrong... that all their creeds were an abomination... that those professors were all corrupt." (*The Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith — History 1:19).
- *The Way International* employs the same strategy of gaining allegiance through exclusive and direct communication with God. In *The Way Living In Love*, the late founder of The Way, Victor Paul Wierwille, declares that God singled him out and "spoke to me audibly... He said He would teach me the word as it had not been known since the first century if I would teach it to others." (page 178).

ADDITIONAL PATTERNS IN THE CULTS

- A recurring trend found within many cults is *speculation and date-setting*, particularly concerning the return of Christ. This enables the sect to be able to enlist new members or converts and also to gain stronger allegiance from its present followers.
- *Obscure biblical attention* through an authoritative and dogmatic stand on debatable or minor Bible issues that have no bearing on our salvation.
- *Financial exploitation* of followers by the cult that goes beyond the voluntary giving system of the New Testament to a coercive control of the member's finances. A price may be applied to healing, whether physical or spiritual, to spiritual progress, or to salvation itself.
- The *denial of eternal punishment* can become a leading attraction for the cults. The cultic trend is to deny the existence of hell directly by opting for annihilation or offering a second chance to unbelievers or proclaiming that God will in effect save everyone regardless of where one has placed his trust while on earth.
- Another pattern is the *fostering of paranoia* by citing one group or element of society as planning a conspiracy for world takeover. Also an isolationist attitude, that is an "us against the world" elitist stance taken by the group.
- A characteristic which has plagued many a cult group is that of *doctrinal changes*. Numerous groups have found shifts in theology to take place after the death of one leader and the replacement by the successor or have made alterations because of inner strife or outside social pressure.
- Ties to *spiritualistic practices* is another trait that may be found in several cults. Such activity includes clairvoyance, automatic writings, claimed angelic direction and alleged help in spiritual matters from departed loved ones.
- The uncertain or *ambiguous hope of salvation* is an additional deceptively clever device utilized by the cults. A person who never really has the certainty of possessing eternal life can be continually manipulated into striving for unrealizable goals. Fear becomes the motivator of one's actions.

For additional information write: North American Mission Board, SBC, Interfaith Evangelism,
4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176.

Contact Interfaith Evangelism via e-mail: interfaith@namb.net or at www.namb.net

Reprinted by permission from Personal Freedom Outreach, P.O. Box 26062, St. Louis, MO 63136

Occult Overview

INTRODUCTION

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *occult* as "relating to, or dealing with supernatural influences, agencies, or phenomena." The occult encompasses several philosophies and religious exercises that include physical and metaphysical energy accessible only to those with secret wisdom or power. It involves such practices as divination, *magick*, Satanism, spiritism, UFO cults, and witchcraft.

Most superstitions had their origin in occultic beliefs and practices. People who accept the occultic worldview regard superstitions such as stepping on cracks, breaking mirrors, and walking under ladders as signs of bad luck.

OCCULT DIVINATION

The American Heritage Dictionary defines divination as "the art or act of foretelling future events or revealing occult knowledge by means of augury or an alleged supernatural agency." Divination is the most widespread occultic practice.

Many different ways of divining the future are used by occult practitioners. Diviners use such techniques and paraphernalia as astrology, crystal gazing, Ouija™ Board, palm reading, runes, tarot cards, and tea leaves.

Astrology is the practice of interpreting the influence of the stars and planets upon people on earth. Using a horoscope, astrologers claim to predict the future. The horoscope is derived from the location of the sun and planets when the individual was born. Astrology

has been popular for thousands of years. Astrology in the West was strongly influenced by Babylon.

Crystal gazing involves the use of a crystal ball to predict the future. This practice is sometimes referred to as scrying. In addition to the use of crystal balls, a mirror or pool of water may also be used.

William Fuld patented the Ouija™ Board in 1892. It is the most popular game rooted in divination in America today. It includes a four-sided board with the words yes, no, and goodbye printed on it. In addition, the digits 0 through 9 plus the letters of the alphabet are also included. The players ask questions while their hands rest on the mobile pointer. The pointer's movement on the board produces the answer.

Palm reading, or palmistry, is the practice of divining a person's future by examining the lines of their hands. Advocates for palmistry often claim that it provides understanding into a person's character, personality, abilities, and personal relationships. The assertion is frequently made that the palm is the blueprint of one's life. Palmistry is closely linked with astrology by most of its practitioners.

The use of runes is a technique of divination that was popular in Germany. It entails the printing of the rune alphabet on blocks. The blocks are thrown and the letters are interpreted. Tarot is a form of foretelling that involves the use of a special deck of cards. There are 78 cards in the deck, each with a symbol that has a meaning when interpreted by

the card reader. Tea leaves are also sometimes read as a method of divining the future.

Many proponents of the occult argue that divination works even though it cannot be proven scientifically. Jean Dixon is often pointed to as proof of divination. She is credited with predicting President John Kennedy's assassination. Her accuracy, however, is less than astonishing when one examines all of her predictions. In 1965, for example, she predicted that "Russia will be the first nation to put a man on the moon, probably in about three years time." (Jean Dixon, *A Gift of Prophecy*, p. 186.)

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

The Bible warns believers against practicing divination. Leviticus 19:26 (NIV) warns, "Do not practice divination or sorcery." Deuteronomy 18:10-11 forbids any Israelite from engaging in divination. Second Kings 17:17 indicates that divination is one of the things that provokes the Lord to anger. No Christian should engage in any form of divination.

SPIRITUALISM

The American Heritage Dictionary defines "spiritualism" as "the belief that the dead communicate with the living, as through a medium." It is rooted in the belief that the spirits of the dead can communicate with the living through persons sensitive to the spirit world. Spiritualists believe that the spirits of the dead are able to offer aid and knowledge to the living.

Swedish philosopher and occultist Emmanuel Swedenborg claimed to communicate with the spirits of the dead. The New Jerusalem Church, founded by Swedenborg, brought his teachings to America in the late 1700s. John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed) spread his doctrine across early America.

Two young sisters, Margaret (age 15) and Katie (age 12) Fox, began the contemporary spiritualist movement.

The young girls complained of hearing strange knocking sounds in their house. They professed to have developed a code that allowed them to communicate with the spirit they claimed was making the strange noises. News of this event birthed modern spiritualism in 1848. Forty years later Margaret Fox admitted to reporters that the whole occurrence had been a fraud. Margaret demonstrated how she and her sister were able to produce loud knocking and cracking sounds by popping their knee and toe joints.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

The Bible warns believers against practicing spiritualism. Leviticus 19:31 warns that those who turn to mediums or spiritists will be defiled by them. Leviticus 20:6 says that God will turn against those who use mediums and spiritists. Leviticus 20:27 records that the punishment for any Israelite who practiced spiritualism was death by stoning. Spiritualism is one of the sins that 2 Kings 21:6 indicates is evil in the eyes of the Lord and that provokes God to anger.

OCCULT MAGICK AND WITCHCRAFT

The American Heritage Dictionary defines "Magic" as "1. The art that purports to control or forecast natural events, effects, or forces by invoking the supernatural. 2.a. The practice of using charms, spells, or rituals to attempt to produce supernatural effects or control events in nature. b. The charms, spells, and rituals so used. 3. The exercise of sleight of hand or conjuring for entertainment." Occult magick refers to the first two meanings and not to the third. Practitioners of occult magick add a "k" to the word "magic" to differentiate it from sleight of hand techniques or conjuring for amusement that makes no claim of supernatural powers. Occult magick is an attempt by the practitioner to manipulate the supernatural in order

to receive power or control.

Closely connected with occult magick is the practice of witchcraft. Witches often refer to themselves as the “old Religion” or “The Craft.” They claim that their religion dates back to prehistoric times. They often refer to themselves as “Wiccans.” The term comes from the Anglo-Saxon term for “wise ones”. Witchcraft is a nature religion that in many ways is similar to the fertility religions that the prophets in the Old Testament confronted. Witches deny that they believe in or worship the devil.

Many researchers credit Gerald B. Gardner (1884-1964) as the founder of contemporary witchcraft. Gardner was a student of the occult and used his occult research to originate modern witchcraft. In 1954, Gardner's book *Witchcraft Today* was published. His teachings promptly spread throughout Britain and North America. Gardner stressed nakedness in worship, but there is a lot of diversity in Wicca rituals. Many witches have started referring to themselves as neo-pagans. They call their group a nest, grove, or circle, rather than a coven.

Witches normally meet twice a month during the full and new moon. They celebrate four major and four minor sabbats. The four minor sabbats are the spring equinox (March 21), the fall equinox (September 21), Yule (December 21), and summer solstice (June 21). The four major sabbats are Samhain (Oct. 31), Imbolc or Candlemas (Feb. 2), Beltane (May 1), and Lammes (Aug. 1). These dates are approximate and vary year to year. It is thought that their origins relate to hunting, agriculture, and animal fertility.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

All forms of magic and witchcraft were prohibited in the Mosaic Law. “When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who

sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you” (Deut. 18:9-12, NIV).

Ezekiel 13:20 indicates that God is against magic charms. In Acts 19:19, Luke tells how those who trusted in Jesus took their books on magick and burned them publicly. Revelation 9:21 lists magical arts as one of the sins that people need to turn away from, while Revelation 21:8 says that those who practice magical arts will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

SATANISM

The biblical name “Satan” literally means “the adversary”. In the New Testament, it is used as interchangeable with *diabolos*, or the devil. Satanism is the darkest side of the occult. It involves a submission to Satan's will.

While there are many different types of Satanists, they can be divided into two main categories: self-styled Satanists, and religious Satanists. Some Satanists do not believe in a literal Satan but use Satan as a symbol of their opposition to the Christian God. Others believe that Satan exists and worship him as a god.

Self-styled Satanists are often young people, who are introduced to Satanism through listening to heavy metal music, or by watching movies that glamorize it. Heavy metal music is more influential in introducing young people to Satanism than books or movies. Songs that exalt abuse of women, anger, violence, aberrant sexual behavior, dying, and Satanism typify heavy metal music. Many young people will dabble in Satanism by reading books on it but never get involved in Satanic rituals.

Others will get so involved that they will go on to create their own self-styled form of Satanism. The groups that these self-styled Satanists form are very diverse and tend to borrow from many sources. They make up their beliefs and practices as they go. Much of the documented violence associated with satanic groups comes from self-styled Satanists.

Religious Satanists are members of formal satanic groups. Many of these religious Satanists do not believe in either God or Satan. Anton LaVey, the founder of the Church of Satan, claimed that he did not believe in the existence of a literal Satan. He asserted that Satan is a symbol of humanity's ego, lust, and greed. LaVey rejected the existence of sin, heaven, hell, life after death, and anything supernatural.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

The Bible warns Christians that they are involved in spiritual warfare against the forces of Satan. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12, NIV).

The Bible also informs us that Jesus Christ by His death and resurrection has already overcome Satan. The reason Jesus came to earth was to destroy the devil's work (see 1 John 3:8). Jesus

attained a conclusive victory over Satan on the cross of Calvary (see Col. 2:15). The Christian has the power to resist Satan's temptations (see 1 Cor. 10:13; James 4:7). Satan will spend eternity in the lake of burning sulfur where he will "be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10, NIV).

WITNESSING TO PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE OCCULT

Determine the degree of the person's involvement in the occult. Many people are dabblers without any commitment to the occult world.

Talk with the person to discover the needs and problems they are facing. Many get involved in the occult because they believe it can help them solve life's difficulties. Share with them that faith in Jesus Christ is the only answer to the spiritual difficulties they face.

Stress the authority and victory of Christ over the occult world and His power over Satan (see Mark 9:14-29; Luke 4:33-36). Christ offers victory over Satan and the occult powers to all who will believe in Him and trust Him as their Lord and Savior (see Rom. 8:35-39; Eph. 6:11-17).

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you share the good news of deliverance through faith in Jesus Christ.

Revised by Bill Gordon.

Bill Gordon, Associate Director, Interfaith Evangelism Team
© 1999 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use. All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, SBC.

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983



4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information, call (770) 410-6000; to order materials, call Customer Service Center,
1 800 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

0840086334/5M/399

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC
e-mail: interfaith@namb.net

Cult/Sect Overview

Interfaith Evangelism

BELIEF BULLETIN

Cults, Sects, and New Religious Movements

Americans and Canadians have seen much in the media in recent decades about the phenomena of cults and sects. The tragic mass suicide of the People's Temple in Guyana, the horrific flaming destruction of the Branch Davidians in Texas, the self-destruction of the oddball members of Heaven's Gate in California, and the deadly collapse of the Solar Temple in Quebec have shocked North Americans into a realization that many Americans and Canadians are deeply involved in strange and dangerous religious movements.

Christians especially have become more aware of this growing situation. However, most do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes a cult or a sect, or know how to determine if a religious movement or church is authentically Christian.

This belief bulletin describes characteristics of cults and sects, and highlights principles for evaluating a religious movement's authenticity. It also provides specific guidelines for witnessing to people in cults and sects.

WHAT IS A CULT OR SECT?

Different definitions of the terms "cult" and "sect" are used by researchers, writers, and speakers in various fields of study. Most secular experts rely primarily on sociological, psychological, or behavioral factors and usually do not

consider doctrinal or theological issues when evaluating specific religious movements.

Christian discernment ministries, however, normally begin with a careful examination of a group's stated doctrinal beliefs before considering other significant factors. They usually agree that the following are common characteristics of movements designated cults or sects.

Cults or sects are religious movements, churches, or other organizations that have all or some of the following characteristics:

- 1. Cults and sects usually claim to be biblically-based, Christian organizations.** For example, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) maintains that it is a Christian church centered on Christ and His teachings. The Christian Science church also often refers to itself as a Christian movement.
- 2. All cults deny or redefine any or all essential Christian doctrines.** Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, absolutely deny the deity of Jesus Christ. The LDS redefines the Trinity to mean the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate personages or gods.
- 3. Sects may adhere officially to essential Christian teachings while exhibiting other of these characteristics.** The International

Church of Christ, for example, adheres to traditional views about God and Christ, but members regard their movement as the only one proclaiming the true message of salvation today.

4. Cults and sects usually claim to be led by divinely inspired leaders.

They usually believe their leaders are capable of receiving direct revelation from God or have a special, inspired understanding of the Bible. One example is Rev. Sun Myung Moon, founder and leader of the Unification Church. His followers regard him as "Lord of the Second Advent," a position equal to that of Christ. The LDS believes its president is a "living prophet, seer, and revelator" who can receive direct revelation from God.

5. Cults and sects usually claim to possess a new and inspired written scripture that supplements or supersedes the authority of the Bible. Christian Science teaches that Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* is an inspired adjunct to the Bible. Likewise, Scientologists regard the writings of L. Ron Hubbard as the works of a genius who discovered the keys to understanding life and death.

6. Cults and sects usually claim to be the only true (or most true) church in the world. Full salvation is said to be found only by membership in the movement. Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, regard all other religious organizations as devoid of truth. In their view, only their Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has the truth that leads to eternal life. The LDS teaches that eternal life (exaltation) can

be achieved only by being a baptized member of the LDS church.

PRINCIPLES FOR EVALUATING RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

In light of these characteristics, mature and discerning Christians (see Heb. 5:14) should ask the following questions when they encounter unfamiliar religious movements.

1. What is the source of the movement's authority for doctrine and practice? Do members rely on the Bible alone or add some other book(s) that is equal to or supersedes its authority? Do they depend only on a special leader or leaders to interpret the Bible for them?
2. Does the movement clearly affirm basic historic Christian teachings? What do its leaders believe about the nature of God, the person and work of Christ, and plan of salvation?
3. What is the movement's attitude toward other Bible-believing, Christian groups? Do its leaders view them with any degree of suspicion, or rejection? Do they insist you must be a member of their group to be assured of salvation? Also, does the movement regard people who leave or wish to leave the organization with scorn or good will?
4. How does the movement explain the way of salvation? Do its leaders affirm salvation by grace through Christ alone, or is it by works, church membership, or obedience to the group's leaders?

The answers to the above questions can help sincere Christians evaluate the truth and motives of most religious movements. In any case, Christians should develop cautious relationships with religions they do not understand.

MAJOR CULTS AND SECTS IN NORTH AMERICA

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)
Jehovah's Witnesses
United Pentecostal Church (Oneness Pentecostalism)
Unitarian Universalist Association
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS)
Christian Science
Unity School of Christianity
International Church of Christ
The Way International
Church of Scientology International
Baha'i Faith
Nation of Islam

WITNESSING TO PEOPLE IN CULTS AND SECTS:

1. Have a clear understanding of the biblical basis of historic Christian doctrine. Focus particularly on biblical teachings about the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the plan of salvation, and life after death.
2. Take the initiative in the witnessing encounter and seek to develop a friendly relationship with the person in the cult or sect. Remember, you are sharing Christ with a person, not just debating a movement's doctrine.
3. Listen carefully to determine how committed the person is to the cult or sect and its teachings.
4. Establish the sole authority of the Bible. Be aware of how cults and sects may misuse the Bible, often quoting verses out of context or using symbolic meanings.
5. Define all terms clearly. Remember, cults and sects often redefine standard Christian or biblical terms to accommodate their preconceived doctrines. Explain carefully what you mean by the words you use and ask the person in the cult or sect to do the same.
6. Focus on basic issues and do not get side-tracked with secondary issues or defending your denomination.
7. Share your testimony of faith in Jesus Christ. Describe your salvation experience and relationship with Christ in personal terms. Center on God's grace as shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Avoid emphasizing emotional feelings, but focus on your assurance of eternal life through Christ.
8. Explain carefully the biblical plan of salvation. Emphasize the following points:
 - (1) God's desire is that all people have eternal life (see Rom. 6:23b; John 3:16, 10:10, 14:3).
 - (2) People have a problem which is sin (see Rom. 3:23, 6:23a).
 - (3) God's only provision for sin is Jesus Christ (see John 1:1,14; Rom. 4:25; 1 Pet. 3:18).
 - (4) Each person must repent of his or her sin and by faith receive Jesus as his or her Lord and Savior (see John 1:12; Acts 3:19, 26:20; Eph. 2:8,9).
9. Pray earnestly, be patient, and trust the Holy Spirit to lead you in your witnessing to people in cults and sects.

Tal Davis, Associate, Interfaith Evangelism

© 1998, North American Mission Board, of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use. All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, SBC, 4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176; or call, (770) 410-6292; or fax, (770) 410-6006; or send to *permissions@namb.net*

For more copies, order 084008952X from
Customer Service Center
1 800 448-8032, or fax, (615) 251-5983



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
NAMB

4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®

084008952X/15M/2-00

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC
e-mail: *interfaith@namb.net*
Web site: *www.namb.net*

Buddhism

World Religions

FOUNDER: Siddhartha Gautama, a prince from northern India near modern Nepal who lived about 563-483 B.C.

SCRIPTURES: Various, but the oldest and most authoritative are compiled in the Pali Canon.

ADHERENTS: 613 million worldwide; 1 million in the United States.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION: Buddhism is the belief system of those who follow the Buddha, the Enlightened One, a title given to its founder. The religion has evolved into three main schools:

1. Theravada or the Doctrine of the Elders (38%) is followed in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia (Kampuchea), and Vietnam.
2. Mahayana or the Greater Vehicle (56%) is strong in China, Korea, and Japan.
3. Vajrayana, also called Tantrism or Lamaism, (6%) is rooted in Tibet, Nepal, and Mongolia. Theravada is closest to the original doctrines. It does not treat the Buddha as deity and regards the faith as a worldview—not a type of worship. Mahayana has accommodated many different beliefs and worships the Buddha as a god. Vajrayana has added elements of shamanism and the occult and includes taboo breaking (intentional immorality) as a means of spiritual enlightenment.

GROWTH IN THE UNITED STATES:

Buddhists regard the United States as a prime mission field, and the number of Buddhists in this country is growing rapidly due to surges in Asian immigration, endorsement by celebrities such as Tina Turner and Richard Gere, and positive exposure in major movies such as *Siddhartha*, *The Little Buddha*, and *What's Love Got to Do with It?* Buddhism is closely related to the New Age Movement and may to some extent be driving it. Certainly Buddhist growth is benefiting from the influence of New Age thought on American life.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND:

Buddhism was founded as a form of atheism that rejected more ancient beliefs in a permanent, personal, creator God (Ishvara) who controlled the

eternal destiny of human souls. Siddhartha Gautama rejected more ancient theistic beliefs because of difficulty he had over reconciling the reality of suffering, judgment, and evil with the existence of a good and holy God.

CORE BELIEFS: Buddhism is an impersonal religion of self-perfection, the end of which is death (extinction)—not life. The essential elements of the Buddhist belief system are summarized in the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and several additional key doctrines. The Four Noble Truths affirm that (1) life is full of suffering (*dukkha*); (2) suffering is caused by craving (*samsara*); (3) suffering will cease only when craving ceases (*nirodha*); and (4) this can be achieved by following the Noble Eightfold Path consisting

of right views, right aspiration, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right contemplation. Other key doctrines include belief that nothing in life is permanent (*anicca*), that individual selves do not truly exist (*anatta*), that all is determined by an impersonal law of moral causation (*karma*), that reincarnation is an endless cycle of continuous suffering, and that the goal of life is to break out of this cycle by finally extinguishing the flame of life and entering a permanent state of pure nonexistence (*nirvana*).

BRIDGES FOR EVANGELIZING

BUDDHISTS: The gospel can be appealing to Buddhists if witnessing focuses on areas of personal need where the Buddhist belief system is weak. Some major areas include:

Suffering: Buddhists are deeply concerned with overcoming suffering but must deny that suffering is real. Christ faced the reality of suffering and overcame it by solving the problem of sin, which is the real source of suffering. Now, those who trust in Christ can rise above suffering in this life because they have hope of a future life free of suffering. "We fix our eyes not on what is seen [suffering], but on what is unseen [eternal life free of suffering]. For what is seen [suffering] is temporary, but what is unseen [future good life with Christ] is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18, NIV).

Meaningful Self: Buddhists must work to convince themselves they have no personal significance, even though they live daily as though they do. Jesus taught that each person has real significance. Each person is made in God's image with an immortal soul and an eternal destiny. Jesus demonstrated the value of people by loving us so much that He sacrificed His life in order to offer eternal future good life to anyone who trusts Him. "God demonstrates his

own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NIV).

