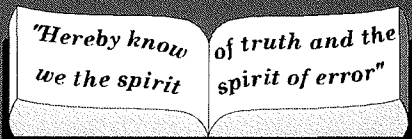


The Discerner



Volume 17, Number 3

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AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL HERESY-EXPOSING QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

By William A. BeVier

I hope that by this time each of you has received your copy of our new 1997-99 Catalog. Should you desire additional copies, please notify us. As I indicated in the newsletter enclosed with the Catalog, the publication and mailing of this edition was a costly project. We welcome your special financial support at this time.

The Catalog is the best means we have of informing people what's available in good literature for information and to counteract the myriad of cults and aberrations of Christianity in the world today. Information is available if we will take the time and make the effort to acquire it.

In this issue of The Discerner we present another article by a member of our Board of Reference, Dr. Roy E. Knuteson. The article is in the form of an open letter to a Jehovah's Witness friend stressing the Biblical revelation of the absolute deity of Jesus Christ as contrasted with the

errors presented in Jehovah's Witness literature.

Many seemingly are not aware that the Jehovah's Witnesses have experienced several divisions and breakups during their history. One major division goes by the name "Bible Students" (but also is known by other titles). Robert Hill has done extensive research on these divisions and we are pleased to begin a series of articles on this subject. I do not know of anyone else currently writing on this topic. I believe you will find the articles informative.

With the passing of a few months of time, Marshall Applewhite and "Heaven's Gate" have probably faded from the memories of many individuals. However, the basic phenomena (UFOs, New Age Movement, etc.) which produced the tragedy are still with us. Brooks Alexander, one of the most insightful Christian writers of today, wrote an article for the Spiritual Counterfeits Project

newsletter last spring on this subject which we have received permission to reproduce. The article is so extensive, but so worthy of complete presentation, that it will have to be continued in the next issue of The Discerner.

Our concluding article in this issue is by Michael Amatucci on a

subject which Christians are divided today, the proper or improper relationship between Biblical Christianity and the broad field of psychology. Michael Amatucci has strong views on this subject and he supports them from the Bible.

AN OPEN LETTER TO A JEHOVAH'S WITNESS

By Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.

Dear Ralph:

Thank you for your gracious reply to my letter. I appreciated the spirit in which it was written, and I intend to continue this dialogue in the same manner. Regardless of our differences on such things as military service, saluting the flag, blood transfusions, or such doctrines as hades, the second coming of Christ, and the millennium, the major and key difference that separates us is the question regarding the full deity of Jesus Christ. Is He "a god" as you insist? "A mighty god," but not "almighty"? Is He Jehovah?

It is my firm conviction that if a person is wrong about the person of Jesus Christ, nothing else matters, because our ultimate salvation rests upon a proper understanding of the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible to believe sincerely in "another Jesus" as 2 Corinthians 11:4 states and be eternally lost. In that light I ask you to carefully consider several key Scriptures from your own sources regarding the deity of Jesus Christ and His claim to be Jehovah in human form.

First a look at "The Kingdom Interlinear Translation," published by your society, regarding the name Jehovah, also referred to as the

"Tetragrammatan" because of the four Hebrew letters JHWH sometimes translated "Yahweh." On page 17 we are told:

"The divine name in Tetragrammatan form has been eliminated from the text by copyists who did not understand or appreciate the divine name, or who developed an aversion to it, possibly under the influence of anti-Semitism. In place of it they have substituted *Kyrios* (usually translated "the Lord,") and *Theos*, meaning God."

Obviously, this means that they accept *Kurios* (the correct spelling) as meaning Jehovah, which is, they say: "the divine name." On that basis then, whenever we see *Kurios*, or *Theos*, we should read "Jehovah." This is exactly what your New World Translation does in Revelation 1:8 and in 236 other places in the New Testament. This is good and correct. But, in order to be consistent, based upon the above quotation, we must then confess that Jesus is Jehovah as Philippians 2:11 states we should. In this passage, *Kurios* means Jehovah and is in complete agreement with Revelation 1:8 and 22:6, where *Kurios* is openly translated "Jehovah" in the New World Translation. According to your own translation of Romans 10:9, if you do that, you will be saved now!

On the Romans 10:9 passage, the Kingdom Interlinear Translation in the right hand column says: "If you publicly declare that 'word in your mouth' that Jesus is Lord... you will be saved." The left hand column contains the Greek word *Kurios* which is translated "Lord" and the footnote to this passage has several texts where *Kurios* is equated with "haAdon," the Hebrew name meaning "Lord." Then curiously, they state: "Not Jehovah." However, on page 1453 of the New World Translation, under the title: "Isaiah 1:24 — The (true) Lord" it states: "This prefixing of the definite article before the title a-don limits the application to the title of Jehovah God." If I understand what they are saying, the conclusion must be that Jesus is indeed Jehovah! Wouldn't you agree?

In Isaiah 6:1-10 we have a clear statement about "Jehovah sitting on a throne lofty and lifted up" (NWT, page 778). The Apostle John refers to this passage in John 12:41 and says: "Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him." The context of this remarkable commentary on this Old Testament passage clearly indicates that this a reference to Jesus Christ and not to God the Father. It cannot be understood any other way. Jehovah is Jesus and Jesus is Jehovah.

