

CONTEMPORARY DESTRUCTIVE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

References: Today's Destructive Cults and Movements By Rev. L.J. Gesy, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., U.S.A., 1993.

Notes For Servants:

1. Can you clearly differentiate between Christian values and societal values?
2. Do you make an effort to support those values from the Bible?

Objectives:

General: Learn the Bible and understand Christian morals and values.

Specific:

1. Make an effort to read the Bible regularly.
2. Extract Christian morals and values from the Bible and not from the society.
3. When in doubt about something, consult spiritual leaders.

Instructions:

1. Church occasion.
2. Introduce the topic by talking about the contemporary society and our religion.
3. Define destructive cults, their types and how they progress.
4. Explain the concept of shepherding and discipleship in cults.
5. Briefly introduce magical, satanic and new age movement.
6. Explain why people join cults and the signs of someone joining a cult.
7. Explain how to avoid falling into this trap.

Bible Verse:

"Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace"

Heb. 13:9

Lesson:

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Our Contemporary Society & Religion:

- ! In our contemporary civil society and in our Judo-Christian faith communities we have standards by which we measure right and wrong, good and evil.
- ! Our beliefs provide the yardstick by which we can measure and then judge what is right or wrong in contemporary religious movements.
- ! As believers in God, our yardstick is the Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the traditions of the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit.

- ! The "orthodox principles" held by "mainstream churches" are:
- The Trinity:** The 3 persons of God. *John 1:1-3*
 - The Son:** The incarnate Word of the Father. *Phil. 2:5-11, Heb. 4:14-15, John 1*
 - Humankind:** We are created in the image of God. *Gen. 1:26, Ps. 8:5, John 1:11-13*
 - Salvation:** Jesus died to redeem us. *Rom. 10:4-17*
 - Revelation:** God reveals Himself to us. *John 14*
- ! To ensure a democratic society, the Constitution assures the freedom of religion, of speech and of the press.

Accordingly, destructive religious movements are protected unless or until they break the law.

What are Destructive Cults?

A destructive cult or sect is a highly manipulative group which exploits and sometimes physically and/or psychologically damages members and recruits.

A destructive cult:

- a) dictates how members should think, feel and act;
- b) claims a special exalted status for itself and/or for its leaders;
- c) exploits its members psychologically, financially, and/or physically;
- d) utilizes manipulative or "mind-control" techniques (to make members loyal, obedient and subservient); and
- e) causes considerable psychological harm to many of its members.

Post-cult symptoms include nightmares, depressions, inability to make decisions, sexual and social adjustments, memory loss, etc.

Progress and Types of Destructive Cults:

Destructive cults have become more noticeable since the '40s. There are more than five thousand destructive cults in U.S.A., with 3 to 5 million members.

The four main types are:

- 1) Movements based on the holy scripture ... derived from Christianity.
e.g. Seventh Day Adventists
- 2) Those derived from other religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism.
e.g. Hare Krishna
- 3) Those with signs of decomposition of the genuine idea of religion and return to paganism.
e.g. Unification Church
- 4) Gnostic - having special knowledge.
In the new forms of gnosticism, the evil world in which humanity is imprisoned is overcome, "escaped from" by knowledge. It accepts the view that we are divine and can do it all

ourselves.
e.g. Witchcraft

I. Most common cults that aim at attracting those who come from Christian background, these cults have very good propaganda means and very active door to door preaching:

A. The Mormons:

The Mormons are actually called the *Agod makers* because they believe *that men are little gods*. Their founder was *Joseph Smith* who said that he had a sort of vision in 1820 when he was 14 only years old. In this version it states that a total apostasy has occurred "all the churches are wrong. . . you should join none of them." then he was *inspired the book of Mormons which is their bible*.

They spend millions of dollars each year on publicity, their ads on T.V. is aimed at attracting those of Christian background by showing the scenes of a happy christian family. However this is only a front, their teachings are based on the having more than one wife, their founder Joseph Smith had 17 wives. They try to look like a normal preaching Christian church while they have the following basic principles which they don't show in their ads:

1 - God was once a man who lived on another planet This is the most important teaching of Mormonism. They believe that God was once a mortal man on another planet who progressed by living in obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel he had on his world, then he died. He became a resurrected man and evolved to become a god. He is still married now (some early leaders say he is a polygamist) and created this world.