Future Hope: The hope of nirvana is no hope at all—only death and extinction. The hope of those who put their trust in Christ is eternal good life in a "new heaven and new earth" in which God "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things [suffering] has passed [will pass] away" (Rev. 21:4, NIV).

Moral Law: Because karma, the Buddhist law of moral cause and effect, is completely rigid and impersonal, life for a Buddhist is very oppressive. Under karma, there can be no appeal, no mercy, and no escape except through unceasing effort at self-perfection. Christians understand that the moral force governing the universe is a personal God who listens to those who pray, who has mercy on those who repent, and who with love personally controls for good the lives of those who follow Christ. "In all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom. 8:28, NIV).

Merit: Buddhists constantly struggle to earn merit by doing good deeds, hoping to collect enough to break free from the life of suffering. They also believe saints can transfer surplus merit to the underserving. Jesus taught no one can ever collect enough merit on his own to earn everlasting freedom from suffering. Instead, Jesus Christ, who has unlimited merit (righteousness) by virtue of his sinless life, meritorious death, and resurrection, now offers His unlimited merit as a free gift to anyone who will become His disciple. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9, NIV).

Desire: Buddhists live a contradiction—they seek to overcome suffering by rooting out desire, but at the same time they cultivate desire for self-control, meritorious life, and nirvana. Christians are consistent—we seek to reject evil desires and cultivate good desires according to the standard of Christ. “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22, NIV).

JESUS AND THE EIGHTFOLD PATH:

PATH: Because Buddhists think a good life consists of following the Eightfold Path, the stages of the path can be used to introduce them to Christ as follows:

Right views: Jesus is the way the truth and the life (John 14:6), and there is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12).

Right aspiration: Fights and quarrels come from selfish desires and wrong motives (Jas. 4:1-3); right desires and motives honor God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Right speech: A day of judgment is coming when God will hold men accountable for every careless word they have spoken (Matt. 12:36).

Right conduct: The one who loves Jesus must obey Him (John 14:21), and those who live by God's wisdom will produce good acts/fruit (Jas. 3:17).

Right livelihood: God will care for those who put Him first (Matt. 6:31,33), and all work must be done for God's approval (2 Tim. 2:15).

Right effort: Like runners in a race, followers of Christ must throw off every hindrance in order to give Him their best efforts (Heb. 12:1-2).

Right mindfulness: The sinful mind cannot submit to God's law (Rom. 8:7),

and disciples of Christ must orient their minds as He did (Phil. 2:5).

Right contemplation: The secret of true success, inner peace, self-control, and lasting salvation is submission to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and setting your heart and mind on things above where He now sits in glory waiting to bring the present order of sin and suffering to an end (Col. 3:1-4).

WHEN WITNESSING TO BUDDHISTS:

1. Avoid terms such as “new birth,” “rebirth,” “regeneration,” or “born again.” Use alternatives such as “endless freedom from suffering, guilt, and sin,” “new power for living a holy life,” “promise of eternal good life without suffering,” or “gift of unlimited merit.”
2. Emphasize the uniqueness of Christ.
3. Focus on the gospel message and do not get distracted by details of Buddhist doctrine.
4. Understand Buddhist beliefs enough to discern weaknesses that can be used to make the gospel appealing (see “Bridges for Evangelizing Buddhists” and “Jesus and the Eightfold Path”)
5. While using bridge concepts (see “Bridges for Evangelizing Buddhists”) be careful not to reduce Christian truth to a form of Buddhism. Buddhism has been good at accommodating other religions. Do not say “Buddhism is good, but Christianity is easier.”
6. Share your own testimony, especially your freedom from guilt, assurance of heaven (no more pain), and personal relationship with Christ.
7. Prepare with prayer. Do not witness in your own strength.

Daniel R. Heimbach, Associate Professor of Christain Ethics,
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible New International Version*.
Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

© 1996 Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for personal use.
All other inquiries should be addressed to: Director, Editing Department, Home Mission Board, SBC.

For more copies, order 363-64F from
Customer Services
Home Mission Board, SBC
call 1 800 634-2462
or fax 1 800 253-2823

HHB
HOME MISSION BOARD, SBC
4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30202-4174

For more information
on this subject or other
Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Witness Department
Home Mission Board, SBC

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

International Churches of Christ

OFFICIAL NAMES: The International Churches of Christ (IOCC). Also known as The International Church of Christ. (Formerly known as The Boston Church of Christ or Boston Movement.) Local congregations are usually designated by the community's name. Two examples are the Atlanta Church of Christ and the Nashville Church of Christ.

FOUNDER AND CURRENT LEADER: Kip McKean (born May 31, 1954, Indianapolis, Ind.)

CHURCH ELDERS: Kip McKean, Bob Gempel, Al Baird

WORLD SECTOR LEADERS (1999): Tom McCurry, Jim Blough, Vivian Hanes, Dan Bathon, Chris Jacobs, Don Lee, Jaime DeAnda

WORLD HEADQUARTERS: International Churches of Christ, 3530 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1750, Los Angeles, CA 90010, (213) 385-5434. Web site: www.icoc.org

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS: In 1998, the IOCC claimed 175,000 people in weekly worship attendance in 333 churches in 140 countries worldwide.

MINISTRIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE IOCC: *UpsideDown Magazine*; Discipleship Publications International (DPI); Kingdom News Network (KNN); HOPE for Children, Inc. (Adoption Agency); Kingdom Kids; HOPE Worldwide; RADICAL Christian Rock Band.

INTRODUCTION

One of the fastest growing new religious groups in the United States, Canada, and around the world is the International Churches of Christ (IOCC) movement. For two decades, religious observers have watched this offshoot sect of the mainline Churches of Christ grow from only 30 original members to tens of thousands of adherents.

Much has been published and said in the media about the IOCC's doctrine and practices. Consequently, the church has earned a reputation both in secular and religious circles as controversial and even at times abusive. NAMB Interfaith Evangelism has received hundreds of inquiries from pastors, parents, and relatives of people who have fallen under the IOCC's sway.

This Belief Bulletin examines the history and controversial beliefs of the IOCC. It provides a biblical analysis of the IOCC doctrine and suggests specific principles for encountering and/or evangelizing IOCC members.

SHORT HISTORY OF IOCC

In the spring of 1972, 17-year-old Kip McKean was a freshman at the University of Florida. Though mildly religious, it was not until he was baptized that year into Gainesville's dynamic Crossroads Church of Christ that McKean says his life truly changed.

After three years of intense discipleship by

Crossroads ministers and his graduation from college in 1975, McKean went to serve as a Churches of Christ campus minister at Northeastern Christian College in Philadelphia, Pa. Disturbed by the lack of commitment of the school's students and faculty, he left the next year to begin a ministry at Eastern Illinois University. That campus ministry grew under McKean's charismatic leadership. Nonetheless, he felt a growing disenchantment with what he saw as the shallow spiritual condition of most mainline Churches of Christ.

In 1979, the Lexington (Massachusetts) Church of Christ invited McKean to serve as pulpit and campus minister of their shrinking congregation. In June of that year, McKean and 29 others in Lexington committed themselves to restoring true biblical Christianity, as they saw it, to the world. IOCC leaders point to that event as the foundation of their "restoration" movement.

The next few years, McKean and his team developed their philosophy of radical discipleship and designed an effective strategy for expansion, which they called the "key" or "pillar" plan for church planting. Thus, over the next two decades, the church grew rapidly as ministers were sent from the mother church to cities worldwide including London, Chicago, New York City, Toronto, and Moscow. In 1983, McKean's church began to hold regular services in the spacious Boston Opera House, so it changed its name to

the Boston Church of Christ. About that time, McKean also began to teach that only those who were baptized by immersion and were submitting to his concept of discipleship were actually saved. Thus, he required all new members of his movement, even those coming from other Churches of Christ, to be rebaptized.

Early in the Boston movement, leaders from many Churches of Christ visited the Boston Church of Christ to learn its techniques of discipling and missions. However, criticism grew due to disagreements over church organization and what many perceived to be the Boston Church's of Christ heavy-handed approach. McKean and his movement gradually disassociated from the mainline Churches of Christ. In 1988, the final cord was cut when the Crossroads Church of Christ in Gainesville, where McKean began his ministry, formally broke fellowship with his church.

The Boston movement continued to expand internationally, so in 1990, the church decided to move the headquarters from Boston to Los Angeles, Calif. McKean turned over leadership of the mother church to his brother Randy McKean, moved to the West Coast, and the next year officially named the movement The International Churches of Christ.

AUTHORITY

The ICOC's statement of belief declares, "The Bible is the only written message of God inspired by the Holy Spirit and without error (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21)." (From ICOC Web site: www.icoc.org/who/whatbelieve.html, 1/22/99.)

Kip McKean states that all scripture is inspired by God and is to be applied to people's lives. He says it is relevant and it is to be compared to a scalpel that cuts out a cancer (sin) (Heb. 4:12,13). He also declares that the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible, that there is no private interpretation of it, and that unbiblical traditions and creeds are to be rejected (Matt. 15:1-9). (ICOC Web site: www.icoc.org/who/bible/bible.html, 1/22/99.)

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

The ICOC and Kip McKean's concept of biblical authority is shared by most evangelical Christians. Indeed the Bible alone is our final written authority for faith and practice. However, the ICOC violates the standard of "no private interpretation" by requiring its members to reject all reasonable interpretations of many Bible passages *except* those of Kip McKean and the ICOC.

JESUS CHRIST IS LORD

The ICOC rejects the historic creeds of the Christian faith, arguing, as do many cults and sects, that true Christianity was distorted and even lost in the early centuries of the New Testament era. Thus, they avoid as much as possible utilizing theological language or concepts not found specifically in the Bible.

The ICOC apparently is, nonetheless, in agreement with orthodox historic Christian doctrinal views on the nature of God (the Trinity), the deity and humanity of Christ, His sacrificial atonement, and the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; John 1:1-14; 5:17-18; 8:56-59; 10:30-33; 14:16; 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 13:14; Col. 1:15-20; 2:9; 1 Pet. 1:2).

SALVATION: DISCIPLE = CHRISTIAN = SAVED

The ICOC maintains, as do other historic Christian groups, that mankind is corrupted by sin and is lost and bound for eternal separation from God in hell. However, unlike most evangelicals, the ICOC rejects the concepts of salvation by grace through faith in Christ *alone*. The ICOC maintains that faith in Christ is necessary, but it is only one of the several ingredients in the salvation process listed below.

ONLY DISCIPLES ARE CHRISTIANS

The ICOC argues in its literature that salvation is only available to those who are deemed "disciples." Kip McKean states in his "First Principles" Bible studies that Jesus demands his followers be "disciples" and that the term "Christian" is only applicable to those who are true disciples. True disciples are those who have consciously abandoned all other allegiances to that of commitment to Christ alone, as McKean understands it.

Key elements of true discipleship, according to McKean, are total denial of self, baptism for the remission of sins, acceptance of persecution (even from family or friends), the practice of biblical stewardship (tithing), and above all, unquestioning submission to the ICOC church authority. Every new prospect and member is assigned a discipler by church leaders with whom they must speak daily. ICOC "disciples" are expected to confess all known sins (past and present) to their discipler and to submit all major decisions for them to counsel. The ICOC warns its members that willfully to disobey their discipler or to break fellowship with the movement puts them in danger of losing their salvation and going to hell.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

Certainly Christians are required to follow Jesus' requirements for discipleship. However, the ICOC's understanding of that term goes beyond the biblical perspective. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. (Eph. 2:8,9). The notion that every believer, in order to be assured of salvation, must submit to human authority violates the New Testament teaching of the priesthood of all believers and the direction of the believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:7-16; 1 Pet. 2:5,9). The ICOC's claim to exclusive church authority is presumptuous and arrogant at best, and blasphemous at worst.

BAPTISM: NECESSARY FOR FORGIVENESS OF SIN

The ICOC, in historic agreement with the mainline Churches of Christ, maintains that the New Testament requires baptism by immersion for the remission (forgiveness) of sins to be saved. However, unlike most Church of Christ congregations, they require baptisms exclusively under the auspices of one of their congregations.

Kip McKean denies he teaches that one must be baptized into the ICOC to be saved. Nevertheless, he states, "However, I do not know of any other church, group, or movement that teaches and practices what we teach as Jesus taught in Acts 2:41-42: One must make the decision to be a disciple, then be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins to be saved and receive the Holy Spirit." (Kip McLean, "Revolution Through Restoration" on ICOC Web site: www.cico.org/who/REVOLUTION1/boston.html, 1/12/99.)

In other words, it would seem only those baptisms performed by ICOC ministers are deemed valid. Baptisms performed by other denominations and even those performed by other Churches of Christ are not regarded as valid. Only a true "disciple" is a legitimate candidate for baptism; and since the only true "disciples" are in the ICOC, then only those baptized in the ICOC are baptized correctly. Thus, logically, only ICOC members are saved.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

Perhaps no issue has separated Churches of Christ from other evangelical and Protestant denominations than that of baptism. Though they deny a sacramental understanding of baptism, the traditional Churches of Christ's doctrine (and that of the ICOC) is that baptism by immersion, in addition to faith in Jesus Christ, is necessary for a person to be saved (for a biblical response to this view of baptism see *Interfaith Evangelism Belief Bulletin: Churches of Christ* by Bill Gordon [ISBN: 084008634]). (See also: Hershel H. Hobbs, *The*

Baptist Faith and Message, Nashville: Convention Press, p. 72-75, 1997).

The ICOC contention that only those involved in its congregations are true disciples is without biblical justification. No one church or organization can claim exclusive identification as the kingdom of God or the only possessor of saving grace. All those who have sincerely repented of their sins and received the forgiveness of their sin by grace through faith in Christ and His atoning work are His disciples and are justified (saved) (John 1:12; Acts 3:19; Rom. 6:23; 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8-10). Those who have genuinely received Christ are assured of salvation and will endure to the end (John 10:28-29; Eph. 1:13-14; Col. 3:5; 2 Tim. 1:12).

POTENTIAL ABUSES OF ICOC DISCIPLING METHODS

The ICOC method of discipling is similar strategically to those employed by many evangelical churches and parachurch ministries. However, the strict requirement that each disciple obey his or her assigned personal discipler creates an environment for potential spiritual, physical, and/or emotional abuse.

Indeed, many former ICOC members have reported that while a part of this movement, they felt they were under great psychological pressure to conform to the standards and doctrines of the ICOC. Intimidation, harassment, and even threats of eternal damnation are used to control members who may either disagree with ICOC teachings or who fail to measure up to its legalistic moral standards, time demands, and financial expectations.

RESPONDING TO AND EVANGELIZING THOSE IN THE ICOC

Christians who encounter members of the ICOC are told that they are not true disciples of Christ, not properly baptized, and not truly saved. As a result, Christians need to be prepared to respond to ICOC contentions and be ready to give a clear presentation of the biblical gospel to ICOC members. Many ICOC members are trusting in their baptism and/or church association for salvation rather than Jesus Christ alone.

Here are several specific principles for response:

1. Understand your own faith and the Bible.

Christians need to have a clear comprehension of the biblical basis of Christian doctrines. Doctrines that should be studied particularly relative to the ICOC are salvation by grace, baptism, eternal security, the church, and stewardship.

2. Reject unbalanced ICOC disciplining methods.

Discipleship ministries abound, but before committing to the ICOC or any other of them, a Christian should ask several important questions:

- A. Does each person have the freedom to make decisions for himself or herself under the leadership of the Holy Spirit?
- B. Are disagreements on doctrinal issues tolerated?
- C. Is more than one interpretation of biblical passages tolerated?
- D. Is study of a variety of materials encouraged or utilized, or is only one author's, organization's, or publisher's works utilized or permitted?
- E. Do the disciplining leaders have servant attitudes or seek to control their disciples?
- F. Are family relationships enhanced or are those involved expected to place the movement and its demands above all family concerns?

3. Love and respect for those in the ICOC.

No doubt, many people in the ICOC are sincere and dedicated followers of Christ. Unfortunately, they have been misled to assume that the ICOC is the only valid expression of the Christian faith.

Christians should respectfully reject the unbiblical teachings of the ICOC while, as much as possible, maintaining a relationship of Christian love with those involved in it. Though ICOC members may reject them as their brothers and sisters in Christ, Christians

have no basis to reciprocate. We must reach out in love regardless of the response.

4. Determine the spiritual condition of one involved in the ICOC.

Though many involved in the ICOC are true Christians, many are not. We must seek to determine the basis of each ICOC member's hope of salvation. We should seek answers to the following questions of our ICOC friends.

- A. Is he or she depending entirely on Christ for salvation, or on baptism and church membership?
- B. Can he or she relate a clear testimony on his or her experience of knowing Christ as personal Lord and Savior?

If the answer to either of these is unclear, the Christian should share his or her own testimony and explain clearly the gospel of salvation, including the need for repentance, trusting in Christ as Lord, and receiving salvation by grace through faith in Him alone (John 1:12; 14:6; Acts 3:19; 26:20; Rom. 3:23; 10:9,10; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 2:9,10).

5. Be prepared to minister to those exiting the ICOC.

Each year hundreds of disillusioned people withdraw from the ICOC. Christians should be alert to those in their communities either wanting to leave or who have already done so. Encouragement and biblical teaching on the assurance of God's love can help former members make the difficult adjustment to life outside the ICOC movement and to positive faith in Jesus Christ.

Written by Tal Davis, Associate, Interfaith Evangelism

© 2000 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use. All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Pkwy, Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176; or call, (770) 410-6258; or fax (770) 410-6006; or e-mail permissions@namb.net

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 448-8032, or fax, (615) 251-5983



4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC
e-mail: interfaith@namb.net
Web site: www.namb.net

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®
0840089643/15M/2/00

Interfaith Evangelism

BELIEF BULLETIN

Hinduism

ORIGIN: India, about 1500 B.C. to 2500 B.C.

FOUNDER: No single person

ADHERENTS: 1998 Worldwide: 825-850 million, India: 780 million, Bangladesh: 20 million, Nepal 20 million, Indonesia 7 million, Sri Lanka 3 million, Pakistan: 2 million. In Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius, Surinam, and Trinidad and Tobago, over 20 percent of their people practice Hinduism. A considerable number of Hindus live in African Continent, Myanmar, and the United Kingdom.

USA: Estimated 1.5 to 2 million

SCRIPTURES: *Vedas, Upanishads, epics, Puranas,* and *The Bhagavad Gita* explain the essence of Hinduism.

Hinduism is the world's oldest living organized religion. It is a complex family of sects whose copious scriptures, written over a period of almost 2,000 years (1500 B.C.-A.D. 250), allow a diverse belief system. Hinduism has no single creed and recognizes no final truth. At its core, Hinduism has a pagan background in which the forces of nature and human heroes are personified as gods and goddesses. They are worshiped with prayers and offerings. Hinduism can be divided into Popular Hinduism, characterized by the worship of gods, through offerings, rituals, and prayers; and Philosophical Hinduism, the complex belief system understood by those who can study ancient texts, meditate, and practice yoga.

GOD: God (*Brahman*) is the one impersonal, ultimate, but unknowable, spiritual Reality. Sectarian Hinduism personalizes Brahman as *Brahma* (Creator, with four heads symbolizing creative energy), *Vishnu* (Preserver, the god of stability and control), and *Shiva* (Destroyer, god of endings). Most Hindus worship two

of Vishnu's 10 mythical incarnations: *Krishna* and *Rama*. On special occasions, Hindus may worship other gods, as well as family and individual deities. Hindus claim that there are 330 million gods. In Hinduism, belief in astrology, evil spirits, and curses also prevails.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: If God (Ultimate Reality) is impersonal, then the impersonal must be greater than the personal. Our life experiences reveal that the personal is of more value than the impersonal. Even Hindus treat their children as having more value than a rock in a field.

The Bible teaches that God is personal and describes Him as having personal attributes. The Bible regularly describes God in ways used to describe human personality. God talks, rebukes, feels, becomes angry, is jealous, laughs, loves, and even has a personal name (Gen. 1:3; 6:6, 12; Ex. 3:15; 16:12; 20:5; Lev. 20:23; Deut. 5:9; 1 Sam. 26:19; Pss. 2:4; 59:9; Hos. 1:8-9; Amos 9:4; Zeph. 3:17). The Bible also warns Christians to avoid all forms of idolatry

(Gen. 35:2; Ex. 23:13; Josh. 23:7; Ezek. 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:20). No idol or pagan deity is a representation of the true God. They are all false deities and must be rejected.

CREATION: Hindus accept various forms of pantheism and reject the Christian doctrine of creation. According to Hinduism, Brahman alone exists; everything is ultimately an illusion (*maya*). God emanated itself to cause the illusion of creation. There is no beginning or conclusion to creation, only endless repetitions or cycles of creation and destruction. History has little value since it is based on an illusion.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Christianity affirms the reality of the material world and the genuineness of God's creation. The Bible declares that all is not God. God is present in His creation but He is not to be confused with it. The Bible teaches that in the beginning God created that which was not God (Gen. 1:1ff; Heb 11:3). The Bible contradicts pantheism by teaching creation rather than pantheistic emanation. The Bible issues strong warnings to those who confuse God with His creation (Rom. 1:22-23). God created the world at a definite time and will consummate His creation (2 Pet. 2:12-13). Christianity is founded upon the historical event of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ (John 1:1-14).

MAN: The eternal soul (*atman*) of man is a manifestation or "spark" of Brahman mysteriously trapped in the physical body. *Samsara*, repeated lives or reincarnations are required before the soul can be liberated (*moksha*) from the body. An individual's present life is determined by the law of *karma* (actions, words, and thoughts in previous lifetimes). The physical body is ultimately an illusion (*maya*) with little inherent or permanent worth. Bodies

generally are cremated, and the eternal soul goes to an intermediate state of punishment or reward before rebirth in another body. Rebirths are experienced until karma has been removed to allow the soul's re-absorption into Brahman.

