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The Cultic Mentality

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by Ed Hindson



Religious cults are on the rise worldwide. These schismatic deviations of true Christianity prey upon the immature and uninformed. They offer a better way of life, special discoveries of truth, and direct access to God.

American religious cults are generally an offshoot of legitimate Christianity or an attempted synchronism of biblical truth with pagan practice. The result is often a bizarre system of deviant doctrine built upon the claim of extrabiblical revelation. The words of some prophet or divine leader or special book replace the authority of Scripture.

Religious cults differ from denominations in that they are heretical schisms from orthodox belief and practice. While cults exist in virtually every religious society, and take many varied forms, they all have one thing in common: the belief that they alone are the people of God.

Believers within traditional denominations may have different doctrinal views and polity practices, but they do not exclude all others from the fold of heaven in the way cults do. For example, a Baptist and a Methodist may disagree on their mode of baptism, but they do not consign each other to hell on that basis. A Presbyterian and a Lutheran may differ on the matter of church government, but they do not reject each other as heretical or "cultic."

Cult members believe they are the only true people of God, have the only true message of God, and the only true way to heaven. The cult, instead of the Bible, becomes the ultimate norm of all truth. While the cult may tolerate ignorance of their views by the uninformed, they ultimately believe that all who disagree with them are lost. Thus, the exclusivity of salvation belongs to the cult group alone. This gives rise to the persecution complex that feeds the paranoia of most cults. They develop the mentality that "people hate us because we're different." Cults expect persecution and often invite it.

Religious cults thrive on biblical illiterates and religious neophytes who become enamored with special revelations, deeper truths, and better methods.

This mentality that believes "we alone are right" eventually gives way to uncritical allegiance to leadership. Soon, all disagreement is looked upon as "disloyalty" and a threat to the "purity" of the movement. Social pressure and sometimes even violence and physical restraint have been used by cult leaders to hold the allegiance of their followers. Jim Jones and the People's Temple cult are adequate examples.

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methods. Cult members profess to have a special corner on God's revelation. As a rule they claim to have a book or letter that is the "key" to understanding the Bible. Some say only their own translation of the Bible is inspired. Others believe their leader alone has God's final message for the world in these last days.

The idea then develops that God can accomplish His ultimate purposes only through "our" group, since we alone are His people and understand His message. If our movement fails, they rationalize, then God has failed. If we let Him down, they think, His work will never be accomplished. With this mentality a cult becomes a manufactured religion of human effort. Salvation by works and allegiance to the cult soon replace the doctrine of justification by faith, and a "messianic complex" (we alone can save the world) sets the movement in religious cement. Thus, centuries later, devoted followers are still trying to prove that their founder was true or that his long-past date for the Second Coming of Christ is still legitimate.

Jim Jones's followers did not commit suicide merely because he told them to do it. They had long before fallen victim to the cultic mentality. The rest was inevitable! ■

Marks of the Religious Cults

1. *Claim to extra-biblical revelation:* "We have a special message from God."
2. *Exclusive salvation:* "We alone are saved. All others are lost."
3. *Persecution complex:* "The world is against us because we have the truth."
4. *Defective Christology:* "Jesus died for our sins, but..."
5. *Doctrinal ambiguity:* "Truth doesn't have to make sense."
6. *Presumptuous leadership:* "I know what is best for you."
7. *Segmented interpretation of the Bible:* "These verses are more important."
8. *Denunciation of other Christians:* "All the churches are wrong but ours."
9. *Limited eschatology:* "Jesus is coming only for us."
10. *Messianic complex:* "We are God's only hope to save the world."