2 - Who is Jesus Christ in their beliefs

Jesus was begotten by physical union of God and Mary. Since God has a body of flesh and bones, he really had literal sex with Mary. The product of this union was Jesus, part man and part God.

They usually find Christians of shaken faith as a good catch. The main capital for mormonism is Utah in the USA. The power of that cult is derived from its wealth, as most of its members are rich businessmen. They believe in human sacrifice and that Jesus Blood is not enough and they have to shed blood for the remission of sins. Some who joined their so-called church and left it are subject to be killed as a result of their denying the mormons faith.

B. Jehovah Witnesses

- At an early stage they believed that Christians were confused between Jesus and Archangel Michael. Then later on they said that there is Jesus but he is of a less degree and function than the father.

- The chronology stated that Jesus had invisibly returned to earth in 1874 to set up his kingdom, and that in 1914, at the end of the "Gentile Times", Jesus would come to judge the earth and annihilate the wicked.
- When nothing supernatural happened in 1914, the Watchtower Society started transferring all of the doctrines about 1874 to 1914. They explained that Christ's kingdom had been set

up invisibly in 1914, and that although secular governments were still in place, their rule was no longer valid.

Shepherding/Discipleship Groups:

- ! Most groups are ultra-fundamentalist and use the bible as their only source of teaching.
- ! Most groups criticize the "orthodox" teaching, ritual, doctrine, creeds and devotional traditions.
- ! Their operations can be described as follows:
"The `Shepherd' claims to provide his sheep with a `covering' which is a protection from sin and the demonic realm. `Sheep' must act in obedience to the `shepherd', who takes responsibility from God for their actions. Even if one wilfully and knowingly commits sin in obedience to his `shepherd', his action becomes righteous, because he has submitted to the authority of his `shepherd'. To question or challenge a `shepherd's' advice or direction is considered rebellion. You do not submit, you are forced out!"

Occult (magical) and Satanic Activity:

- ! Occult activities include a belief in astrology, in fortune telling, in psychic abilities, in reincarnation, practice of witchcraft, worship of pagan deities, and worship of Satan.
- ! Satanist recruit people who are attracted by "**heavy metal**" rock groups, who may dabble in Satanism. They offer drugs to break down the inhibition of those who are drawn to that environment; they encourage sexual activity in their young followers, and then introduce them to Satanism.

The New Age Movement:

- ! Is a mixture of Eastern mysticism, Western occultism, and some, though very little, Christian thinking.
- ! Teaching include the concept that everything is an aspect of divinity (humans are divine), reincarnation, auras (attempted healing based on "aura reading"), and "crystal healing".

Why Do some People Join Cults:

- ! People who are edging toward a confrontation with the mounting pressure and conflicting emotions of modern life: individual awareness versus social responsibility; immediate pleasure and sensation versus long-range planning and much larger and less tangible form of happiness.
- ! People today will pursue any avenue in search of the experience of feeling fulfilled.
e.g. *Idealistic young people who find the world is full of compromises.*
Young people who are hurting from a broken love affair.
Students who have tried too hard for "success" and experience fatigue or even "burnout".
Teenager and young adults who feel misunderstood by family; or whose parents are going through a divorce.

Middle-aged people and elderly people who perhaps expected too much of life in this world.

People who are trying to find out about themselves; to find the meaning of life.

People who find the world a very messy place and want some order in their lives.

Signs of Someone Joining a Cult:

Signs that indicate that a person joined a cult are:

- ! the person suddenly begins to speak in a very enthusiastic manner about a new religion;
- ! the person talks as if infatuated with a new group of friends;
- ! talk about going away with a new (unnamed) group of friends;
- ! becoming very evasive, even secretive;
- ! sudden change toward family members, old friends, etc.;
- ! express inordinately idealistic attitudes;
- ! express hostility toward education as if it were a stumbling block to serving mankind;
- ! use stilted (formal) language.

How to Avoid Falling into this Trap:

Inactive and unchurched persons seek a personal relationship with God, the first religious group they encounter will get their attention and possibly their commitment.

Conclusion:

Learn the Bible and understand Christian morals and values.

1. Make an effort to read the Bible regularly.
2. Extract Christian morals and values from the Bible and not from the society.
3. When in doubt about something, consult spiritual leaders.