CHRISTIAN REPSONSE: People are created in God's image (Gen. 12:7). The body's physical resurrection and eternal worth are emphasized in John 2:18-22 and 1 Corinthians 15. The Bible declares, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:27-28, KJV). Since we only die once, reincarnation cannot be true. Instead of reincarnation, the Bible teaches resurrection (John 5:25). At death, Christians enjoy a state of conscious fellowship with Christ (Matt. 22:32; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23) to await the resurrection and heavenly reward. A person's eternal destiny is determined by his or her acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (John 3:36; Rom. 10:9-10).

SIN: Hindus have no concept of rebellion against a Holy God. Ignorance of unity with Brahman, desire, and violation of *dharma*, (one's social duty) are humanity's problems.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Sin is not ignorance of unity with Brahman, but is rather a willful act of rebellion against God and His commandments (Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 1:28-32; 2:1-16; 3:9, 19; 11:32; Gal. 3:22; 1 John 1:8-10). The Bible declares, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of god" (Rom. 3:32, NIV).

SALVATION: There is no clear concept of salvation in Hinduism. *Moksha* (freedom from infinite being and self-hood and final self-realization of the truth), is the goal of existence. *Yoga* and meditation (especially

raja-yoga) taught by a *guru* (religious teacher) is one way to attain *moksha*. The other valid paths for *moksha* are: the way of works (*karma marga*), the way of knowledge (*jnana marga*), or the way of love and devotion (*bhakti marga*). Hindus hope to eventually get off the cycle of reincarnation. They believe the illusion of personal existence will end and they will become one with the impersonal God.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Salvation is a gift from God through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-10). Belief in reincarnation opposes the teaching of the Bible (Heb. 9:27). The Christian hope of eternal life means that all true believers in Christ will not only have personal existence but personal fellowship with God. It is impossible to earn one's salvation by good works (Titus 3:1-7). Religious deeds and exercises cannot save (Matt. 7:22-23; Rom 9:32; Gal. 2:16; Eph 2:8-9).

WORSHIP: Hindu worship has an almost endless variety with color symbolism, offerings, fasting, and dance as integral parts. Most Hindus daily worship an image of their chosen deity, with chants (*mantras*), flowers, and incense. Worship, whether in a home or temple, is primarily individualistic rather than congregational.

HINDUS IN THE UNITED STATES:

- Traditional movements include the Ramakrishna Mission and Vedanta Societies, Sri Aurobindo Society, Satya Sai Baba Movement, Self-Realization Fellowship, and International Sivananda Yoga Society.
- Hindu-based sects include the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishna), Transcendental Meditation, Vedanta Society, Self-Realization Fellowship,

Theosophy, and Eckankar.

- Sects have "Americanized" Hindu concepts include Church of Christ, Scientists (Christian Science), Unity School of Christianity, and several groups within the New Age Movement.

WITNESSING TO HINDUS:

- Pray and trust the Holy Spirit to use the gospel message to reach the hearts and minds of your Hindu friend.
- Share your personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Keep your testimony short.
- Stress the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as God's revelation of Himself.
- Stress the necessity of following Jesus to the exclusion of all other deities.
- Keep the gospel presentation Christ-centered.
- Share the assurance of salvation that God's grace gives you and about your hope in the resurrection. Make sure you communicate that your assurance is derived from God's grace and not from your good works or your ability to be spiritual (1 John 5:13).
- Give a copy of the New Testament. If a Hindu desires to study the Bible, begin with the Gospel of John. Point out passages that explain salvation.

Revised 1999 by N.S.R.K. Ravi, Associate, Interfaith Evangelism Team

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright 1973, 1978,1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use. All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176; or call, (770) 410-6292; or fax, (770) 410-6006; or send to permissions@namb.net

For more copies, order 0840089570 from
Customer Service Center
1 800 448-8032, or fax, 1 (615) 251-5983



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
NAMB

4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC
e-mail: interfaith@namb.net

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

0840089570/10M/8-99

Judaism

Interfaith Witness

BELIEF BULLETIN

World Religions

JEWISH POPULATION: World: 16,000,000; Israel: 5,000,000; United States: 6,000,000; Canada, 400,000¹

DENOMINATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA: Orthodox: 17%; Conservative: 33%; Reform: 22%; Unaffiliated: 28%

WHO ARE THE JEWISH PEOPLE?

According to Scripture (see Gen. 12:1-2; 17:20-21; 21:12; 28:3-4, 10-17; Acts 7:8), they are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and those who have joined themselves to the Jewish people as proselytes. They are not to be defined, therefore, in terms of race, politics, or religion. They constitute an ethnic group, or, to use a biblical phrase, "the house of Israel." Although the lineage in Scripture was patrilineal, in the intervening centuries, lineage has been based upon the mother. Most unsaved Jewish people would further exclude from their definition those who have accepted Jesus as Messiah. Messianic Jews (or Jewish Christians) would not, of course, agree. They would argue that faith in Jesus (in Hebrew, Yeshua), the hope of Israel and the King of the Jews, rather than diminishing their sense of Jewishness, enhances it. Some would add that since the Synagogue did not confer Jewishness upon them, neither could it take it away.

The Jewish people of North America are not united by organizational structure, theology, or political party. Of the 72 percent who are affiliated with a synagogue, less than 10 percent attend synagogue on a regular basis. While it is true that religious observance in the home is more important than corporate worship, it is also true that many are involved in secularism, New Age religions, and some even in Buddhism. Most are aligned with liberal social and political agendas. There is, however, a growing conservative movement that is emphasizing family values, capitalism, and conservative principles.

CATEGORIES AND DENOMINATIONS

Judaism is usually classified in three denominations: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Orthodox Judaism, however, falls into two broad categories: Modern Orthodox and Hasidim. The Modern Orthodox are usually more academic, while the Hasidim are more mystical. One of the more "high profile" groups within Hasidism is the Lubavitch (also called Habad). Hasidic men usually wear black or dark gray suits and always wear skullcaps (in Hebrew, kippah; in Yiddish, yarmulke). Orthodox Jews insist on traditional Judaism, with few accommodations to modernity.

Reform Judaism (not "Reformed" Judaism), on the other hand, has embraced modernity, liberalism, and humanism in an effort to enhance a sense of relevance. Although there is a variety of beliefs within Reform Judaism, it generally maintains a more inclusive position regarding feminism, homosexuality, and agnosticism.

Conservative Judaism "fills the gap" between Orthodox Judaism and Reform Judaism. This is the largest denomination within American Jewry, and it is important to point out that "Conservative" applies to their approach to religion and should not be seen as a political label. Their desire is to make allowances for modern culture, while "conserving," as far as possible, traditional Judaism. Again, there is a variety of perspectives within Conservative Judaism. Some conservative synagogues are closer to Orthodox Judaism, while others are closer to Reform Judaism. There are other, smaller groups within Judaism, but these are the

principal ones.

In the midst of such diversity, it is almost impossible to generalize regarding their beliefs. Therefore, the only way to understand the beliefs of any particular Jewish person is to speak with him or her directly. It should also be noted that Judaism emphasizes behavior, not doctrine. Nevertheless, acknowledging that there will be exceptions at every point, the following summary may be helpful in understanding the beliefs of the majority of the Jewish people of North America.

THE NATURE AND SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

Orthodox Judaism holds a very high view of the inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures. Jewish people most often use an acronym, Tanakh, to refer to what most Christians call the Old Testament. The text is the same in Hebrew, although the order of the books is slightly different and there are occasional differences in the numbering of chapters or verses. While the Tanakh is viewed as the Word of God, Judaism accords different levels of inspiration to the different divisions within it. Torah, the five books of Moses, is viewed as being inspired by God; the Prophets have a slightly lower level of inspiration; and the Writings have a level of inspiration that is lower still. Reform Judaism holds a very liberal view, seeing the Scripture as little more than folklore and the collective wisdom of the Jewish people refined through the centuries. Conservative Judaism would hold a mediating position.

Scripture, however, is certainly not seen as sufficient—it is incomplete without the “Second (or Oral) Law.” This Oral Law is mostly embodied in the writings of Jewish traditions found in the Talmud. The Talmud is a set of books, composed of the Mishnah and several commentaries. It is printed in such a way that each portion of the Mishnah is printed on the same page with its commentaries. One popular compilation of the regulations of the Talmud is the Shulchan Aruch, which gives summary guidelines for the ordering of a Jewish home and lifestyle.

Not only is the Scripture insufficient without the Oral Law, Judaism maintains that a greater authority is to be accorded to these traditions. Judaism teaches that even if a voice from heaven contradicts the consensus of the sages, it (the heavenly voice) is to be rejected.

God: The defining verse of Scripture for rabbinic Judaism is Deuteronomy 6:4, commonly referred to as the “Shema” (Hebrew for “hear”): “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD”. The key word in this verse proclaiming the oneness of God is a Hebrew word that allows for a composite unity. For example, it is used in Scripture of a man and his wife (“one” flesh) and of evening and morning (“one” day). The Shema notwithstanding, Judaism has increasingly used another word to describe God—a word that means absolute and unqualified singularity. God is seen as primarily transcendent, and for many Jewish people, God is more impersonal—for some, He has become little more than a philosophical construct or an impersonal force.

Man: Judaism’s view of humanity is influenced more by the biblical account of his creation in the image of God than the account of his fall through disobedience and sin. Consequently, Judaism offers a lofty humanism, which is essentially idealistic and optimistic. The alienation between God and man is overcome by man as he reaches toward God. Martin Buber, well known Orthodox Jewish theologian and author, says that, “it is the faith that struggling man, in his moral effort, can climb the steep hill which leads to God.”

Rabbinic Judaism also insists on the absolute freedom of the human will. One Jewish author has said, “... in the act of atonement, both God and man co-operate . . . , but in the forefront stands the work of man accomplished by his own strength.”¹³

Sin: Judaism is motivated by a desire to do God’s will. Judaism believes God’s will is primarily found in the Mosaic Law, as it has been elaborated and applied to changing circumstances through the centuries. In rabbinic Judaism, good and evil are always possibilities for man, but his dignity and basic goodness requires that he be free to tip the scales in either direction, and his inclination is to choose the good. Therefore, Judaism is optimistic about one’s ability to do God’s will, and sin is not generally a major concern.

With the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70, the sacrificial system ended. This was one of the greatest crises in the long history of the Jewish people. It necessitated the reconstitution of Judaism, for

the sacrificial system was foundational to the Mosaic Covenant. Scripture taught that man's approach to God could only be indirect, (i.e., through the blood of sacrifices). Judaism reversed itself on this point and began to teach that one could approach God directly.

Atonement: Since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, at least three positions have developed within Judaism regarding atonement for sin. The most common view is that repentance, prayer, and good deeds provide atonement. It is also held that the sufferings of the Jewish people, as a whole, provide for their own atonement. This is based on the understanding of the Servant in Isaiah 53 as the people of Israel. Finally, there is the view that the Jewish people will automatically have a share in the world to come by virtue of being Jewish. In any case, there is no concept of a need for regeneration. If a Jewish person has strayed from God, it is only necessary for him to "return" (the Hebrew meaning of "repentance") and walk in God's ways.

Messiah: The emphasis that Christians have placed on Jesus as the Messiah has forced the issue into the background in rabbinic circles. Within Judaism, opinion regarding the Messiah is varied. Judaism allows for concepts of the Messiah in both personal and impersonal terms. Some understand the Messiah as a future political or military deliverer. Others, however, understand the Messiah as a golden age of peace and prosperity. Finally, some conceive of the Messiah in nationalistic terms, as the modern State of Israel.

Although Orthodox Judaism retains the belief in a personal Messiah and He figures prominently in the liturgy, He does not occupy a leading role in contemporary Jewish thought. Furthermore, the other two positions are even further removed from the concept of a personal Messiah. In spite of this divergence of opinion within the ranks of rabbinic Judaism, they are in essence all agreed in this: Jesus is not the Messiah. A Jewish Christian scholar characterizes the synagogue's position like this: "With the Messiah or without the Messiah, to Judaism the Kingdom of God is in our hands; it is for us to establish it upon this earth."⁵ Thus, "The Kingdom of God is not God's kingdom, but man's kingdom where God has been made King."⁶

Jesus: Some have argued that it is not so much what Judaism affirms that is important, but what it denies. A central tenet of rabbinic Judaism is a denial that Jesus is the Messiah, much less, that He is God. Since the historicity of Jesus is difficult to deny, Judaism has embraced Him only as He is divested of deity and of His role as Messiah. When Jewish scholars speak of reclaiming the Jewishness of Jesus, they most often refer to the Jewish learning and concepts which Jesus expressed, but admit no authority or originality to Him. He was simply a humble Jewish reformer and teacher. Such a teacher only needs to be "reclaimed" as an obscure footnote in Jewish history. A Jesus that does not need to be rejected, however, does not need to be reclaimed.

The Holocaust: No event since the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 has so traumatized the Jewish people as the Nazi Holocaust. Yet, the horror of Hitler's genocidal depravity also affected the theology of the Jewish survivors, because it crashed headlong into their world view, as described above. As Christians, we might expect that the Holocaust would have challenged their view of man as good. Yet, strangely, instead of asking, "How could mankind have committed such unspeakable evil?" they ask, "Where was God when the six million died?" Their belief in God was more vulnerable than their belief in man. The biblical teachings concerning sin and the afterlife, where the injustices of this world will be made right, were de-emphasized in rabbinic Judaism. Consequently, a significant number lost their faith in God in the aftermath of Auschwitz.

WITNESS TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The claims that the New Testament makes regarding Jesus stand as the central issue between traditional Judaism and Christianity. They are denied by the former and affirmed by the latter. Some charge that Christianity's claim that Jesus is the only way of salvation is a denigration of Judaism. However, Christianity's affirmation is no more a denigration of Judaism than Judaism's denial is a denigration of Christianity. We should all be seeking God's truth regarding atonement for sin and a lifestyle that is pleasing to Him.

Most Jewish people view Christianity as a

Gentile religion that has no relevance to them. When a Jewish person places his trust in Jesus for salvation and is baptized, the Jewish community considers that he has turned his back on his people and has become a Gentile. It is therefore important to communicate that our desire is not that our Jewish friend would become a Gentile, but that, as a Jew, he or she would find atonement for sin and discover a personal relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Humility, prayer, and genuine compassion must characterize Christian witness. Far too often Jewish impressions of Christianity have been characterized by arrogance, superiority, and a disregard for Jewish culture. Paul warns against this kind of Gentile pride in Romans 11:13-32.

Use terminology that emphasizes the Jewishness of our faith. For example, instead of "Christ," which is based on the Greek word for "the Anointed One," use "Messiah," which is based on the Hebrew. Instead of the "Old Testament," refer to the "Hebrew Scriptures."

Use verses from their Bible in discussing topics like: Sin (see Ps. 14:2-3, 51:5; Eccl. 7:20; and Isa. 59:1-2);, Atonement (see Lev. 17:11 and Isa. 53:5-6), Messiah [see Isa. 53; Dan. 9:16, and Mic. 5:1(v. 2 in our Bible)], and Faith (see Gen. 15:6; Num. 21:7-9, and Joel 2:32).

Footnotes

¹Demographic estimates are based on information in the *American Jewish Yearbook*; 1996 (David Singer, ed., NY: American Jewish Committee); World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1997 (Robert Famighetti, ed., Mahwah, NJ: World Almanac Books, 1996); and the 1990 U.S. census data.

²According to Jakob Jocz in his *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (London: SPCK, 1962, p. 269).

³Dr. Max Dienemann, as cited by Jocz, p. 274.

⁴Jocz, p. 285-286.

⁵Jocz, p. 285.

Jim R. Sibley, Coordinator of Jewish Ministries, Interfaith Witness Evangelism, NAMB
© 1998 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use.
All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, SBC.

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
NAMB

4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Witness Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC

For more information, call (770) 410-6000; to order materials, call Customer Service Center,
1 800 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

0840086989/10M/8-98

Christian Science

Interfaith Witness

BELIEF BULLETIN

Cults, Sects, and New World Religions

OFFICIAL NAME: Church of Christ, Scientist (CCS)

KEY FIGURE IN HISTORY: Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910)

CURRENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS (1996): Virginia S. Harris, J. Anthony Periton, Olga M. Chaffee, William H. Hill, John Lewis Selover

HEADQUARTERS: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston Massachusetts

CHURCHES (1996): 2,300 in 68 countries

PRACTITIONERS: Approximately 3,000 worldwide

MINISTRIES ASSOCIATED WITH CHRISTIAN SCIENCE:

Radio and Television: WQTV, Boston, Mass., and Monitor Radio

Publications: *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Christian Science Journal*, *The Christian Science Sentinel*, *Herald of Christian Science*, *The World Monitor*, *Christian Science Quarterly*

This belief bulletin highlights Christian Science doctrines and provides biblical responses.

INTRODUCTION

The Church of Christ, Scientist (CCS), also known by its original name, The Christian Science Church, was founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879 in Boston, Mass.

According to the CCS, Mary Ann Morse Baker, as a young person, was frail and suffered many illnesses. In 1844, her first husband, George Glover, died of yellow fever leaving her poor and with an infant son whom she gave up to foster care. In 1853, she married Daniel Patterson. She divorced him in 1873. While living in New Hampshire in 1866, she claimed to have discovered the secret of "Divine Science" after being healed miraculously from a crippling fall. She began teaching her healing techniques and spiritual philosophy to interested students. In 1875, she moved to Lynn, Mass., founded the Christian Science Association, and published her book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (S&H).

In 1877, she married Asa Albert Eddy (d. 1882) and together they formally established the CCS. In 1890, Mrs. Eddy established "The Mother Church," The First Church of Christ, Scientist, of Boston, Mass.

Mrs. Eddy died in 1910 and authority now rests in the CCS Board of Directors (see above).

AUTHORITY: The Bible and Mrs. Eddy

Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy maintained that "as adherents of Truth, we take the inspired Word of the Bible as our sufficient guide to eternal Life" (S&H, p. 497). Nonetheless, Christian Science interprets the Bible in light of Mrs. Eddy's writings, particularly her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, in which she interprets it according to her metaphysical presuppositions. Also, Mrs. Eddy seemed to question the textual reliability of the Bible blaming "the manifest mistakes in the ancient versions . . . these facts show how a mortal and material sense stole into the divine record, with its own hue darkening to some extent the inspired pages" (S&H, p. 139).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The Bible is the only source of divinely inspired Scripture. No single person or church can claim an infallible interpretation. Mrs. Eddy's metaphysical approach fails to adhere to sound principles of biblical interpretation (see 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). She ascribes arbitrary spiritual meanings to common biblical terms. For example "Jerusalem" is defined as "Mortal belief and knowledge obtained from the five

corporeal senses" (S&H, p. 589). "Holy Ghost" is defined as "Divine Science; the development of eternal Life, Truth, and Love" (S&H, p. 588).

GOD IS MIND, TRUTH, LOVE, ETC.

"God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love" (S&H, p. 465). These are synonymous terms that "refer to one absolute God. They are also intended to express the nature, essence, and wholeness of Deity. The attributes of God are justice, mercy, wisdom, goodness, and so on" (S&H, p. 465).

The Trinity is redefined as life, truth, and love. "The theory of three persons in one God (that is, a personal Trinity or Tri-unity) suggests polytheism, rather than the one ever-present I AM" (S&H, p. 256).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: There is only one true God (see Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10, 44:6-8) who exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14). The CCS use of impersonal synonyms for God diminishes His personal nature as revealed in the Bible. The Bible says "God is love" (1 John 4:8), not "love is God."

JESUS: DISCOVERER OF THE CHRIST-IDEAL

There is an essential difference between Jesus the man and the "Christ Principle" which came upon Him as He comprehended it. "We acknowledge Jesus' atonement as the evidence of divine, efficacious Love, unfolding man's unity with God through Christ Jesus the Way-shower" (S&H, p. 497).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: There is no distinction that can be made between Jesus the man and Christ, His divine office (Messiah). He did not receive his Messiahship, but rather claimed that title from eternity past (see Isa. 9:6; Matt. 1:16-18, 2:4; Luke 2:11). Jesus died on the cross as an atonement for humanity's sin and rose again *physically* to claim God's victory over death (see Luke 24:36-43; John 2:18-22; 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

"SPIRIT" IS REAL; "MATTER" IS NOT

Since God's essential essence is spirit or mind, and only that which reflects His nature is real, then matter does not really exist. "Spirit is

immortal Truth; matter is mortal error. Spirit is the real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal" (S&H, p. 468).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Indeed, God is Spirit (see John 4:24). He is creator of all that exists, including the material universe (see Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:16; Heb. 11:3). God declared the entirety of the created order "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Jesus was God incarnated in a material body (see John 1:14; Col. 2:9) and was resurrected physically (see Luke 24:36-39; John 20:26; 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

PEOPLE ARE DIVINE SPIRITS

Since matter does not exist and humanity reflects God's nature then humanity is not really made of matter. "Spirit is God, and man is His image and likeness. Therefore man is not material; he is spiritual" (S&H, p. 468).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Humanity has both a spiritual and physical dimension (see Gen. 1:26-27). God created humanity as living souls (see Gen. 2:7). Our future resurrection will be both spiritual and physical (see 1 Cor. 15).

THE PROBLEM: HUMANITY'S ILLUSIONS

Since only those ideas that reflect God's nature actually are real, then sin, death, disease, and pain are not real, but only illusions. "The only reality of sin, sickness, or death is the awful fact that unrealities seem real to human, erring belief . . . They are not true, because they are not of God" (S&H, p. 472). "The cause of all so-called disease is mental, a mortal fear, a mistaken belief or conviction of the necessity and power of ill-health" (S&H, p. 377).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Sin is a reality and all people (except Christ) are sinners by nature (see Rom. 3:23). It is a result of humanity's willful disobedience to God and His will. Sin alienates people from God and produces suffering, disease, and death (see Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12-23).

SPIRITUAL HEALING

Since matter, sin, disease, and death are illusions and unreal, then people are not subject to them. "Through immortal Mind, or Truth, we can destroy all ills which proceed

from mortal mind" (S&H, p. 374). Thus when people fully realize this principle, disease should disappear. "When one's false belief is corrected, Truth sends a report of health over the body" (S&H p. 194).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Sickness is real. Christians believe God can cure through prayer if it is His will. Inevitably, however, the physical body deteriorates and dies. Medical science is an appropriate adjunct to prayer in curing and maintaining physical health (see 1 Cor. 12:9,30; James 5:14-16). Luke (writer of the gospel of Luke and Acts) is identified as a physician (see Col. 4:14).

DEATH: THE ULTIMATE ILLUSION

Since God and man are immortal spirit or mind, death is also only an illusion. It is a transition from the illusion of the material to ultimate reality of immortal spirit. "So, when our friends pass from our sight and we lament, that lamentation is needless and causeless" (S&H, p. 386).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Death is a reality and a result of mankind's sin (see Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 6:21-23, 8:6). It is both physical and spiritual. The spirit of the believer, however, at death, goes to be with the Lord (see 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23-24) and awaits a reunion with the body at the Lord's return (see 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thes. 4:13-18). Those who are unsaved will face judgment (see Heb. 9:27) and eternal separation from God in hell ("the second death"). (See Rev. 20:1-15).

SALVATION

Since sin and death are false beliefs (illusions), salvation involves overcoming the false idea that they exist with a realization of our divine spirit and mind. "We acknowledge that the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection served to uplift faith to understand eternal Life, even the allness of Soul, Spirit, and the nothingness of matter" (S&H, p. 497).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Salvation is not realized through some special knowledge. It is received only by acknowledging, confessing, repenting of one's sin (see Acts 3:19, 26:20; 1 John 1:9) and putting one's faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (see John 1:12; Rom. 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8,9).

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE TERMS:

Bible Lesson (Lesson Sermon): One of 26 weekly lessons studied and taught in local churches.

Branch Church: Local self-governing CCS congregation.

First Reader: Person who leads Sunday and Wednesday services in local CCS (second reader assists).

Lecture: Free talk sponsored by local CCS given by authorized member of Christian Science Board of Lectureship.

Practitioner: Person in full-time professional work of Christian Science healing.

Reading Room: Local bookstore/library open to the public to access Christian Science literature.

WITNESSING TO CHRISTIAN SCIENTISTS

1. Have a clear understanding of your faith and the Bible.
2. Have a basic knowledge of the beliefs and presuppositions of Christian Science.
3. Seek to establish a sincere personal relationship with the Christian Scientist.
4. Establish the unique authority of the Bible. Tell the Christian Scientist that you do not consider any belief that is not biblically based as valid.
5. Define clearly all terms of biblical Christianity and Christian Science. Christian Science uses many biblical and Christian terms that have different meanings.
6. When appropriate, respectfully discuss significant differences in doctrine. Focus on historic biblical perspectives about God, Jesus Christ, and salvation. Also, establish the reality of sin, disease, and death. Emphasize why Christ's death was necessary.
7. Share your personal testimony of faith in Jesus Christ. Explain how you realized you are a sinner, but have trusted in Jesus' death and resurrection to atone for your sin.
8. When you have clarified all important issues, share the plan of salvation and seek to lead the person to faith in Christ.

Tal Davis, Associate, Interfaith Witness Evangelism
© 1996 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use.
All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, SBC.

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 233-1123, or fax, 1 (615) 251-5983



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
NAMB

4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Witness Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

Churches of Christ

Interfaith Evangelism

BELIEF BULLETIN

American Dominations

CHURCHES: USA (1996): 13,013; Canada (1996): 147

MEMBERS: USA (1996): 1,651,103; Canada (1996): 7,181 (Source: *The World Almanac of Facts 1997*)

ORGANIZATION: Churches of Christ view themselves as autonomous churches in voluntary fellowship and not as a denomination. They believe denominational organizations are contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. They have no official organization beyond the local church.

HISTORY: Churches of Christ grew out of the Disciples of Christ movement that began in the early nineteenth century. Thomas Campbell organized the "Christian Association of Washington" (Pennsylvania) in 1809. He hoped to reunite Christian churches by restoring the apostolic practices of the early church.

He and his son, Alexander, helped found the Restoration Movement. They sought to restore the first century beliefs and practices of the apostolic churches. Alexander Campbell took over the leadership of the movement after he joined his father. Their interpretation of the Bible led them to accept immersion of believers as the only acceptable mode of baptism. Consequently, they joined the Baptists.

Alexander Campbell became a very influential leader among Baptists. He was editor of the *Christian Baptist* and a well known debater and preacher. However, his teachings concerning the

need for a new reformation in the church caused animosity between his followers and traditional Baptists. In 1830 he and his followers separated and became known as the Disciples. In 1832 they united with many of the followers of Barton Stone and later became known as the Disciples of Christ.

In the early twentieth century some Disciples of Christ felt their movement had drifted away from its original purpose. In 1906, a group led by David Lipscomb asked federal census takers not to list Churches of Christ with the Disciples of Christ. This marked the beginning of Churches of Christ as a distinct group from the Disciples of Christ. While the Churches of Christ have congregations throughout the United States, most of their members are located in the South and Southwest.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES:

Churches of Christ have a congregational form of church government. Each local church is autonomous and self-governing. The only rituals they observe are those, which they believe, were part of the first century church. The Churches of Christ reject the use of musical instruments in worship.

SALVATION:

Churches of Christ

believe salvation is the free gift of God's grace provided through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. They avoid theories of the atonement claiming they are speculative. Those in the Churches of Christ reject Calvinistic theology. They downplay the effects of original sin. The role of the Holy Spirit in conversion is regarded as either non-essential or minimal. They view faith as a rational decision where the individual accepts the biblical facts about Jesus. The Churches of Christ also teach that Christians can lose salvation by apostatizing. Many understand faith as an intellectual acceptance of the biblical facts about Jesus. They believe that Christians may sin in such a way that they lose their salvation.

BAPTISM: Churches of Christ teach that baptism by immersion for believers is essential for the remission of sins and is necessary for salvation. They use passages such as Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38 to substantiate this teaching. Baptism has a threefold purpose: (1) it is necessary for salvation; (2) it places one in Christ; and (3) it places one in the church.

RESPONSE: While baptism is important, it is not necessary for salvation. The biblical passages quoted by the Churches of Christ to argue for the necessity of water baptism do not prove their point.

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Contrary to the claims of the Churches of Christ, this passage does not prove the necessity of water baptism. There are four possible relationships between belief and baptism. First, one both believes and is baptized. We are told in the first part of verse 16 that this person will be saved. Second, one believes and is not baptized. This possibility is not

discussed in the passage so we cannot draw any conclusions about whether such an individual will be saved or lost. A third possibility is that one does not believe but is baptized. Fourth, one both does not believe and is not baptized. According to verse 16, one who does not believe is condemned whether baptized or not.

If the Churches of Christ really want to speak only when the Bible speaks and be silent when the Bible is silent, they will not use Mark 16:16 to argue for the necessity of water baptism for salvation. Mark 16:16 is silent concerning whether the person who believes but is not baptized is saved or lost.

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). The Churches of Christ claim this passage teaches that both repentance and baptism are necessary for salvation. An examination of the Greek text reveals information not available in the English translation. The word "for" is a translation of the Greek preposition *eis*. The Churches of Christ are correct when they point out that *eis* can sometimes express aim or purpose. If Luke intended that usage, then this passage would teach that baptism is necessary to receive forgiveness of sins. However, this is not the only meaning that the Greek term *eis* can have in this passage. *Eis* can also be used to indicate the basis or ground of something. According to A. T. Robertson, this usage "occurs at least three times" where it cannot be purpose or aim, but rather the basis or ground" (Matt. 10:41; 12:41) (A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol. III, p. 35). Acts 2:38 can mean that one is baptized because his or her sins have already been forgiven. Acts 2:38

does not prove the necessity of water baptism for salvation.

THE LORD'S SUPPER: The Lord's Supper is one of the three elements central in Churches of Christ worship. The other two elements are preaching and baptism. According to the Churches of Christ, the Supper has three primary meanings: (1) commemoration of the memorial meal commanded by Christ; (2) proclamation of Christ's death for sinful people; and (3) examination of the individual's Christian commitment. In keeping with their understanding of the New Testament, Churches of Christ celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday.

THE TRINITY: Churches of Christ subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity, but they avoid the use of the terms *Trinity* and *Trinitarian*. These are considered philosophical rather than New Testament terms.

THE BIBLE: The Churches of Christ believe that the New Testament is the primary guide for understanding Christian faith and practice. Creeds are considered unnecessary and extraneous. A popular slogan of the Churches of Christ (and other Protestants) is: "Where the Bible speaks, we speak. Where the Bible is silent, we are silent."

MINISTRY: Churches of Christ have three basic types of ministers: evangelists, elders, and deacons. Evangelists are ordained by a local

congregation and sent out to preach, win converts, and establish churches. Elders function much the same as pastors, providing spiritual and disciplinary functions in local churches. Deacons function in servant roles in churches.

BAPTIST COMPARISONS: Both Baptists and Churches of Christ place a strong emphasis on the autonomy of the local church. Both groups also advocate the support of missions.

While there are many similarities between Baptists and Churches of Christ, there are also many areas of differences. Baptists do not consider water baptism essential to salvation. Baptists believe baptism is a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are baptized to identify publicly with Christ, and to portray their death to a life of sin and resurrection to a new life.

Baptists unlike Churches of Christ have organizations beyond the local church in order to work together for purposes of missions and evangelism. Contrary to the practice of the Churches of Christ, Baptists accept the use of musical instruments in worship. Baptists see faith as requiring a personal trust in and commitment to Jesus Christ rather than just an intellectual acceptance of the biblical teachings about Christ Jesus. Baptists believe the Bible teaches that salvation does not depend on membership in a particular church. Salvation comes as a result of a personal faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Resources:

Allen, Crawford Leonard. *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry Of Churches Of Christ*, Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, Abilene Christian University, 1988.

Hooper, Robert E. *Crying In The Wilderness: A Biography Of David Lipscomb*, Nashville, TN: David Lipscomb College, 1979.

Hughes, Richard T. *Reviving The Ancient Faith: The Story Of Churches Of Christ In America*, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996.

Foster, Douglas A. *Will The Cycle Be Unbroken?: Churches Of Christ Face The 21st Century*, Abilene, Texas: A-C-U Press, 1994.

Mead, Frank S. and Hill, Samuel S. *Handbook Of Denominations In The United States*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985.

Olbricht, Thomas H. *Hearing God's Voice: My Life With Scripture In The Churches Of Christ*, Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996.

Bill Gordon, Associate, Interfaith Evangelism
© 1999 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use.
All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, SBC.

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
NAMB

4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC
e-mail: interfaith@namb.net

For more information, call (770) 410-6000; to order materials, call Customer Service Center,
1 800 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

0840086342/10M/3/99

Major American Denominations

INTRODUCTION: Denominationalism is an American phenomenon. Immigrants who brought the beliefs and practices of their old state church to America started many denominations. Many of these churches had offshoots and the number of denominations has mushroomed. This bulletin will look at only a few of the denominations found currently in America.

DENOMINATION: Baptists

Statistics:*

American Baptist Association (1,705)	250,000
American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. (5,823)	1,517,400
Baptist Bible Fellowship International (3,600) 1,500,000	
Baptist General Conference (857)	135,008
Baptist Missionary Association of America (1,355)	231,191
Conservative Baptist Association of America (1,084)	200,000
Free Will Baptists, National Association of (2,496)	207,576
General Assn. of Regular Baptist Churches (1,458)	136,380
General Baptists, General Association of (876)	74,156
National Baptist Convention of America (2,500)	3,500,000
National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. (33,000) 8,200,000	
National Missionary Baptist Convention of America (not available)	2,500,000
North American Baptist Conference (263) 43,236	
Progressive National Baptist Convention (2,000)	2,500,000
Separate Baptists in Christ (100)	8,000
Seventh Day Baptist General Conference (86)	4,400
Southern Baptist Convention (40,039) 15,663,296	
Sovereign Grace Baptists (300)	3,000

History:

Baptists have been classified as part of the radical reformation because of their objection to sacramentalism, infant baptism, and the

union of church and state. The first Baptist church in England was formed in 1611 when followers of John Smyth returned from Holland. Baptists have been influenced by both Arminian (General Baptists) theology and by Calvinistic (Particular Baptists) theology. The American Baptist Home Mission Society was formed in 1832. Baptists in the North and South separated in 1845 over the issue of slavery.

Authority:

The Bible is the sole source of authority for Baptists.

Religious Practices:

Baptists observe two church ordinances. The first church ordinance is believer's baptism by immersion. The second church ordinance is the Lord's Supper. Baptists have a congregational form of church government. The members of each local Baptist church make decisions for the church through democratic votes. Each church is autonomous.

Religious Tenets:

Baptism is only to be performed on those who have made a conscious decision to follow Jesus Christ through faith and repentance. Since the Bible is their sole authority, Baptists reject authoritarian creeds. They have, however, issued statements of faith that represent the beliefs of most Baptists. Baptists believe that the government should not be involved in the establishment of religion. Traditionally, Baptists have taken stands against the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs, and in recent years, many have argued against abortion.

DENOMINATION: *Churches of Christ*
(Disciples of Christ)

Statistics:

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
(4,036) 929,725
Churches of Christ (13,020) 1,655,000

History:

Churches of Christ grew out of the Disciples of Christ movement that began in the early nineteenth century. They are part of the Restoration Movement that Thomas Campbell and his son, Alexander, helped establish. In 1832, they united with many of the followers of Barton Stone and later became known as the Disciples of Christ. In the early twentieth century, some Disciples of Christ felt their movement had drifted away from its original purpose. In 1906, a group led by David Lipscomb asked Federal census takers not to list Churches of Christ with the Disciples of Christ. This marked the beginning of Churches of Christ as a distinct group from the Disciples of Christ.

Authority:

The Churches of Christ claim the Bible as their sole authority. Their byword is "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."

Religious Practices:

The Lord's Supper is one of the three elements central in Churches of Christ worship. The other two elements are preaching and believer's baptism by immersion in a Church of Christ. They observe the Lord's Supper each week. Churches of Christ have a congregational form of church government. Each local church is autonomous and self-governing. They have no formal denomination structure beyond the local church. The Churches of Christ do not view themselves as a denomination. They claim to observe no rituals that were not practiced in the first century church. Those associated with the Churches of Christ reject the use of instruments in worship.

Religious Tenets:

They are Arminian in their theology. They believe people are free to accept or reject God's offer of salvation. Each person must cooperate

with God's offer through his or her own response of faith, repentance, and baptism. Many understand faith as an intellectual acceptance of the biblical facts about Jesus. Churches of Christ teach that baptism by immersion for believers is essential for the remission of sins and is necessary for salvation. They believe that Christians may sin in such a way that they lose their salvation.

DENOMINATION: *Eastern Orthodox*

Statistics:

Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America (2)
1,875
American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox
Greek 19,321
Antiochian Orthodox Christian
Archdiocese of 300,000
Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the
East, 120,000
Armenian Apostolic Church of America
(28) 180,000
Armenian Church of America, Diocese of
the (72) 414,000
Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church (9)
1,100
Coptic Orthodox Church (85) 180,000
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and
South America (535) 1,950,000
Orthodox Church in America (600)
2,000,000
Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of
America (37) 65,000
Serbian Orthodox Church in United States
and Canada (68) 67,000
Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch
(Archdiocese of the United States and Canada)
(17) 32,500
True Orthodox Church of Greece
(SOMC), American Exarchate (9) 1,080

History:

The Orthodox Church traces its origin to the establishment of the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost. They separated from the western Latin Church in A.D. 1054.

Authority:

Scriptures and sacred Tradition, especially as recorded in the writings of the Church Fathers.

Religious Practices:

The Orthodox Church recognizes seven sacraments or mysteries. The sacraments of the Orthodox Church are the Eucharist, baptism, chrismation, ordination, penance, marriage, and holy oil for the sick. They believe that the elements of the sacraments become grace filled through the power of the Holy Spirit. Icons are used because they reject statues as religious objects. Orthodox clergy may marry before ordination.

Religious Tenets:

The Orthodox Church rejects both the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome as well as his papal infallibility. Mary's immaculate conception is rejected because of their opposition to the doctrine of original sin. The perpetual virginity of Mary is affirmed, as well as her bodily assumption. She is also given the title "Mother of God." They also reject the Roman Catholic doctrine of the filioque that states the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Instead, the Orthodox Church maintains that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father.

DENOMINATION: Episcopal Church (a branch of the Anglican Church communion)

Statistics:

(7,388) 2,504,682

History:

The Anglican Church originated when Henry VIII separated the English Church from Rome. The Episcopal Church, distinct from the Church of England, came into existence after the American Revolution. In 1988, the Episcopal Church began ordaining women to the priesthood.

Authority:

The Episcopal Church believes the Bible is divinely inspired. The Nicene and Apostles' Creeds are accepted.

Religious Practices:

Two main sacraments of the Episcopal church are baptism and the Eucharist. Infants are baptized and several modes of baptism are acceptable. The Episcopal Church consists of a union of autonomous dioceses and each

diocese elects a bishop as its religious leader. Each parish elects a rector who oversees the local congregation. The worship service follows the Book of Common Prayer, with the most important part of the service being the Eucharist. The Episcopal Church has great diversity in its worship. Some churches are liturgical with a complex ritual, while other churches are more informal.

Religious Tenets:

While the Episcopal Church accepts the Bible and the historic creeds of the church, it gives members freedom in doctrinal beliefs. The use of the Book of Common Prayer in worship is stressed more than the acceptance of particular beliefs.

DENOMINATION: Lutherans

Statistics:

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (60) 7,700
Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (119) 25,548
Church of the Lutheran Confession (71) 8,864
Conservative Lutheran Association (8) 1,047
Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (23) 3,989
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (10,955) 5,190,489
Evangelical Lutheran Synod (128) 25,379
Free Lutheran Congregations, Association of (234) 30,769
Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (55) 12,446
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (6,148) 2,596,927
Lutheran Churches, American Association of (94) 22,061
Protestant Conference (Lutheran) (7) 1,150
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (1,252) 412,478

History:

Lutheranism began in 1517 with the religious revolution begun by Martin Luther in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther's followers became numerous in Germany and Scandinavia. As people from these countries came to America they established Lutheran churches.

Authority:

One of the key differences between Luther and the Roman Catholic Church was the issue of authority. Luther argued that the Scripture was the sole authority for determining belief and practice. The 1580 Book of Concord is the normative statement of Lutheran beliefs.

Religious Practices:

Baptism is necessary for spiritual regeneration. The sacramental view of the Lord's Supper is retained but transubstantiation is rejected. There is diversity among Lutherans in church government. They range from congregational to Episcopal in church government. There is no uniform liturgy among Lutherans. The altars and vestments from Catholicism have been retained. The preaching of the Word is considered the most important part of the worship service.

Religious Tenets:

Traditionally, Lutherans have believed in the sufficiency of Scripture alone as the guide to religious truth. They have also emphasized that redemption comes through faith alone and that the church sacraments are only helps to faith. Luther rejected the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. Transubstantiation claims that the elements of the Lord's Supper literally become the body and blood of Jesus during the Eucharist, though their outward or physical characteristics do not change. Luther instead advocated consubstantiation to describe the Lord's Supper. This view argues that the elements are conjoined with the body and blood of Christ.

DENOMINATION: *Methodist*

Statistics:

African Methodist Episcopal Church
(8,000) 3,500,000

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
(3,098) 1,230,842

Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection
(120) 2,056

Evangelical Methodist Church (132) 8,500

Free Methodist Church of North America
(1,068) 74,707

Fundamental Methodist Church (12) 787

Primitive Methodist Church, U.S.A. (79)

7,298

Southern Methodist Church (126) 7,876

United Methodist Church (36,559)

8,584,125

The Wesleyan Church (U.S.A.) (1,624)

115,867

History:

In 1729, a group of students at Oxford University in England began meeting together for methodical prayer and Scripture reading. They were called Methodists because of their methodical approach towards prayer and Bible study. Methodism as a popular religious movement began in 1738 when John and Charles Wesley began evangelistic preaching. The Wesleys were ordained ministers of the Church of England. Their followers in America became an independent denomination after the American Revolution.

Authority:

Methodist beliefs are derived from Scripture as enlightened by tradition, personal experience, and reason.

Religious Practices:

Methodists have two sacraments which they believe are symbols and pledges of God's love: baptism and communion (Lord's Supper). Methodists practice infant baptism. The Lord's Supper is a memorial of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Methodists have an Episcopal form of church government that is similar in many ways to the organization of the federal government. United Methodists, for example, have the General Conference as their top legislative body, with the nine members of their Judicial Council functioning as a supreme court. The Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church acts as an executive branch. There is a variety of worship styles among Methodists.

Religious Tenets:

Methodists are Arminian in theology following the teachings of John Wesley. They believe that God's prevenient grace precedes salvation and makes it possible for the sinner to respond to the gospel. Methodists also believe that it is possible for Christians to sin in such a way that they lose their salvation.

DENOMINATION: *Pentecostals*

Statistics:

Apostolic Faith Mission (Portland, OR)
(54) 4,500
Apostolic Faith Mission Church of God
(28) 11,000
Apostolic Overcoming Holy Church of God
(160) 12,369
Assemblies of God (11,823) 2,387,982
Bible Church of Christ (6) 6,850
Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) (6,060)
753,230
Church of God in Christ (15,300) 5,499,875
Church of God of Prophecy (1,961) 72,859
Congregational Holiness Church (190)
2,468
Church of the Foursquare Gospel (1,710)
222,658
Open Bible Standard Churches (361)
45,988
Pentecostal Assemblies of the World
(1,760) 1,000,000
Pentecostal Church of God (1,224) 119,200
Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church (163)
18,500
United Pentecostal Church International
(3,730) 550,000

History:

The first contemporary instance of speaking in tongues occurred in 1901 in Topeka, Kan., under the ministry of Charles Parham. In 1906, speaking in tongues broke out among the followers of William J. Seymour in Los Angeles, Calif. They rented a building on Azusa Street and quickly grew, attracting much attention. From this group, the modern day practice of speaking in tongues spread across the world. The term "Pentecostalism" refers to a broad movement of groups concerned with speaking in tongues and Holiness.

Authority:

The Scripture, and in some cases new revelations given by the Holy Spirit.

Religious Practices:

Baptism by the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by speaking in tongues, is sought by Pentecostals. Most Pentecostal groups observe baptism (usually by immersion) and the Lord's Supper. There is diversity in church government

among Pentecostal groups, but many are congregational. The worship style is very spontaneous and informal, and speaking in tongues will often occur during Pentecostal worship services.

Religious Tenets:

Pentecostals believe that all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Bible are active and present in the church today. They claim that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is manifested by speaking in tongues. Pentecostals tend to be Arminian in theology with an emphasis on perfectionism and holiness. While many Pentecostals believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, there are Pentecostal groups that reject it.

DENOMINATION: *Presbyterian (Reformed Churches)*

Statistics:

Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
(General Synod) (206) 38,936
Cumberland Presbyterian Church (783)
87,896
Evangelical Presbyterian Church (177)
56,499
Korean Presbyterian Church in America
(203) 26,988
Orthodox Presbyterian Church (181)
20,151
Presbyterian Church in America (1,299)
267,764
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (11,361)
3,669,489
Reformed Presbyterian Church of North
America (70) 5,657

History:

John Calvin laid the theological foundations for Presbyterianism and other Reformed Churches in Switzerland during the sixteenth century. Calvin emphasized the sovereignty of God in all matters. Presbyterianism is the name given the church established by the followers of Calvin in Scotland. Under the leadership of John Knox, the Presbyterian Church became the official church of Scotland. The Presbyterian Church was planted in America as Scottish and Scottish-Irish immigrants arrived in the British colonies.

Authority:

The Scripture is their sole source of authority.

Religious Practices:

Presbyterians practice baptism (including infants) and the Lord's Supper with the elements symbolizing Christ's spiritual presence. Their worship services have little liturgy and the sermon is considered the most important part of the service.

Religious Tenets:

The Westminster Confession of Faith summarizes the established Presbyterian beliefs. Their Calvinistic theology has traditionally been summarized by the acrostic TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints.

DENOMINATION: *Roman Catholic*

Statistics:

(19,726) 60,280,454

History:

Roman Catholics claim the Apostle Peter, the first Bishop of Rome, founded their church. Secular historians date the beginning of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution (with centralization and papal authority) to the fifth and sixth centuries.

Authority:

Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium (teaching authority) of the church are the three sources of authority for the Roman Catholic Church.

Religious Practices:

There are seven sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church: baptism (includes infant), confirmation, Eucharist (Mass), penance (confession), matrimony, and the anointing of the sick. Roman Catholic services are liturgical, but since Vatican II, the services are performed in the language spoken by the parishioners. The Bishop of Rome is the head of the Roman Catholic Church.

Religious Tenets:

Roman Catholics affirm the triune nature of

the God of the Bible. They believe that the pope is capable of making infallible statements on matters of faith. They maintain that Mary was born without original sin, that she continued as a virgin throughout her life, and that at the end of her days on earth she was taken up body and soul into heaven. Catholics believe that Mary and other saints can hear their prayers. Roman Catholics also distinguish between mortal and venial sin. Mortal sin destroys the sanctifying grace of God within the individual and necessitates forgiveness through the sacrament of penance. Venial sin is a sin that either is not serious, or does not involve full knowledge or complete consent. Unlike mortal sin, it does not destroy the saving grace of God in the individual.

DENOMINATION: *United Church of Christ*

Statistics:

(6,145) 1,472,213

History:

The United Church of Christ is the result of several mergers involving four distinct denominations. The last merger occurred in 1957 and established the United Church of Christ. The four denominations making up this new church are the Congregational, Christian, Evangelical Synod, and the Reformed Church.

Authority:

The Scripture is their source of authority. But members are free to follow their own perception of God's will.

Religious Practices:

Baptism (including infant) and the Lord's Supper is observed by the United Church of Christ. They tend to have simple worship services with the sermon as the central focus. Their churches are free to act in accordance with the collective decision of its members.

Religious Tenets:

The United Church of Christ adopted a non-binding statement of faith in Oberlin, Ohio in 1959. It stresses the priesthood of all believers and the freedom of members to believe and act in accordance with their perception of God's will. The church also encourages its members to work for justice and the liberation of all people.

*All statistics are from the *1996 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*, © National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, or from the *1997 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* Web site at www.dnaco.net/~kbedell/ybstats2.htm.

Bill Gordon, Associate, Interfaith Evangelism
© 1999 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the prior written permission of the publisher. All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176; or call (770) 410-6258; or fax (770) 410-6006; or e-mail permissions@namb.net.

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 448-8032, or fax, (615) 251-5983

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
NAMB
4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

New Age

Cults, Sects, and New World Religions

NAME: The New Age Movement can be described as a Westernized form of Eastern religions' beliefs combined with occultic practices, self-help, holistic medicines, and forms of astrology. The New Age Movement is not a single organization. The term "New Age Movement" refers to a large number of autonomous groups and individuals. There are hundreds of groups and religious leaders in North America that could be described as New Age.

NATURE: The New Age Movement desires a change in society's collective consciousness. The term "new" does not refer to time but to its differences from traditional Western beliefs. New Age beliefs have been held by Eastern religions for thousands of years. The New Age Movement does not approach spirituality from a Christian perspective. Not every New Age group admits that its beliefs and practices are religious. Many depict their tenets as secular, scientific, or selfhelp philosophies.

DATE OF BEGINNING: The New Thought Movement, Spiritualism, and the Theosophical Society first introduced New Age beliefs and practices to America in the 1800s. These ideologies gained popularity during the counterculture of the mid-sixties and early seventies.

HEADQUARTERS: The New Age Movement has no central headquarters or leadership. The movement is an informal alliance of individuals, groups, and businesses.

ADHERENTS: It is impossible to determine the number of people involved in the New Age Movement. There are hundreds of New Age groups and spokespersons. However, most of these organizations do not have formal memberships. Many who espouse New Age beliefs do not identify with a specific group. Religious surveys indicate that 20 percent of Americans accept at least some New Age beliefs but most do not consider themselves New Agers.

ASSUMPTIONS: The New Age Movement contains great diversity. However, the following ideas characterize most New Agers. (1) Pantheism—God (god/goddess) is All and All is God (god/goddess). (2) Monism—All is One. (3) Reincarnation—After you die you will be reborn as a baby and live another life. (4) You are God, and must discover your divinity. (5) Good and evil do not exist, therefore, there are no absolutes in morality. (6) Separate the historical person of Jesus from the Christ Spirit. (7) A New Age of enlightenment and transformation is coming.

New Age groups and practices rarely identify themselves as New Age. Their beliefs and occult practices identify them. This Belief Bulletin examines these New Age beliefs and offers a Christian response.

NEW AGE BELIEFS

PANTHEISM—God is All and All is God: Everything is God and God is everything. Everything that exists is God. As one New Ager has written, "For God is the All, and the Goddess is *everything*, and there is nothing else that is."¹ This belief is known as pantheism. Since everything is God you also are God. While New Agers sometimes talk about God in personal

terms, most understand God as ultimately impersonal. God is often referred to as a force or energy. When (the impersonal) All is God, the personal God of the Bible cannot exist.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: New Age pantheism denies the biblical view of creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1, NIV). New Agers deny that God created something that was not God. Instead of creation, most New Agers believe that God emanated itself into what we now know as the universe. This means that everything in the universe is God.

New Agers treasure the teachings of pantheism because it means that they also are Gods (gods/goddesses). This teaching, however,

loses much of its appeal when it is pointed out that the rat rummaging through the garbage is also God according to pantheism. If pantheism is true then it means that even garbage is God. It means that a slug is God. It means that a worm in an apple is God. It means that maggots are God.

Another problem with pantheism is that God ultimately must be understood as impersonal and not as a personal being. If this is true, it means that the impersonal must be greater than (or at least the same value as) the personal. But even New Agers find it very difficult to live as if this is true. They tend to value animals as having more value than an impersonal rock. They tend to value their families as having more value than a plant. When New Agers live as if the personal is of more value than the impersonal, they act as if the teachings of the Bible, and not pantheism, are true. The God of the Bible is a personal God distinct from His creation.

The Bible issues strong warnings to those who confuse God with his creation. "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom. 1:22-23, NIV).

Both our experiences of reality and the teachings of the Bible contradict the New Age belief that we are God. We encounter problems. Things do not always go our way. People do not always treat us fairly and honestly. Sorrow and trouble sometimes come our way.

The Bible teaches that while humanity was created in the image of God, mankind is not and never will be God (see Gen. 1:26-27). Isaiah 43:10 (NIV) says, "You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after Me."

MONISM—All is One: Everything that exists is One. All distinctions (including your sense of being distinct from everyone and everything else) are really illusions. The belief that All is One is closely related to the New Age tenet that everything is God. According to his book *Conversations with God*, Neale Donald Walsch states, "The first step in finding that we are not apart from God is finding that we are not apart from each other, and until we know and realize that all of us are One, we cannot know and realize that we and God are One."¹²

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Both our experience of reality and the teachings of the Bible contradict the belief that "all is one."

We experience ourselves as different from others. We perceive and treat our children differently from the offspring of others. Even New Agers find it difficult to live life as if "all is one." They treat their mates differently than they do someone else's spouse.

The teachings of the Bible agree with our experience of reality. The Bible indicates that the reason we do not experience life as being one is because all is not one. God has created a universe that contains objects that are both unique and precious. We experience ourselves as different from others because God has created us as unique beings distinct from other things and people. "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16, NIV).

REINCARNATION—After we die we will be reborn as a baby and live another life. Then we will die and be reborn again starting the process all over. These cycles of birth, life, and death are necessary in order to lose the illusion of separateness from the All. We progress toward this Oneness by acquiring positive karma. Karma is the fruit of our life and actions that are carried by the soul to its next life. Positive karma advances us toward realizing unity with the All. Negative karma prolongs the time needed to realize this unity. In traditional Hinduism, negative karma can cause us to come back as a lower life form.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The Bible denies the possibility of reincarnation. "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment . . ." (Heb. 9:27, NIV). Since people will experience only one physical death, reincarnation cannot be true.

Reincarnation is a form of works salvation. The Bible rejects salvation through works (of any kind) as impossible. Romans 11:6 (NIV) says, "And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace." Likewise Ephesians 2:8-9 stresses that salvation from sin and its external consequences is a gift that God gives freely. Sin does not result in reincarnation but in death. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23, NIV).

The Bible teaches resurrection not reincarnation. Jesus declared "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (John 5:25, NIV).

PEOPLE ARE DIVINE: Many New Agers teach that our sensation of existing as finite creatures is an illusion. Humanity has forgotten that it is divine. As a result, people need to become enlightened about their true divinity in order to experientially become one with the All.

Exercises intended to transform consciousness can help one attain enlightenment. Techniques such as yoga, meditation, past-life regression, soul travel, and channeling spiritual guides may help one achieve enlightenment.

The New Age gospel calls not for faith in Jesus Christ, but rather for a shift in consciousness. This change of consciousness will only be achieved when you “stop seeing God as separate from you, and you as separate from each other.”

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The reason even New Agers experience life as if they were finite creatures is because they are limited and not divine beings. The real illusion is the New Age teaching they are divine, not the sense of finiteness that everyone experiences.

Humanity's problem is sin, not ignorance of divinity. While human beings have been created in the image of God, they are not divine (see Gen. 1:26-27). The Bible teaches that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NIV). The only solution to the human predicament is faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Many of the consciousness-altering techniques used by New Agers are occultic and forbidden by the Bible. God condemns the use of divination, sorcery, witchcraft, magical spells, mediums, and spiritualists (see Deut. 18:9-12).

MORALITY IS RELATIVE: Since all is One there is no difference between good and evil, right or wrong. For the New Ager there is no such thing as evil.¹ Some New Agers even deny that Hitler's actions were evil. ‘The real issue is whether Hitler's actions were ‘wrong.’ Yet I have said over and over again that there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in the universe. A thing is not intrinsically right or wrong. A thing simply is.’²⁵ Some New Agers would even assert that evil comes from God. As writer Benjamin Creme states, “Of course, yes, the forces of evil are part of God. They are not separate from God. Everything is God. There is nothing else in fact but God. The forces of evil on this planet receive their energy from the cosmic astral plane.”²⁶

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The sense that there is a distinction between right and wrong is universal. New Agers try to explain evil by denying its reality. But in order to deny the existence of evil they must also deny the validity

of goodness. They not only deny the Bible, which condemns certain actions as wrong, but also their own consciousness.

The belief that there is no difference between right and wrong is illogical because it contradicts itself. Its adherents claim it is right to believe there is no right or wrong. But if there is no right or wrong then how can it be right to believe that there is no right or wrong? Both the Bible and our life experiences support the Christian teaching that there is a distinction between good and evil, right and wrong. Also, the Bible clearly indicates that God is not the source of evil (see Jas. 1:13).

SEPARATE THE MAN JESUS FROM THE CHRIST SPIRIT: New Agers claim Jesus is not the only Christ. Jesus was one of several great teachers who obtained the Christ Spirit (self-actualization of one's deity). As Walsch puts it, “Many have achieved such consciousness. Many have been Christed (sic), not just Jesus of Nazareth.”

Some New Agers also claim that the church has corrupted the teachings of Jesus. They believe that Jesus traveled to India and studied Hinduism before beginning His public ministry. He was rejected and crucified because of His Hindu teachings.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: When New Agers use the term Christ to refer to a divine consciousness or spirit they give it a meaning not found in the Bible. Christ is a Greek term that means “anointed one.” The New Testament uses the term to designate Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Jesus warned His followers to be on guard against false teachers who would proclaim false Christs (see Matt. 24:24-25). The New Age view of the Christ Consciousness is one of these false Christs. The Jesus of the Bible is unique. He is God's one and only Son (see John 3:16).

A NEW AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND TRANSFORMATION IS COMING: New Agers believe the universe is evolving. Our world is about to undergo a transformation to a higher level. This change will be brought about by a shift in human consciousness toward New Age paradigms.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: A new world is coming, not a leap to a higher level, but the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth. The

dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness (see 1 Thess. 4:14-18). The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell and the righteous will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord (Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 3:7).⁸

SHARING JESUS WITH NEW AGERS:

1. Share about the personal relationship you have with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Tell about the difference that God makes in your life.
2. Ask the New Ager what he or she believes about God and Jesus Christ. Listen to their answers. There is a lot of diversity in the New Age Movement. Not all New Agers believe the same things. Start your witness from where they are.
3. Lovingly share with New Agers some of the implications of their belief system. For example, many New Agers do not realize that one implication of pantheism is that God is impersonal. Also, one of the implications of their belief in karma and reincarnation is that there are no innocent sufferers.
4. Since the New Age belief system denies our experience of reality, it is hard for New Agers to live as if what they believe is true. Gently point out the inconsistencies between what they claim to believe and how they actually live. For example, many New Agers take offense with the gospel message that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. They claim that there is no right or wrong way to God and that we are wrong to claim that there is. Ask: "If there is no right or wrong way to God then how can you claim that our gospel is wrong?" Lovingly point out that their position is illogical because it contradicts itself.
5. Be loving and kind toward those in the New Age Movement. Remember that God loves them and wants them to place their faith in Jesus Christ.
6. Trust in the Holy Spirit to convict New Agers of their need for Jesus.
7. Do not get frustrated if you do not see immediate results. Most New Agers have to hear the gospel more than once before they trust in Jesus.
8. Encourage them to read the Bible, particularly the Gospels, and to make a study of the life of Christ. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (see Rom. 10:17).

1. Walsch, Neale Donald, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue, Book 2* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company), p. 92.

2. Ibid., p. 3.

3. Ibid., p. 173.

4. Ibid., p. 31.

5. Ibid., p. 36.

6. Creme, Benjamin, *The Reappearance of the Christ and Masters of Wisdom* (Los Angeles: Tara Center, 1980), p. 103.

7. Walsch, Neale Donald, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue, Book 2*, p. 22.

8. *The Baptist Faith and Message*: "Section X. Last Things." (Nashville, The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1963), p. 15.

Bill Gordon, Interfaith Witness Evangelism Associate, Interfaith Witness

© 1997, North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use. All other inquiries should be addressed to: Manager, Editorial Unit, North American Mission Board, SBC.

For more copies, order 213-87F from:
Customer Services
1 800 634-2462, or fax, 1 800 253-2823



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC

4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

For more information
on this subject or other
Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Witness Team

North American Mission Board, SBC

Roman Catholicism

NAME: Roman Catholic Church

CURRENT POPE: John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla, installed Oct. 22, 1978)

MEMBERSHIP: (1996) 968,025,000; **NORTH AMERICA:** 74,243,000

WORLD HEADQUARTERS: Vatican City

HISTORY

Secular historians date the beginning of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution (with centralization and papal authority) to the fifth and sixth centuries. The authority of the pope reached its height in the thirteenth century with Innocent III, who claimed the title "Vicar of Christ."

DOCTRINE

God: Catholics affirm the Triune nature of the one God. God is one. God has revealed Himself as three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], paragraph no. 253). Catholics do not consider Mary part of the Trinity.

Catholics teach that God is good, loving, and truthful. God is all-powerful and all-knowing. God is the creator of all things. God both transcends and sustains the universe.

Response: Protestants and Catholics affirm the same beliefs about God's nature.

Jesus: Catholics affirm Jesus as the second Person of the Holy Trinity, as well as His full deity and full humanity (CCC, no. 464). Catholics regard Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hopes (CCC, no. 436).

Catholics believe Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on a Roman cross, was buried, and was resurrected

from the dead. He returned to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Response: Protestants and Catholics affirm the same beliefs about Jesus' nature, death, burial and resurrection.

Authority: Catholics accept three sources of authority: the Bible, Tradition and the teaching ministry (Magisterium) of the Church.

Bible: Catholics affirm the 66 books of the Protestant Bible, plus several apocryphal books that most Protestants consider spurious.

Catholics are encouraged to read the Bible. The teaching of the Catholic Church "forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful ... to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ,' by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'" (CCC, no. 133).

Tradition: Tradition refers to teachings of the apostles that Catholics believe have been preserved in the Church apart from the Bible. "This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it" (CCC, no. 78). Catholics view Tradition as an authority equal to the Bible (CCC, no. 82).

Teaching Ministry of the Church (Magisterium): Catholics believe that their bishops (in communion with the pope) have been given the task of

authentically interpreting both the Bible and Tradition. This task “has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone” (CCC, no. 85). According to the CCC, “The faithful receive with docility the teachings and directives that their pastors give them in different forms” (CCC, no. 87).

The teaching ministry of the Church (Magisterium) is also considered equal in authority to the Bible and Tradition. According to Catholicism, the Bible, sacred Tradition, and the teaching authority of the Church “are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others” (CCC, no. 95).

Response: Catholics are correct to encourage people to read the Bible (2 Tim. 3:15-17). However, the Apocrypha should be rejected. These additions are uninspired and spurious. The Jews of Palestine never accepted the inspiration of these books. Also, Jesus never quoted the Apocrypha. The Apocrypha defends dishonesty and deceit (Tobit 5:4-13; Judith 9:10-13) and teaches that salvation depends on deeds of virtue (Tobit 4:10-11; 12:9; Ecclesiasticus 3:30).

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit enables people to understand God’s Word (Ps. 119:99-105, 130; Luke 24:44-45; John 16:13; 17:17; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12). All religious teaching must be evaluated by comparing it with the Bible. The Bereans used the Scriptures to verify the truthfulness of the apostle Paul’s teaching (Acts 17:11).

Moses warned of the danger of adding to or subtracting from the Scripture (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19). Jesus warned about the possibility of tradition perverting the intent of God’s Word (Matt. 15:23,6; Mark 7:8,9,13). Paul informed the Colossians of the danger of being led astray by following “the tradition of men” (Col. 2:8). Peter reminded his readers that they had been redeemed from “vain conversation received by tradition” (1 Pet. 1:18). Neither the Tradition nor teaching authority (Magisterium) of the Catholic Church has an authority equal to the Scriptures. The Bible is the sole authority

for matters of faith and practice.

Mary: Catholics believe that Mary “was totally preserved from the stain of the original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life” (CCC, no. 508). Catholics teach that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. They also believe that at the end of her life she “was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things” (CCC, no. 966). Catholics refer to Mary as “the Holy Mother of God” (CCC, no. 975). They view her as a co-mediator of God’s grace and as a collaborator with the salvation of Jesus her Son (CCC, nos. 510, 973). According to Pope Paul VI, “The church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship” (CCC, no. 971).

Response: Mary should be honored as a godly woman who was faithful to God. The Scriptures teach the virgin conception and birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:20-25). Unlike Catholic dogma, the Bible does not teach that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life (Ps. 69:8; Matt. 12:46; 28:10; Mark 3:31; Luke 8:19; John 7:3). Nor does the Bible indicate that Mary was conceived without original sin or that she was bodily ascended into heaven (Luke 1:47). The Bible does not refer to Mary as the Holy Mother of God. The offering of adoration and prayers to Mary (and to other saints) is both unscriptural and wrong (Dan. 3:16-18; Rev. 19:10; 22:8,9).

Sin: The CCC defines sin as “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law” (CCC, no. 1871). Catholics distinguish between two types of sin. The two types of sin are mortal and venial (CCC, no. 1854). Mortal sin destroys the sanctifying grace of God within the individual and necessitates forgiveness through a sacrament of reconciliation (CCC, no. 1856). It causes exclusion from heaven and results in “the eternal death of hell” (CCC, no. 1861). Catholics classify a sin as mortal when it meets the following conditions: the sin is serious or “grave” (murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, etc.), is committed with “full knowledge and

complete consent" (CCC, nos. 1857-59). A venial sin is a sin that either is not serious or grave, nor does it involve full knowledge or complete consent (CCC, no. 1862). Unlike mortal sin, venial sin does not destroy the saving grace of God in the individual. "Venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness" (CCC, no. 1863).

Response: The Bible does not teach the dual concept of mortal and venial sins. Apart from the saving grace of God, even the least serious sin will send a person to hell (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; Jas. 2:10). The Scripture also indicates that even the most serious sin is incapable of destroying the saving grace of God in the believer. This is why the true believer in Christ cannot lose salvation (John 10:27-29).

Sacraments: There are seven sacraments in the Catholic Church: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, holy orders and matrimony. "The seven sacraments are the signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spreads the grace of Christ the head throughout the Church which is his Body" (CCC, no. 774). Catholics believe that the sacraments actually "confer the grace that they signify" (CCC, no. 1127) and that their ordained priesthood "guarantees that it really is Christ who acts in the sacraments" (CCC, no. 1120). For believers, the sacraments of the Catholic Church "are necessary for salvation" (CCC, no. 1129).

Baptism: "The faithful are born anew by Baptism" (CCC, no. 1212). "Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ" (CCC, no. 1213). Catholics baptize their children shortly after birth. "The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth" (CCC, no. 1250). Catholics teach that "Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament" (CCC, no. 1257). "By Baptism

all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin" (CCC, no. 1263).

Confirmation: Confirmation completes baptismal grace by increasing the gifts and strengths of the Holy Spirit in the recipient (CCC, no. 1303). It is usually done by the bishop when a child reaches the "age of discretion" (CCC, no. 1307).

Eucharist (Mass): "The Eucharist [or communion] is 'the source and summit of Christian life'" (CCC, no. 1324). Catholics maintain that the miracle of transubstantiation takes place during the Eucharist. In this sacrament, they believe that there occurs "a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of the blood" (CCC, no. 1376). By receiving Eucharist, Catholics believe they are receiving Christ.

Penance (Confession): Penance is the sacrament of reconciliation. In the sacrament, the sinner confesses all mortal sins to a priest. The priest imposes acts of penance and offers forgiveness of sin. "Indeed bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins" (CCC, no. 1461). According to Catholics, this sacrament reconciles one with God (CCC, no. 1468) and obtains "forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism" (CCC, no. 1486).

Anointing of the Sick (formerly known as Extreme Unction): Only priests and bishops can give this sacrament, using oil blessed by the bishop (CCC, no. 1530). The sacrament may be given when a Catholic is in danger of death because of illness or old age (CCC, no. 1527).

Holy Orders: Catholics believe this sacrament confers sacred power for service (CCC, no. 1592). There are three degrees of Holy Order. The highest is that of bishop, then priest (presbyters), and then deacon. "Without the bishop, presbyters, and deacons, one cannot speak of the Church" (CCC, no. 1593). Women may not receive this ordination (CCC, no. 1577). The pope is the bishop

of Rome. Catholics believe that he has "full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church" (CCC, no. 882).

Matrimony: Catholics believe the sacrament of matrimony "gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church" (CCC, no. 1661). Remarriage by a divorced Catholic while the lawful spouse is alive is not allowed (CCC, no. 1665). The Catholic Church, however, frequently grants annulments in which remarriage is allowed.

Response: The Bible does not teach a sacramental theology. What counts with God is genuine love, not ritual (Gal. 5:6). God does not use sacraments to convey grace to humanity. This is why Paul can write that baptism is not part of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:17). There is only one mediator between God and humanity and that mediator is the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 9:15). Since Jesus is easily approachable, there is no need for any mediator between humanity and Jesus (Matt. 11:28-30).

GUIDELINES FOR WITNESSING TO CATHOLICS:

- Remember that salvation does not depend on church membership, but on a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that comes through faith (Eph. 2:8-9).

- Pray and trust in the Holy Spirit to use the gospel message to reach the hearts and minds of those who are lost.

- Share a testimony of your personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Many Catholics have never experienced a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Your testimony of what Jesus has accomplished in your life can have a great impact on them. Keep your testimony short. Avoid using, or clarify terms, that are unfamiliar to Catholics, such as: "walked the aisle," "got saved," and "born again".

- Share the assurance of salvation that God's grace gives you. Make sure that you communicate that your assurance is derived from God's grace and not from your good works or your ability to remain faithful (1 John 5:13).

- Give them a New Testament. Catholics are now encouraged to read the Bible. Point out texts that explain salvation.

- Avoid getting bogged down with secondary issues that are not central to salvation.

- Keep the gospel presentation Christ-centered.

Quotes were taken from *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 1994.

Bill Gordon, Associate, Interfaith Evangelism

© 1999 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use. All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, SBC.

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983



4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC
e-mail: interfaith@namb.net

For more information, call (770) 410-6000; to order materials, call Customer Service Center,
1 800 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

Interfaith Witness

BELIEF BULLETIN

Cults, Sects, and New Religious Movements

Scientology

OFFICIAL NAME: Church of Scientology International

FOUNDER: L. Ron Hubbard, in 1954

CURRENT LEADERS: David Miscavige, (b. 1960); Heber C. Jentzsch (b. 1935)

HEADQUARTERS: Los Angeles, Calif.; Clearwater, Fla. (Flag Land Base)

ORGANIZATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH SCIENTOLOGY:

Applied Scholastics

Association for Better Living and Education (ABLE)

Citizens Commission on Human Rights

Concerned Businessmen of America

Hubbard Dianetics Centers

Narconon/Crimon

Religious Technology Center

Sterling Management Systems

The Way to Happiness Foundation

PUBLISHING ORGANIZATIONS: New Era Publications, International

Bridge Publications, Inc.

KEY PUBLICATIONS: *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (1950) and other books by L. Ron Hubbard; *What is Scientology?* (1978) compiled by staff of the Church of Scientology International; *Freedom* magazine

This Belief Bulletin highlights basic concepts of Scientology and gives Christian responses.

HISTORY: Lafayette Ronald Hubbard was born in Nebraska in 1911. He spent most of his childhood on his grandfather's Montana ranch while his parents served overseas in the U.S. Navy. Hubbard later stated that visits with parents to Asia in the 1920s introduced him to eastern philosophies and religions.

As a young man Hubbard developed a career as a science fiction writer and claimed to have explored the world. He also claimed that he received near fatal wounds in World War II. While

recovering, he formulated his novel psychological theories that were revealed in his 1950 book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*.

In 1954 Hubbard incorporated the Church of Scientology to promote his ideas using a religious facade. His books and church spread worldwide but Hubbard became a recluse. He spent most of his last years aboard his yacht being waited on hand-and-foot. He died inauspiciously in 1986.

COMMONLY USED SCIENTOLOGY TERMS:

Analytical mind: The conscious, rational, and problem solving part of one's mind.
Auditing: Scientology's personal counsel-

ing using dianetic techniques and utilizing an E-meter for reading engrams.

Auditor: Counselor who conducts auditing session.

Clear: State of person who has completed auditing. Person is supposedly liberated from all engrams and their ill effects on the mind and body.

Dianetics: Method developed by L. Ron Hubbard for removing engrams and their negative effects from the mind.

E-Meter (*Electropsychometer*): Instrument invented by L. Ron Hubbard for utilization in auditing process.

Engram: Unconscious mental image recorded in the reactive mind that has negative effects on a person's life.

MEST: Acronym coined from the initial letters of matter, energy, space, and time which compose the physical universe and hold the thetan captive.

Preclear: A person undergoing Dianetics auditing progressing toward Clear.

Reactive mind: The part of the mind not under a person's rational, conscious control or awareness.

Thetan: The immortal human soul or spiritual being. It is the true, timeless identity of the individual.

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: L. Ron Hubbard was a modern genius who discovered the answers to life's questions and unraveled the secrets of our past, present, and future existences. His writings and speeches are considered absolutely authoritative, especially his book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Researchers not associated with the Church of Scientology have documented inaccuracies in Hubbard's account of his life. They allege he fabricated and exaggerated many of his personal claims. His theories directly conflict with basic Christian teachings. Only the Bible is the infallible basis for

faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

IMMORTALITY: People are immortal, divine beings. They are composed of three dimensions: soul (thetan), mind (an accumulation of all past experiences in this and past lives), and body (the mortal, temporary physical component).

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: People are souls created in the spiritual image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-30, 2:7). They are twofold in nature, body and spirit. The body is mortal and the spirit immortal. There is no existence before earthly life.

GOD: The Church of Scientology International has no clear definition of the nature or person of God. References to a Supreme Being are rare in Scientology literature, calling it the "eight dynamic" or "infinity." The Supreme Being is defined in vague, pantheistic terms as embracing the "allness of all."

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: God is the eternal, infinite, personal Creator of the universe (Gen. 1; Deut. 6:4). He is Spirit (Num. 23:19; John 4:24) and has existed from all eternity in a triune form: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6).

HUMANKIND: Engrams are stored in one's "reactive mind" and learned from one's past lives, prenatal experience, and early childhood. These prevent individuals from realizing their innate divinity and experiencing a happy and fulfilled life using their analytical minds.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Human-kind's problem is sin, an attitude of rebellion or indifference toward God and His will, resulting in separation from God both in this life and forever (Mark 7:20-23; Rom. 3:23, 6:23; 1 John 3:4, 5:17).

SCIENTOLOGY'S SOLUTION—

AUDITING: Engrams are removed from the mind only by an expensive process of dianetic counseling. This process, called "auditing," involves the utilization of an "E-meter," that supposedly indicates when a person has discovered an engram and helps the client expunge it from his or her unconscious reactive mind in order to achieve "Clear." A person who has attained Clear may need further auditing to remove engrams held over from previous lives. Auditing sessions may cost as much as \$1,000 per hour.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Jesus Christ is God's solution to the sin problem. He was God Himself, in human form on Earth (John 3:16, 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 3:18). He lived a sinless life, died as an atoning sacrifice for sin, and rose from the dead. People thus receive salvation as a gift, both as a present reality and future hope, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:1; Rom. 10:9-10; Gal. 2:15-16; Eph. 2:8-9).

THE ULTIMATE GOAL—

LIBERATION FROM MEST: A person will experience many theta reincarnations in many lives over thousands of years. (Thus, auditing often must include clearing the client of engrams from past lives.) Eventually the theta can liberate itself completely from MEST and attain total spiritual awareness and become one with infinity.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Born-again Christians will live forever with God and Jesus in heaven (John 14:3-6; Rom. 6:23; 8:35-39; Rev. 20—22). Jesus taught that the righteous will have eternal life, but the unsaved will suffer eternal punishment in hell (Matt. 25:46). Reincarnation is nowhere taught in the Bible. People live one earthly life and then face God's judgment (Heb. 9:27).

WITNESSING TO SCIENTOLOGISTS:

1. Have a clear understanding of your faith and the Bible.
2. Ask appropriate questions to determine the person's level of involvement in Scientology and/or Dianetics. Many people involved do not understand its philosophical, spiritual, and scientific problems, nor its incompatibility with historic Christianity. In some cases, you may need to provide documentation to show the Scientologist that L. Ron Hubbard was not what Scientologists believe him to be and expose the controversial history of the Scientology movement. (see: Brent Corydon; *L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman* [Barracade Books, 1994] and Russell Miller; *Bare-Faced Messiah: A Biography of L. Ron Hubbard* [H. Holt & Co., 1988].)
3. Seek to establish a personal, friendly relationship with the Scientologist.
4. Establish the sole authority of the Bible. You may need to give the Scientologist a marked Bible to highlight basic Christian doctrines.
5. Define clearly all terms of Scientology and historic Christianity.
6. Show the Scientologist how Christian doctrines are incompatible with Scientology. Focus especially on contrasting ideas about God, sin, salvation, and life after death.
7. Share your personal testimony of faith in Jesus Christ and the benefits you derive from knowing Him as Savior and Lord.
8. Share the plan of salvation and sensitively seek to lead the person to faith in Jesus.

Tal Davis, Associate, Interfaith Witness Evangelism
© 1996 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use.
All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, SBC.

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 233-1123, or fax, 1 (615) 251-5983



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
NAMB

4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Witness Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

BELIEF BULLETIN

World Religions

Sikhism

NAME: Sikhism (pronounced "seek-ism")

FOUNDER AND KEY FIGURES: Nanak (1469-1539) and nine successive leaders (gurus) through 1708.

ORIGIN: India, with greatest success in the Punjab region

SCRIPTURES: Adi Granth (Guru Granth Sahib)

ADHERENTS: Worldwide—est. 20 million, U.S.—est. 250,000

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Sikhism is a recent religion (15th century A.D.) and represents a syncretism of Hindu devotional elements and the monotheism of Islam. However, its adherents claim it constitutes a fresh religious start. Nanak believed God commissioned him to spread a new redemptive revelation to humanity—that all people should believe in the true God. His message primarily taught the repetition of God's name, through charity to all, meditation, worship, and ritual purity through ablution were prominent elements. Nanak's followers called themselves Sikhs (disciples). Sikhism does not consider itself an active missionary religion because it accepts other religious traditions as valid.

Sikhs first came to the United States in 1908, when several immigrants from the Punjab region of India entered California. They built their first place of worship in 1912. Migrations since World War II have added to the Sikh population. In 1969, they built the largest Sikh temple in the world in Yuba City, Calif. Sikhs have established several organizational bodies in the United States, including the Sikh Council of North America, the chief instrument for coordinating Sikh work. One prominent branch of Sikhism in the United States is Sikh Dharma. Its head—Yogi Bhajan (b. 1929)—has been the major propagator of Sikh ideas in the United States.

KEY BELIEFS:

GOD: Sikhism holds that God is one. There is no Trinity. He is Creator, sovereign,

all-powerful, all-knowing, eternal. They believe God both transcends and indwells the universe. God is the abstract principle of truth and has never known an incarnation. Neither can He be defined. However, God is personal in that He can be loved and honored. Nanak called God the "true name" (Sat Nam) because he wanted to avoid any term implying God could be limited.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: God is the only eternal being in the universe, and He is supreme. God has revealed Himself personally to humanity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The incarnation of Jesus Christ epitomizes God's love for fallen humanity. Christianity affirms Jesus' unique place as Savior and Lord of humanity (John 1:14; 3:16).

PLACE OF HUMANITY: Although humans are the highest order of creation, they are separated from God because of self-centeredness and willful ignorance of God. This separation is the source of all human misery and unhappiness. Consequently, people are bound up in the process known as transmigration of the soul—continual birth, death, and rebirth (reincarnation). Position in the next life is dependent on the law of karma, a notion that one's thoughts, words, and deeds have a direct impact on future reincarnations. Current circumstances were determined by past behavior and current conduct will shape the next life. The goal of Sikhism is to break this cycle.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Human beings were created in the image of a loving

God and are the crowning achievement of His creative acts. God endowed humanity with free choice, but people chose to disobey God and introduce sin into the race. The chief fault of humanity is rebellion against God. As a gift from God, human personality is sacred and unique; every person is of great value. There are no reincarnations, and people have only one life; afterward, all must stand before God's judgment (Gen. 1:26-31; Ps. 8; John 3:16).

SALVATION: The endless cycles of reincarnation are caused by selfish desire and ignorance of God, but they may be ended by renouncing self and becoming devoted to God. Consequently, the ultimate goal in life has a twofold aspect: liberation from continual birth and rebirth and union with God. Salvation is achieved through God's grace, who reveals Himself and allows humans to meditate on His name and nature.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: The future destiny of people is not determined by karma, but by acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Salvation is defined as being born again, or receiving the new birth (regeneration) through personal faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. The afterlife is not union of the soul with God, but a resurrection of the body and conscious worship of the Lord forever with other believers (Eph. 2:1-10; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 21:1-7).

GRACE: Grace is understood as God's kind recognition or notice of a person. This endowment of grace enables people to follow a path that will free them from karma and reincarnation. Full surrender to God's will is most important for those who want to receive God's grace, because grace comes when

Written by Don Dowless, Louisburg, N.C.

© 1995 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use. All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176; or call, (770) 410-6258; or fax (770) 410-6006; or send to smdaniel@namb.net

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983



4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering
0840089643/2M/3-99

people eliminate self from their minds. The effects of grace include constant meditation on the repetition of God's name and good works to other humans.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Grace refers to God's redemptive love toward sinful humanity. Grace is unmerited on the part of humans. Grace is supremely represented in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who seeks to save sinners and maintains believers in proper relationship with Him (Eph. 2:8-9).

WITNESSING TO SIKHS:

1. Establish positive and cordial relationships with Sikhs. Let them see Christ's love in you. Give your new friends New Testaments so that they may inquire further about your faith. Help them understand what they read.

2. Be aware of aspects of the Sikh religion that are similar to Christianity—for example: monotheism, need for relationship with God, and good works resulting from religious values. Lead them to God's teachings about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Savior.

3. Be prepared to share your faith and God's Word concerning the human predicament and God's desire for humanity. The "Here's Hope Roman Road" tract (see Rom. 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9,13; 12:1-2) is one witnessing tool that has been used effectively by many Christians.

4. Invite Sikhs to attend a Christian worship service, and explain what each part of the service signifies in relation to Christian theology. Clarify such terms as salvation, faith, new birth, and conversion.

5. Underscore the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as humanity's Savior and as God's perfect revelation of Himself.

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC
e-mail: interfaith@namb.net

Seventh-day Adventism

Interfaith Evangelism **BELIEF BULLETIN**

American Denominations

OFFICIAL NAME: Seventh-day Adventist Church

KEY FIGURE IN HISTORY: Ellen G. White (1827-1915)

CURRENT LEADER: Jan Paulsen, President

HEADQUARTERS: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland

MEMBERSHIP (1998): Worldwide: 10 million in 44,888 churches in 230 countries. North American Division (U.S. and Canada): 891,176 in 4,746 churches.

MINISTRIES ASSOCIATED WITH SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS: Radio and Television: "The Voice of Prophecy"; "Amazing Facts"; "It Is Written" (Mark Finley). Publications: "Signs of the Times"; "Liberty"; "Vibrant Life"; "Adventist Review"; "Ministry." Books: *The Bible Story* by Arthur Maxwell and *Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories* by Arthur Maxwell. Educational Institutions: Andrews University; Kettering College of Medical Arts; Loma Linda University.

INTRODUCTION: Interfaith Evangelism (IE) defines a cult as any group that claims to be Christian, yet deviates at a major point of Christian doctrine, especially regarding the nature of God and the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) affirm the Christian doctrine of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. They also affirm the trinitarian nature of the Godhead: the fatherhood of God, deity of Jesus Christ, and the Person and deity of the Holy Spirit. They teach that man was created in the image of God, but is in a fallen state of sin and in need of redemption. They affirm that Jesus was virgin-born; lived a sinless life; was crucified, dead, and buried; and rose again bodily from the grave.

These SDA beliefs are in basic agree-

ment with historic, biblical Christianity. Thus, IE does not designate the SDA as a cult. However, IE designates the SDA as a Christian *sect* because they have a number of distinctive doctrines not in accord with historic Christian faith. This Belief Bulletin highlights those doctrines and provides biblical responses.

FOUNDING OF THE SDA CHURCH: SDAs teach that the church founder, Ellen G. White, possessed a modern "spirit of prophecy." The church maintains that her visions and writings were divinely inspired interpretations of Scripture. Actually, the SDA movement was derived from several previous movements. Those movements included the Millerite Movement (Second Adventism), which had predicted the coming of Christ in 1844, and Seventh-day Sabbatarianism, as taught by Joseph

Bates. Mrs. White's visions combined these unusual theological notions into a unique religious system. She established the SDA movement in the 1850s. The SDA Church was formally organized in 1861 in Battle Creek, Mich.

THE REMNANT CHURCH: The SDA Church teaches that Christianity in its original form was corrupted in the centuries after the New Testament era by apostate Roman Catholic popes. The sign of this apostasy was the shifting of the sabbath day from the seventh to the first day of the week. Throughout history, a small, faithful group of Christians has maintained true worship. Today the "remnant" church is the SDA Church.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The church consists of the body of believers in Christ. It is the body of Christ in which the gospel is proclaimed, Christians are nurtured in their faith, and gifts of the Spirit are exercised. No single organization can claim exclusive title as the true or remnant church. The church includes all the redeemed of all ages (Matt. 16:15-19; Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 1:22-23, 3:21, 4:4-13).

THE SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH: The SDA Church teaches that the biblical sabbath must be observed on the seventh day of the week (Friday evening until Saturday evening) in accordance with Old Testament law. It maintains that the New Testament church observed the sabbath which is the "seal" of God's law. Those Christians who worship on Sunday are in error and, in the last days, will bear the "mark of the beast," which they consider to be Sunday worship.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The New Testament church met on the "Lord's Day" (first day of the week) as a memorial of Christ's resurrection. The SDA Church's insistence that sabbath-keeping is mandatory for Christians is unwarranted. The claim that Sunday worship is the mark of the beast is unfounded.

Salvation and commitment to Christ are not demonstrated by adherence to external legalities (Rom. 13:8-10, 14:4-13; 1 Cor. 16:2; Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:13-17).

SALVATION MAINTAINED BY WORKS: The SDA Church publicly states its belief that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. However, SDA teaching often implies that certain outward acts of righteousness are necessary to maintain one's assurance of salvation, especially observance of the seventh-day sabbath. SDA members also are expected to observe strict dietary regulations and to abstain from alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The SDA Church's emphasis on a healthy lifestyle is commendable. However, salvation is entirely a result of grace through faith in Jesus Christ as one's Savior and Lord. Good works result from one's assurance of eternal security through Christ's finished work (John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:1-2, 35-39; Eph. 1:13-14, 2:8-10; 2 Tim. 1:12).

THE INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT: The SDA Church teaches that the true "holy of holies" sanctuary of God is in heaven where, in 1844, Jesus began the second phase of His atoning ministry. This second phase, called the "investigative judgment," involves an examination of the dead to determine if they are worthy of being part of the first resurrection, and to determine who among the living are abiding in Christ and keeping God's commandments.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The Bible makes no reference to the SDA's idea of two stages in God's plan of redemption. The SDA assertion that Christ entered the sanctuary in 1844 is unwarranted. Christ accomplished the totality of His redemptive work on the cross and in His resurrection. Salvation is assured by God's grace through faith in Christ (John 5:24; Rom. 5:6-10, 8:1; Col. 1:20-22);

Heb. 1:3, 9:27; 1 John 5:11-13).

DEATH IS A STATE OF UNCONSCIOUS “SLEEP”: The SDA Church teaches that people who have died are in an unconscious, sleep-like, state. Believers are awaiting the appearance of Christ when they will be resurrected and caught up to meet the Lord. The unrighteous wicked will be resurrected and judged after the millennium.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The Bible implies that Christians' spirits go to be with Christ at death. Believers live in a conscious, interim state with the Lord, waiting for the day when they will accompany Him at His return. At that time, they will be reunited with their resurrected glorified bodies (John 11:25-26; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Tim. 1:10).

THE SECOND COMING: The SDA Church teaches that we are in the last days. They do not set a date for the second coming, but imply that it will be soon. Bible prophecy can be understood from world history, as interpreted by Mrs. White. The SDA remnant church is proclaiming the final call for all people to prepare for the coming of Christ. They believe certain, specific signs will precede the end, especially a worldwide legal requirement for Sunday worship, the mark of the beast.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Jesus will indeed return physically to close the age and judge mankind. Believers are to be ready at any moment for the Lord's return. Mrs. White's interpretations of the prophetic biblical writings are questionable (Matt. 24:4-7,14,32-51; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7; 1 Thess. 5:1-11).

THE FINAL JUDGMENT: The SDA Church teaches that, after Christ's thousand-year rule, a second resurrection of those not saved will occur. Those whose names are not found in the “book of life” (unsaved) will be cast into the lake

of fire and annihilated out of existence. The doctrine of eternal hell is denied.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The doctrine of eternal hell is affirmed. The saved will enjoy eternal life with Christ and the lost will suffer eternal punishment (Matt. 18:8-9, 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48; John 3:16, 14:1-3; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:22).

CONCLUSION: Members of the SDA Church may be genuinely saved Christians based on personal faith in Jesus Christ. The SDA Church, however, has some teachings that deviate from historic Christian doctrine. Baptists adhere to sound biblical teachings and reject extra-biblical revelations or interpretations.

WITNESSING TO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS:

1. Have a clear understanding of your faith and of the Bible.
2. Have a basic knowledge of SDA beliefs and the extra-biblical sources of some of their doctrines.
3. Establish the sole authority of the Bible based on sound principles of interpretation.
4. Define all terms clearly. Some common terms may have different meanings for SDAs than they do for Baptists.
5. Determine the level of the SDA's commitment to his or her church.
6. Determine what relationship the SDA has with Jesus Christ. Is he or she trusting in Christ for salvation or in good works and church membership?
7. Present a strong, personal testimony of your faith in Christ and your assurance of salvation by grace through faith.
8. If the person does not know Christ as Savior and Lord, share the basic gospel message and seek to bring him or her to faith in Jesus.

9. If you determine that the SDA possesses a saving knowledge of Christ, you may want to engage in a respectful dialogue of differences in doctrinal beliefs.

10. Trust the Holy Spirit to lead you.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. General Conference of SDA, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*. Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988.
2. Martin, Walter. "The Puzzle of Seventh-day Adventism." Appendix in *The Kingdom of the Cults* (rev. ed.). Minneapolis: Bethany House Pub., 1985, pp. 409-500.
3. White, Ellen G. *The Great Controversy* (1887) and *Desire of Ages* (1898).

Tal Davis, Associate, Interfaith Evangelism

©2000 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Ga.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the prior written permission of the publisher. All inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176; or call (770) 410-6292; or fax (770) 410-6006; or e-mail permissions@namb.net

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 448-8032, or fax, 1 (615) 251-5983



4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Witness Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC
e-mail: interfaith@namb.net
Web site: www.namb.net

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®

Mormons

Interfaith Evangelism BELIEF BULLETIN

Cults, Sects, and New Religious Movements

OFFICIAL NAME: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)

FOUNDER: Joseph Smith Jr., on April 6, 1830

CURRENT LEADER: Gordon B. Hinckley (b. 1910)

HEADQUARTERS: Salt Lake City, Utah

MEMBERSHIP (1998): Worldwide: 10.35 million in 25,551 wards and branches in 161 countries; United States: 5.3 million in all 50 states and D.C.; Canada: 140,000.

MISSIONARIES (1998): 58,853

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded by Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844). Smith claimed to have had a visitation from God in 1820 in which God directed him to establish the true church. Consequently, he organized the Mormon Church on April 6, 1830, with six original members. Beginning with a few hundred followers, the church moved to Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois before Smith's death at the hands of a mob at the Carthage, Ill., jail. Smith had been arrested for encouraging the destruction of the *Expositor*, a Nauvoo, Ill., newspaper. After Smith's death, Brigham Young was affirmed as president of the church by a majority of the church's leaders and led his followers to Utah where they established Salt Lake City in 1847. Joseph Smith's widow, Emma, resided in Illinois. Those who affirmed her son, Joseph Smith III, as the true successor of his father and as prophet of the church in the 1850s helped found the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, now headquartered in Independence, Mo.

MAJOR BELIEFS

ONE TRUE CHURCH: The Mormon church claims to be the only true church. In God's supposed revelation to Joseph Smith, Jesus Christ told him to join no other church for "they were all wrong . . . their creeds were an abomination . . . those professors [members] were all corrupt" (*The Pearl of Great Price*,

Joseph Smith—History 1:19). Mormons teach that after the New Testament, all churches became heretical and no true saints existed until the "Church of the Latter-day Saints" was organized, hence their name. Non-Mormons are thus called "Gentiles." The new revelations given to Smith, the institution of the prophet and apostles in the church, the restoration of the divine priesthoods, and the temple ceremonies make the church authentic. True and full salvation or exaltation is found only in the LDS Church.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The true church of Jesus Christ has had an ongoing presence and witness in the world since Pentecost. Jesus Christ promised that His church, *truly* baptized and regenerate believers, would not fail (see Matt. 16:17-18). The marks of a true church include faithfulness to the teaching of the first apostles (see Acts 2:42)—not the creation of new doctrines.

AUTHORITY OF THE PROPHET: The *president* or *prophet* of the Church is thought to be the sole spokesman and revelator of God. Joseph Smith was the initial prophet, but each successive president holds that position. Through him, God's will can be made known to the church. All revelations are made scripture and no Mormon can attain godhood without accepting Joseph Smith as a true prophet. The Mormon scriptures state that Latter-day Saints "shalt give heed unto all his [the prophet's] words and commandments . . . For his word ye shall receive as if from mine [God's] own mouth" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 21:4-5).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Old and New Testament prophets were God's spokesmen. Their words were always consistent with the Bible and pointed to God's Son, Jesus Christ. A test of genuineness for prophets was that any prediction they proclaimed would come true (see Deut. 18:20-22). For example, Joseph Smith predicted that the temple of the church would be built in Independence, Mo., within his lifetime (*Doctrine and Covenants* 84:2-5). No temple has yet been built there. New Testament prophets spoke, along with teachers, pastors, and evangelists, in evangelizing with and edifying the church (see Eph. 4:11-13).

MORMON SCRIPTURE: Mormons accept four books as scripture and the word of God. The King James Version of the Bible is one of them, but only "as far as it is translated correctly"—seemingly allowing for possible questions about its authority. Joseph Smith made over 600 "corrections" to its text. Other "standard works" are the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrines and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*. The Bible is missing "plain and precious parts" according to the *Book of Mormon* (1 Nephi 13:26) which the other three volumes complete. The *Book of Mormon* has "the fullness of the gospel" and tells the story of a supposed migration of Israelites in 600 B.C. to the American continent. These Israelites subsequently lapsed into apostasy although their story was preserved on golden plates written in Reformed Egyptian. Joseph Smith, it is said, translated the plates by the "gift and power of God" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 135:3). Reformed Egyptian does not exist as a language. The golden plates were returned to the angel Moroni after they were transcribed and Moroni returned them to heaven. The *Book of Mormon* does not contain explicit Mormon doctrine. *Doctrines and Covenants* contains the revelations of the Mormon prophets—138 in number along with two "declarations." Here, most of Mormon doctrine can be found including the priesthood, baptism for the dead, godhood, and polygamy. *The Pearl of Great Price* contains Smith's religious history, the Articles of Faith, the Book of Abraham, and the Book of Moses.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The Bible explicitly warns against adding to or detracting from its teaching (see Rev. 22:18; Deut. 4:2). The New Testament contains the inspired and totally accurate witness of contemporary dis-

ples and followers of Jesus. It alone claims to be fully inspired of God and usable for the establishment of doctrine. (see 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

ESTABLISHMENT OF TEMPLES: The first Mormon temple was constructed in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1836. Subsequently, a temple was constructed in Nauvoo, Ill., in 1846. Presently, there are at least 69 operating temples throughout the world including the one finished in Salt Lake City in 1893. The purpose and function of temples is for the practice of eternal ordinances including primarily baptism for the dead, endowments, and celestial marriages. Baptism in the Mormon church, for both the living and the dead, is essential for the fullness of salvation. The dead often are baptized by proxy which affords them after death the opportunity to become Mormons. Celestial marriage for "time and eternity" is also a temple ordinance. It is necessary for godhood and seals the marriage forever. Temples form an essential part of Mormon salvation. Only Mormons in possession of a "temple recommend" by their bishop may enter a temple.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The temple of the Old Testament was a place of symbolic sacrifice forefiguring the sacrifice of Christ. Worship in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem was a practice of early Jewish believers (see Acts 2:46). Otherwise, there is no mention of any such practice in the New Testament. Never was the Jewish temple used for baptism for the dead, marriage, or other secret ceremonies. It was the place in the Old Testament where the glory of God occasionally dwelt. Today, the individual believer is God's dwelling place and not a physical building (see 1 Cor. 3:16).

GOD IS AN EXALTED MAN: Elohim, the god of this universe, was previously a man in a prior existence. As a result of having kept the requirements of Mormonism, he was exalted to godhood and inherited his own universe. God is confined to a "body of flesh and bones" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22) and yet is thought to be omniscient and omnipotent. He obviously cannot be omnipresent. There are an infinite number of gods with their own worlds—these too were previously men. The Holy Ghost, Jesus Christ, and "Heavenly Father" comprise three separate and distinct gods. Heavenly Father sires spiritual children

in heaven destined for human life on earth. All humans, as well as Jesus Christ and Lucifer, are god's heavenly children. (See *Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22; God, Jesus, and the Spirit thus had beginnings.)

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: God is Spirit and is not confined to a physical body (see John 4:24). Jesus Christ was incarnated through a miraculous and nonphysical conception through the Virgin Mary. He was fully God from the beginning (John 1:1). Together with the person of the Holy Spirit, they form the triune (three in one) eternal God.

JESUS IS GOD'S "SON": Jesus was Heavenly Father's firstborn spirit child in heaven. He was begotten by God through Mary as in a "literal, full and complete sense" in the same "sense in which he is the son of Mary" (Bruce McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993, 67). These two elements of Jesus being literally God's son form his uniqueness in Mormon theology. In the Garden of Gethsemane, as well as on the cross, Jesus atoned for Adam's sin and guaranteed all humankind resurrection and immortality. Jesus visited the Israelites or Indians of North America after his resurrection and established the true church among them. We are the spiritual, but literal, younger brothers and sisters of Christ. Some Mormon documents claim that Jesus was married at Cana in Galilee (see John 2) and had children himself.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Jesus is viewed as God, the Word or Son, eternally existent with the Father and worthy of identity as God (see John 1:1-14). He was born of the Virgin Mary who had conceived him supernaturally by the Holy Spirit. He lived a perfect life, died on the cross for the sins of the world, and was raised from the dead. He will come again and reign as Lord of Lords.

HUMANS ARE GODS IN EMBRYO: Every human being has the potential of becoming a god by keeping the requirements of Mormonism. A well-known statement within Mormonism is, "As man is god once was, as god is man may become." From a prior spirit existence in heaven, humans may be born on earth

in order to exercise freedom to choose good or evil and to have a body for the resurrection. Basically, humans are good, but they will be punished for their sin. But by keeping Mormon teaching and obeying the church and the Prophet, after the resurrection, worthy Mormon males may pass the celestial guards, bring their wives with them, and achieve a status similar to Elohim—the god of this world. The consequences of their sin are erased by their allegiance to the tenets of Mormonism. In resurrection, faithful Mormons receive exaltation to godhood and will exercise dominion over their world.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Human beings are God's special creation. There is no evidence from scripture of preexistence, rather God acknowledges that it was in the womb of our mothers that he formed us (see Isaiah 44:2). A sinful nature is part of humanity's experience. Liberation from the power and presence of sin is experienced as a result of faith in Christ. At that point, God's image is begun to be remade in every Christian. While being transformed to Christlikeness, the Bible does not teach literal godhood as the inheritance of the saints (see Rom. 8:29; Rev. 1:5-6).

MORMON PLAN OF SALVATION: The Mormon plan of salvation is built on the idea that all people have eternal life, but only the most faithful Mormons have godhood or enter the celestial Kingdom. In order to obtain this ultimate step, Mormons must exercise faith in the God of Mormonism, its Christ, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; exercise repentance; and be baptized in the LDS Church. Additionally, Mormons must keep the "Word of Wisdom" by abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine; tithe to the church; attend weekly sacrament meetings; support the Mormon prophet; do temple works; and be active in their support of the church.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Salvation, according to the Bible, is due to God's grace and love. He provided Jesus as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. It is through faith in the crucified and risen Jesus that we may be saved. Works are excluded (John 1:12; 3:16; Rom. 10:9-13; Eph. 2:8-9).

EVANGELIZING MORMONS

1. Have a basic and clear understanding of the Christian faith and the gospel.
2. Be aware of the unique Mormon doctrines as presented in this belief bulletin.
3. Remember, Mormons use Christian vocabulary (gospel, atonement, god), but radically redefine their meanings. Define clearly what you mean when you use biblical words.
4. Present a clear testimony of your faith in Christ alone for your salvation.
5. Show your Mormon friend that the Bible teaches salvation alone through the cross of Christ (John 3:16; Rom.10:4,10-13; Eph.2:89).
6. Warn the Mormon about trusting in feelings (i.e., the burning in the bosom) for a validation of Mormonism's truth claim. Without historical, objective verification, feelings are useless.
7. When Mormons use a Bible verse, read carefully the verses before and afterward to make clear the exact meaning and purpose of the passage. Don't let them take Bible verses out of context. Read carefully the full reference in the Bible before deciding what any one verse means.
8. Keep the central doctrines of the faith as the focus of your discussion.
9. Share the plan of salvation with your Mormon friend. Emphasize that salvation is a gift to be received, not a merit to be earned.
10. Do the basics: pray, trust the Holy Spirit, and be loving, patient, and steadfast.

OTHER COMMON LDS TERMS:

Aaronic Priesthood: The lesser of the two divisions of the LDS priesthood.

Bishop: Presiding high priest of a local LDS

ward.

Endowment: Ceremony in LDS temples in which worthy members learn sacred (secret) details of the LDS plan of salvation.

First Presidency: Highest leadership and authority group in the LDS church. Normally consists of the president of the church and his two counselors.

Gentiles: All people who are either not Jewish or not members of the LDS church.

Godhead: According to LDS, is three separate divine entities (gods) - the Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. They are united in one purpose.

Gospel: The full system of LDS belief and practice.

Holy Ghost: Divine entity in LDS godhead who is a personage of spirit.

Melchizedek Priesthood: The higher of the two divisions of the LDS priesthood.

Mission: The specific time and place in which a Mormon serves as an LDS missionary.

Restoration: Refers to Heavenly Father's restoring true Christianity and the true church to the earth through Joseph Smith Jr. in the 1820s and 30s.

Sacrament: Ordinance in which elements of bread and water are partaken by LDS members in weekly ward services.

Sealing: Temple services uniting LDS husbands, wives, and children as a family unit for eternity.

Testimony: A subjective experience that validates the LDS church and doctrine to the Mormon. It is sometimes described as a "burning in the bosom."

Tithe: Payment of one-tenth of their annual income made by LDS members to the church.

Phil Roberts, Director, Vice President, Strategic Cities Strategies

©2000 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the prior written permission of the publisher.

All inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Pkwy.,
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176; or call (770) 410-6292; or fax (770) 410-6006; or e-mail permissions@namb.net

For more copies, order from
Customer Service Center
1 800 448-8032, or fax, (615) 251-5983



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
NAMB

4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:

Interfaith Witness Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC
e-mail: interfaith@namb.net
Web site: www.namb.net

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®

THE MORMON PUZZLE

Comparison Chart— Mormonism and Christianity

Introduction:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon church) professes to be a Christian church. However, a careful comparison of basic doctrinal positions of that church to those of historical, biblical Christianity reveal many radical differences. This pamphlet compares Mormon doctrines as stated in LDS authoritative primary sources to those of historic Christianity as derived solely from the Bible.

The Doctrine of God:

Historic Christianity	Mormonism
<p>The one God is a Spirit who is the personal, eternal, infinite Creator of all that exists. He is the <i>only</i> God and necessary for all other things to exist. He exists eternally as a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (see Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10; 44:6-8; Matt. 28:19; John 4:24; 17:3)</p>	<p>God (Heavenly Father) is an exalted man with a physical body of flesh and bone. LDS founder Joseph Smith said, "If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form" (<i>Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith</i>, p. 345). The trinity is denied with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost seen as three separate entities. "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us" (<i>Doctrine and Covenants</i> [D&C] 130:22).</p>

The Doctrine of Jesus Christ:

Historic Christianity	Mormonism
<p>Jesus Christ was the virgin-born God incarnate who existed in all time with the Father and Holy Spirit in the eternal Trinity. As a man He possessed two natures—human and divine. He lived a sinless life and willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sin of all humanity. (see John 1:1-18; 8:56-59; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:13-22; Heb.1:3; 13:8)</p>	<p>Jesus was the spiritual “first born” Son of God in the preexistence. “Every person who was ever born on earth was our spirit brother or sister in heaven. The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ, so he is literally our elder brother” (<i>Gospel Principles</i> [GP], p. 11). “And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn” (D&C 93:21). He is also the “only begotten” physical offspring of God by procreation on earth. “Jesus is the only person on earth to be born of a mortal mother and an immortal father. That is why he is called the Only Begotten Son” (GP, p. 64). His atonement (death and resurrection) provides <i>immortality</i> for all people regardless of their faith. “Christ thus overcame physical death. Because of his atonement, everyone born on this earth will be resurrected . . . This condition is called immortality. All people who ever lived will be resurrected, ‘both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous’ (<i>The Book of Mormon</i> [BOM], Alma 11:44)” (GP, p. 74). (See GP, pp. 11, 17-19, 61-77.)</p>

The Doctrine of Scriptures and Authority:

Historic Christianity	Mormonism
<p>The Bible (Old and New Testaments) is the unique, revealed, and inspired Word of God. It is the sole authority for faith and practice for Christians. (see 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21)</p>	<p>Recognizes the LDS Four Standard Works as authoritative. These include the Bible “as far as it is translated correctly” (Articles of Faith 1:8). It also includes <i>The Book of Mormon</i> (BOM) which Joseph Smith declared is “the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (<i>Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith</i>, p. 194).</p> <p>The church also regards <i>The Doctrine and Covenants</i> (D&C) as Scripture. It “is a collection of modern revelations . . . regarding The Church of Jesus Christ as it has been restored in these last days” (GP, p. 54).</p> <p><i>The Pearl of the Great Price</i> (PGP) is the fourth book believed to be inspired. “It clarifies doctrines and teachings that were lost from the Bible and gives added information concerning the creation of the earth” (GP, p. 54).</p> <p>The church’s president is regarded as “a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet” (D&C 107:91-92).</p>

The Doctrine of Humanity:

Historic Christianity

Human beings are created in God's image, meaning they have personal qualities similar to God's. Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity and worth. (see Gen. 1:26-27)

Mormonism

People are the preexisting spiritual offspring of the Heavenly Father and Mother. "All men and women are . . . literally the sons and daughters of Deity . . . Man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal (physical) body" (Joseph F. Smith, "The Origin of Man," *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1909, pp. 78,80, as quoted in GP, p. 11). They are born basically good and are "gods in embryo." A commonly quoted Mormon aphorism (attributed to fifth LDS president Lorenzo Snow) says "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."

The Doctrine of Sin:

Historic Christianity

Human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature and pursuing life opposed to His essential character and revealed law. (see Rom. 3:23; 7:14-25; 1 John 1:8-10)

Mormonism

People sin by disobedience to God's laws. Adam's fall, a part of Heavenly Father's plan, caused a loss of immortality, which was necessary for mankind to advance, (see GP, pp. 31-34). As Eve declared according to LDS scripture, "Were it not for our transgression we never should have . . . known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient" (PGP, Moses 5:11; see also BOM, 2 Nephi 2:22-25). Each person is responsible for his or her own sin.

The Doctrine of Salvation:

Historic Christianity

Salvation is release from the guilt and power of sin through God's gift of grace. It is provided through Christ's atonement and received by personal faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. (see Rom. 3:20; 10:9- 10; Eph. 2:8-10)

Mormonism

Jesus' atonement provided immortality for all people. Exaltation (godhood) is available only to Mormons through obedience to LDS teachings: faith, baptism, endowments, celestial marriage, and tithing. "Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God—Wherefore, all things are theirs" (D&C, 76:58-59).

These are some of the blessings given to exalted people:

1. They will live eternally in the presence of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ (see D&C, 76).
2. They will become gods.
3. They will have their righteous family members with them and will be able to have spirit children also. These spirit children will have the same relationship to them as we do to our Heavenly Father. They will be an eternal family.
4. They will receive a fullness of joy.
5. They will have everything that our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have—all power, glory, dominion, and knowledge (See GP, p. 302).

Baptism for the dead provides post-mortem salvation for non-Mormons, and is "by immersion performed by a living person for one who is dead. This ordinance is performed in temples" (GP, p. 375). (See also GP, chapters 18-23.)

The Doctrine of Life after Death:

Historic Christianity	Mormonism
<p>Eternal life in heaven with God for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ. Eternal separation from God's presence in hell for the unsaved. (see Matt. 5:12-30; 25:41; Rev. 20-22)</p>	<p>One of three levels of glory:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom for faithful Mormons where people may become gods or angels; "Then shall they be gods" (D&C 132:20). 2. Terrestrial Kingdom for righteous non-Mormons; "These are they who are honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men. These are they who receive of his glory, but not of his fullness" (D&C 76:75-76). 3. Telestial Kingdom for wicked and ungodly (not hell); "These are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers . . . who suffer the wrath of God on earth" (D&C 76:103-104). (See also D&C 76:57-119; 131:1-4.)

The Doctrine of the Church:

Historic Christianity	Mormonism
<p>Christians congregate together in local bodies and along denominational lines sharing distinctive doctrinal and ecclesiastical concepts. There is no organization or denomination that can claim exclusive designation as the "one true church." The universal church consists of all the redeemed in Jesus Christ in all of the ages. (see Matt. 16:15-19; 1 Cor. 1:12-14; Eph. 2:19; 3:11-12)</p>	<p>Asserts that the LDS is the one true church on the face of the earth. Joseph Smith claimed Jesus Christ told him to join none of the existing denominations because "they were all wrong . . . that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt" (PGP: Joseph Smith—History 1:19-20). Mormons claim only the LDS possesses the divine authority of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood as restored by God to Joseph Smith in 1829. (D&C 13; 27:8-13; 107:1-20; PGP: Joseph Smith—History 1:68-73)</p>

References:

- _____. *Gospel Principles*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1992.
- McConkie, Bruce. *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1986.
- Smith, Joseph, Jr. *The Book of Mormon - Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982.
- Smith, Joseph, Jr. *The Doctrine and Covenants*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982.
- Smith, Joseph, Jr. *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. 7 vols. 2nd ed. rev. Edited by B.H. Roberts. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-1951.
- Smith, Joseph, Jr. *The Pearl of Great Price*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982.
- Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1977.



North American Mission Board, SBC
4200 North Point Pkwy. • Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

A Southern Baptist Convention agency supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering
For general information, call (770) 410-6000, or visit www.namb.net;
to order materials, call Customer Service Center, (800) 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983

Nation of Islam

Interfaith Witness

BELIEF BULLETIN

World Religions

OFFICIAL NAME: The Nation of Islam (NOI)

LEADER: Louis Farrakhan

HEADQUARTERS: Chicago, Ill.

DATE OF BEGINNING: 1978. The Nation of Islam follows the teachings of W. D. Fard.

ADHERENTS: The Nation of Islam does not release statistics, but there are an estimated 25,000 to 100,000 members. Many more people admire Louis Farrakhan as a national leader. In 1995 he called for a Million Man March and several hundred thousand men answered his call.

HISTORY: The NOI was created by Wallace D. Fard, also known as Wallace Fard Muhammad. Fard claimed to come from the Islamic city of Mecca. He began a mosque in Detroit in 1930. He taught that Christianity should be rejected since it was the "slave-master's religion." In 1934 Fard disappeared and was neither seen nor heard from again. Fard was succeeded by Elijah Muhammad (Elijah Poole).

Elijah Poole was born in Sandersville, Ga. on October 7, 1898. He changed his name to Elijah Muhammad after joining the NOI. After Fard disappeared, Elijah took over the leadership of NOI.

Malcolm Little was born in 1925. He joined the NOI and changed his name to Malcolm X. He achieved fame in the early 1960s as the spokesperson for Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm was removed as spokesperson because of an inappropriate remark about the assassination of President Kennedy and was severed from the NOI because of his accusations of sexual misconduct between Elijah and female staff members (C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslim in America*, 3d. ed. [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994], 258). After he left the NOI, Malcolm began the Muslim Mosque, Inc. in 1964. Less than one year later, on February 21, 1965, Malcolm X was killed by assassins.

Warith Deen Muhammad became the new leader of the NOI after his father, Elijah Muhammad, died on February 25, 1975. Warith eliminated from NOI teaching that

Fard was Allah. Warith led the NOI to adopt beliefs compatible with traditional Islam. He changed the name from the NOI to the World Community of Islam. Later, he altered the name to the American Muslim Mission but eventually disbanded the organization and his followers became part of traditional Islam. The NOI was resurrected by Louis Farrakhan.

Farrakhan was born Louis Eugene Walcott in New York City on May 11, 1933. He attended college for two years in North Carolina, but left to begin a career as an entertainer. He sang in nightclubs until he joined the NOI. Louis Farrakhan separated from Warith Deen Muhammad in 1978 because of doctrinal disagreements. Farrakhan formed a splinter group using the original name—the Nation of Islam. He reestablished the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and also reinstated the movement's security force known as the Fruit of Islam (FOI).

BELIEFS: Several teachings of the NOI are incompatible with Christianity. Many of their beliefs are also incompatible with traditional Islam.

God: The Nation of Islam claims that God is a man. "God is a man and we just cannot make Him other than man" (Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, [Chicago: Muhammad's Temple No. 2], 6). The NOI teaches that Fard was Allah in physical form (Elijah Muhammad, *The Fall*

of America, 236, as reprinted in "The Mother Plane," *The Final Call* 15, no. 25, [July 16, 1996]: 19). According to Elijah Muhammad, Fard told him, "My name is Mahdi; I am God" (Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 17). The NOI continues to teach that Fard is Allah. The current NOI statement is published in every issue of their weekly newspaper, *The Final Call*, in an article titled "What the Muslims Believe." It states, "12. WE BELIEVE that Allah (God) appeared in the Person of Master W. Fard Muhammad, July, 1930; the long-awaited 'Messiah' of the Christians and the 'Mahdi' of the Muslims." The NOI denies that God is Spirit. The NOI claims that Christians worship an "invisible spook somewhere in space" (Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 5). According to Elijah Muhammad, "God is in person, and stop looking for a dead Jesus for help, but pray to Him whom Jesus prophesied would come after Him. He who is alive and not a spook" (*Ibid.*, 3).

Christian Response: The Bible teaches that God is Spirit (see John 4:24) and denies that He is a man (see Num. 23:19). The NOI worships a false god. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God (see John 3:16). Jesus is unique; there are no other incarnations of God. Jesus, not Fard, is the true Savior of the world (see Acts 4:12; John 1:1-14).

Humanity: The NOI teaches that blacks are gods and whites are demons. The NOI claims that blacks are of the same race as God. According to Elijah Muhammad, "To accept your own means yourself and your kind, your God Who is of you and you are of Him. It was your fathers who created the heavens and the earth, while there is nothing that the white man has created independently. He did not even create himself. The Black Nation is self-created, while the white race is made by one of the gods and scientists of the Black Nation" (Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 42). The NOI claims that one of these black scientists created the moon. They teach that 66 trillion years ago, he decided to destroy the earth. He drilled a shaft into the earth, filled it with high explosives, and then set it off. He failed to totally destroy the earth but he did blow it

into two parts. The smaller part became what we now call the moon (Tape of Louis Farrakhan, Dec. 9, 1990, Compton, Calif.).

According to the NOI, a black scientist named Yakub created the white race about 6,000 years ago. They claim that whites are a race of devils (Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 51). According to Elijah Muhammad, "If you understand it [the Bible] right, you will agree with me that the whole Caucasian race is a race of devils (*Ibid.*, 23). The NOI claims that Christianity is the devil's religion and was created to mislead blacks (*Ibid.*, 11).

Christian Response: Blacks are not gods and whites are not demons. Both races are descended from Adam and made in the image of God. "And God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl or the air, and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26). "God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The moon was created by the God of the Bible, not by a scientist 66 trillion years ago (see Gen. 1:16). The Bible warns Christians not to believe cunningly devised fables (see 2 Pet. 1:16).

The Bible: While the NOI often refers to the Bible, they claim it has been corrupted. "The original scripture called 'The Torah'—revealed to Musa (Moses)—was Holy until the Jews and the Christian scholars started tampering with it" (Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 87). Elijah Muhammad taught, "The Bible is not all holy, nor is it all the word of God" (*Ibid.*, 89)! Contrary to traditional Islam, the NOI also teaches that the Qur'an has been tampered with. "The enemy has tampered with the truth of both books: for he has been permitted to handle both books" (*Ibid.*, 90).

Christian Response: There is no evidence that the Bible has been corrupted as the NOI claims. Jesus promised, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18, NIV). There are thousands of biblical manuscripts that support the Bible as being incorrupt.

The Resurrection: The NOI denies the physical resurrection of the dead. Their doctrinal statement proclaims, "WE BELIEVE in the resurrection of the dead—not in physical resurrection—but in mental resurrection; therefore, they will be resurrected first" (*Final Call*, July 16, 1996, 39). Despite their denial of a physical resurrection, the NOI apparently believes that Elijah Muhammad is still alive. Every issue of their newspaper carries a statement of *The Muslim Program*. Included with this statement is Elijah Muhammad's picture and the declaration, "He Lives."

Christian Response: The Bible declares the physical resurrection of the dead (see Pss. 49:15, 71:20; Hos. 13:14; John 5:25, 6:40, 11:25; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Tim. 4:16). The dead will rise from the grave. The saved will live forever with the Lord in heaven. The lost will go to hell, a place of everlasting punishment (see Matt. 7:13; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:6,12-13).

The Last Judgment: The NOI teaches that a giant spaceship—the Mother Plane—will carry out Allah's judgment. Black scientists will use the same bombs that brought up the "mountains out of the earth" to destroy the white race (Elijah Muhammad, *The Fall of America*, 236, as reprinted in *The Final Call*, July 16, 1996, 19). They claim this judgment will not only destroy the white race but also Christianity. Elijah Muhammad asserted, "Armageddon has started, and after it there will be no Christian religion or churches. Jesus was a Muslim, not a Christian" (Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 22). Louis Farrakhan claims that he was taken aboard the Mother Plane in a vision. While in the giant UFO, he spoke to Elijah Muhammad who had been dead for several years (see *Washington Post*, September 18, 1995, D3). Farrakhan also asserts that this giant spaceship follows him when he travels (Tape of Farrakhan, July 13, 1986, Chicago, Ill.).

Christian Response: God, not a giant spaceship, will deliver the last judgment upon the world (see Matt. 25:31-32; 2 Cor. 5:10). God's judgment will not be restricted to one race, but will fall upon all who have not trusted in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (see John 3:18).

WITNESSING TO PEOPLE IN THE NOI:

1. Learn the primary Christian truths about God, Christ, the Scripture, and salvation. Know what you believe and why you believe it.
2. Acquaint yourself with the teachings and arguments of the NOI and be ready to give a Christian response (see 1 Pet. 3:15).
3. Listen to those in the NOI and discover why they joined.
4. Explain why you believe the Bible. If they claim that the Bible has been changed, ask them, "When did this happen?" and "What evidence causes you to believe the Bible has been corrupted?"
5. Define your words. Remember that the NOI redefines many terms. For example, when the NOI talks about God, they mean something very different from the God of the Bible.
6. Tell how to become a Christian. Share your testimony about how Jesus has saved you, and the difference He makes in your life. Center your witness on Christ and how to have a personal relationship with Him. Many NOI followers know about Christianity, but they do not know Christ.
7. Witnessing to those in the NOI may be frustrating. They often need to hear the gospel several times before trusting in Christ.
8. Trust God's Spirit to guide you and to convict the unsaved.

Scripture quotation marked NIV is taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*.
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

Bill Gordon, Interfaith Witness Evangelism Associate, Interfaith Witness Evangelism Team
© 1997 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention,
Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use. All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176; or call, (770) 410-6258; or fax, (770) 410-6006; or send to smdaniel@namb.net

For more copies, order 0840089341
from: Customer Service Center
1 800 233-1123, or fax, (615) 251-5983



For more information
on this subject or other
Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Witness Evangelism Team
North American Mission Board, SBC

North American Mission Board, SBC
4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

BELIEF BULLETIN

Islam

World Religions

OFFICIAL NAME: Islam

KEY FIGURE IN HISTORY: Muhammad (A.D. 570-632)

DATE OF ITS ESTABLISHMENT: A.D. 622

ADHERENTS: Worldwide: Estimated 1 billion; 58 percent live in South and Southeast Asia; 28

percent in Africa; 9 percent in Near and Middle East; 5 percent other.

U.S.: Estimated 6.5 to 8 million

WHAT IS ISLAM? Islam is the world's youngest major world religion. It claims to be the restoration of original monotheism and truth and thus supersedes both Judaism and Christianity. It stresses submission to Allah, the Arabic name for God, and conformity to the "five pillars" or disciplines of that religion as essential for salvation. From its inception, Islam was an aggressively missionary-oriented religion. Within one century of its formation, and often using military force, Islam had spread across the Middle East, most of North Africa, and as far east as India. While God is, in the understanding of most Muslims, unknowable personally, His will is believed to be perfectly revealed in the holy book, the Qur'an. The Qur'an is to be followed completely and its teachings form a complete guide for life and society.

WHO WAS MUHAMMAD? Muhammad is believed by Muslims to be the last and greatest prophet of God—"the seal of the prophets." It was through him that the Qur'an was dictated, thus according him the supreme place among the seers of God. A native of Mecca, Muhammad was forced to flee that city in A.D. 622 after preaching vigorously against the paganism of the city. Having secured his leadership in Medina, and with several military victories to his credit, Muhammad returned in triumph to Mecca in A.D. 630. There, he established Islam as the religion of all Arabia.

WHAT IS THE QUR'AN? The Qur'an is the sacred book of Islam and the perfect word of God for the Muslim. It is claimed that the

Qur'an was dictated in Arabic by the angel Gabriel to Muhammad and were God's precise words. As such, it had preexisted from eternity in heaven with God as the "Mother of the Book" and was in that form uncreated and coeternal with God. Islam teaches that it contains the total and perfect revelation and will of God. The Qur'an is about four-fifths the length of the New Testament and is divided into 114 "surahs" or chapters. While Islam respects the Torah, the psalms of David and the four gospels, the Qur'an stands alone in its authority and absoluteness. It is believed to be most perfectly understood in Arabic and it is a religious obligation to seek to read and quote it in the original language.

WHAT ARE THE "FIVE PILLARS"? They are the framework for the Muslims' life and discipline. Successful and satisfactory adherence to the pillars satisfies the will of Allah. They form the basis for the Muslim's hope for salvation along with faith and belief in Allah's existence, the authority of Muhammad as a prophet, and the finality and perfection of the Qur'an. The five pillars are:

1. *The Confession of Faith* or "Shahada": It is the declaration that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet. Sincerity in the voicing of the confession is necessary for it to be valid. It must be held until death and repudiation of the "Shahada" nullifies hope for salvation.

2. *Prayer* or "Salat": Five times a day, preceded by ceremonial washing, the Muslim is required to pray facing Mecca. Specific formulas, recited from the Qur'an (in Arabic),

along with prostrations are included. Prayer is, in this sense, an expression of submission to the will of Allah. While most of Islam has no hierarchical priesthood, prayers are led in mosques by respected lay leaders. The five times of prayer are before sunrise, noon, midafternoon, sunset, and prior to sleep.

3. *Almsgiving* or "Zakat": The Qur'an teaches the giving of two and one-half percent of one's capital wealth to the poor and/or for the propagation of Islam. By doing so, the Muslims' remaining wealth is purified.

4. *The Fast* or "Sawm": During the course of the lunar month of Ramadan, a fast is to be observed by every Muslim from sunrise to sunset. Nothing is to pass over the lips during this time, and they should refrain from sexual relations. After sunset, feasting and other celebrations often occur. The daylight hours are set aside for self-purification. The month is used to remember the giving of the Qur'an to Muhammad.

5. *Pilgrimage* or "Hajj": All Muslims who are economically and physically able are required to journey as a pilgrim to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. The required simple pilgrim's dress stresses the notion of equality before God. Another element of the Hajj is the mandatory walk of each pilgrim seven times around the Kaabah—the shrine of the black rock, the holiest site of Islam. Muhammad taught that the Kaabah was the original place of worship for Adam and later for Abraham. The Kaabah is thus venerated as the site of true religion, the absolute monotheism of Islam.

THE DOCTRINES OF ISLAM

God: He is numerically and absolutely one. God is beyond the understanding of man so that only his will may be revealed and known. He is confessed as the "merciful and compassionate one."

Sin: The most serious sin that can be ascribed to people is that of "shirk" or considering god as more than one. Original sin is viewed as a "lapse" by Adam. The fallen nature of humankind is not endorsed by Islam. Humankind is considered weak and forgetful but not as fallen.

Angels: Islam affirms the reality of angels as messengers and agents of god. Evil spirits or "Jinn" also exist. Satan is a fallen angel. Angels perform important functions for god

both now and at the end of time.

Final Judgment: The world will be judged at the end of time by god. The good deeds and obedience of all people to the five pillars and the Qur'an will serve as the basis of judgment.

Salvation: It is determined by faith, as defined by Islam, as well as by compiling good deeds primarily in conformity to the five pillars.

Marriage: Muslims uphold marriage as honorable and condemn adultery. While many Muslim marriages are monogamous, Islamic states allow as many as four wives. Men consider a woman as less than an equal, and while a man has the right to divorce his wife, the wife has no similar power (see Surah 2:228, 4:34).

Nonetheless, the female has a right to own and dispose of property. Modesty in dress is encouraged for both men and women.

War: The term "jihad" or "struggle" is often considered as both external and internal, both a physical and spiritual struggle. The enemies of Islam or "idolaters," states the Qur'an, may be slain "wherever you find them" (Surah 9:5). (See Surah 47:4). Paradise is promised for those who die fighting in the cause of Islam (see Surah 3:195, 2:244). Moderate Muslims emphasize the spiritual dimension of Jihad and not its political element.

Diet and food: Muslim dietary codes forbid the eating of pork and the use of intoxicating drinks. Other meats may be eaten from animals slaughtered by devout Muslims. Healthy diet and lifestyle are encouraged.

ANSWERING MUSLIM OBJECTIONS TO CHRISTIANITY: Christians and Jews are acknowledged as "people of the book," although their failure to conform to the confession of Islam labels them as unbelievers. Following are several questions that Muslims have about Christianity.

Is the Trinity a belief in three gods? Christians are monotheistic and believe that God is one. But both in His work in accomplishing salvation through the person of Jesus Christ and through biblical study it has become clear that His oneness in fact comprises three persons—Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. Mary is not part of the Godhead. The notion of God, who is three-in-

one, is part of both the mystery and greatness of God. God is in essence one while in persons three. This truth helps us understand God as truly personal and having the capacity to relate to other persons. As well, Christians confirm the holiness, sovereignty, and greatness of God.

How can Jesus be the Son of God? Scripture affirms that Jesus was conceived supernaturally by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary. It does not in any way claim that Jesus was directly God the Father's biological and physical son. It rejects the notion of the Arabic word for son "walad," meaning physical son, for the word "ibin," which is the title of relationship. Jesus is the Son in a symbolic manner designating that He was God the Word who became man in order to save humankind from its sin. The virgin birth was supernatural as God the Holy Spirit conceived in Mary, without physical relations, Jesus the Messiah. In this manner even the Qur'an affirms the miraculous birth of Christ (see Surah 19:16-21). Jesus was in this sense "God's unique Son." During His earthly ministry He carried out the will of the Father. Notably the Qur'an affirms Jesus' supernatural birth, life of miracles, His compassion, and ascension to heaven. (see Surah 19:16-21,29-31, 3:37-47, 5:110.)

How could Jesus have died on the cross, especially if He's God's son? The testimony of history and of the "Injil" or the four gospels is that Jesus died on the cross. If it is understood that God is love, and that humankind is lost in sin, then is it not likely that God would have provided a sacrifice for sin? Jesus is God's sacrifice for all the sins of the world and is a bridge from a holy God to fallen and sinful humans.

This truth is revealed in the Injil—John 3:16. Even the Qur'an states in Surah 3:55 that "Allah said: O Isa [Jesus], I am going to terminate [to put to death] the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me." What other way could this concept have any meaning apart from Jesus' death for sin and His subsequent resurrection?

Muslims believe that God took Jesus from the cross and substituted Judas in His place, or at least someone who looked like Jesus. He was then taken to heaven where He is alive and from where one day He will return.

ANSWERING MUSLIMS QUESTIONS TO CHRISTIANS ABOUT ISLAM

What do you think about the prophet Muhammad? Muhammad was apparently a well-meaning man who sought to oppose paganism and evil in his day. While he succeeded in uniting the Arabian peninsula and upheld several important virtues, we do not believe he received a fresh revelation from God. Jesus Christ fulfilled not only the final prophetic role from God, but He is the Savior of the world and God the Son. While Islam believes that some Bible passages refer to Muhammad (see Deut. 18:18-19; John 14:16, 15:26, 16:7), that is clearly not the meaning of the texts. Other passages may help in understanding and interpreting the previous texts, (see Matthew 21:11; Luke 24:19; John 6:14, 7:40; Acts 1:8-16, 7:37).

What is your opinion of the Qur'an? It is a greatly valued book for the Muslim. It is not received or believed to be a divine book by the Christian. The statements of the Qur'an are accepted only where they agree with the Bible.

What is your opinion about the five pillars? Salvation is from God and comes only through the saving work of Jesus Christ. When we put our faith in Him, we will be saved (see John 3:16-21,31-36).

WITNESSING TO MUSLIMS:

1. Be courteous and loving.
2. Reflect interest in their beliefs. Allow them time to articulate their views.
3. Be acquainted with their basic beliefs.
4. Be willing to examine passages of the Qur'an concerning their beliefs.
5. Stick to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith but also take time to respond to all sincere questions.
6. Point out the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ for salvation.
7. Stress that because of Jesus, His cross, and resurrection, one may have the full assurance of salvation, both now and for eternity (see 1 John 5:13).
8. Share the plan of salvation with the Muslim. Point out that salvation is a gift and not to be earned.
9. Pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Trust Him to provide wisdom and grace.
10. Be willing to become a friend and a personal evangelist to Muslims.

Phil Roberts, Vice President, Strategic Cities Strategies
© 1996 North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. Churches may reproduce this publication in limited quantities for congregational use.
All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board,
4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176; or call, (770) 410-6292; or fax, (770) 410-6006; or send to
permissions@namb.net

For more copies, order 0840089589
from Customer Service Center
1 800 448-8032, or fax, (615) 251-5983



4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

For more information on this subject
or other Belief Bulletin titles, write:
Interfaith Evangelism
North American Mission Board, SBC
e-mail: interfaith@namb.net

A Southern Baptist Convention agency
supported by the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

0840089589/5M/8-99