Zechariah 12:1 records "the utterance of Jehovah, the one who is stretching out (the) heavens and laying the foundation of (the) earth and forming the spirit of man inside him" (NWT, page 1047). In verse 10, this same person — "The One — is identified

as the one "whom they pierced through." Obviously another reference to Jesus Christ. This means that Jehovah-Jesus died for our sins, does it not?

There is much more irrefutable proof that Jesus is Jehovah. For example, in John 8:58 where the Kingdom Interlinear translates *ego eimi* as "I Am," it then says, in the left hand column, this should be translated: "I have been." This is not an accurate translation of the present tense *ego eimi*. In John 18:5, Jesus claimed the title "I Am" again (left hand column). He was using the divine name for Jehovah as God revealed it to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15. For the use of this name the Jews decided to kill Jesus. Why? Because they understood His, and their language, correctly. He was claiming equality with God the Father. Compare this with John 10:33, where the New World Translation tries to avoid this conclusion by using the words "a god" just as it does in John 1:1. This is not good grammar, as proved by your own translation of *Theos* without the definite article in Matthew 6:24, where it is correctly translated "God," not "a god."

Ralph, you cannot honestly render *Theos* "a god" in John 1:1 and then translate *Theou* "of God" (Jehovah) in Matthew 5:9; Luke 1:35; and John 1:6 when *Theou* is in the genitive case of the same noun and without the definite article. In one case your translation renders this "a god" and another "of God." There is no consistency on the part of these translators as there should be among

good grammarians. Hebrews 1:8 has the word *Theos* without the article and yet the NWT renders it "God," not "a god." If your society is right in stating that Jesus is "a god," then you are forced to admit that you have two gods (a big one and a little one), and this is polytheism.

The use of the proper name "God" does not require the definite article anymore than we need the definite article before our names. In the Scriptures cited above, all good Greek scholars translated *Theos* with or without the article, as "God," just as almost all translations have done until the advent of the Emphatic Diaglott and the New World Translation in 1950. Were all these fine scholars over the centuries wrong, and the translators of the NWT the only ones right? Ralph, I know the Koine Greek language and have read almost all the books that any reputable scholar has written on this subject, including those that the Watchtower quotes. My findings are that your translators were not good grammarians and your commentators are guilty of taking verses out of context to support their theology.

I have one more question: Were there no real Christians until Charles Russell, your admitted founder, began his Bible classes in 1876? Russell, as you no doubt know, perjured himself in court in 1913 for claiming to be able to read the Greek New Testament. But, when confronted with the Greek alphabet, he could not recognize the Greek letters, and admitted that he could not read Greek at all! Yet, he claimed that his "Scripture Studies" were "practically

the Bible itself," and that anyone who lays aside his studies and reads only the Bible will within "two years go into darkness." On the other hand, he claimed that if a person "had not read a page of the Bible as such, he would be in the light at the end of the two years because he would have the light of the scriptures" through his writings (The Watchtower, September 15, 1910, page 298). What egotism and what ignorance! I challenge you to put aside all of your society's publications for two years and read only the Bible and see what happens. You will be pleasantly surprised and richly rewarded.

Ralph, I am really concerned about you as a friend and for your eternal soul's sake. Jesus is Jehovah, and you can pray directly to Him and in His name as He instructed and invited us to do in John 14:13-14. Stephen did this in Acts 7:59. Yet I understand that if anyone prays in the name of Jesus, or to Jesus, in one of your meetings, he could be disfellowshipped or excommunicated. How unscriptural! Please do not hesitate to call on the name of the Lord as Romans 10:13 instructs us to do, because if and when you do, you will have the same blessed assurance that I have that you are saved now and forever. See also 1 John 5:11-13; Titus 3:5; and John 10:10.

Thank you for reading this and carefully considering these matters. I shall be prayerfully waiting your reply.

Sincerely,

Roy Knuteson

WHY I AM NOT A BIBLE STUDENT (PART ONE)

By Robert C. Hill, Th.B.

They are growing. Their presses are churning. They are buying cable TV air time and the world wide web is the newest arena for the dissemination of their doctrinal error. Among other things, they promulgate Jesus' second advent as having occurred in the fall of 1874 and that the resurrection of the dead was an event which shortly followed in the year 1878. These are the Bible Students, a.k.a., the Dawn, Millennial Dawn, International Bible Students, Russellites... Russellites? The J.W.s? No. The Bible Students are composed of independent splinter groups directly in line with the theological legacy (some might prefer "heresy") of Charles Taze Russell and hold no affinity to today's Watchtower Societies' Jehovah's Witnesses. But this was not always so. To best understand who they are today and the message they teach a brief foray into the their founder's beliefs and the critical years following his death in 1916 offers insight into their controversial beginnings. Who are these Bible Students and what do they teach and hold as Biblical truth? These articles will explore areas of their history, teachings, organizational structure, and media used for proselytizing.

The Early Years and the Schisms

Charles T. Russell, the founder of the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society

(WTBTS), maintained unquestionable control over his religious organization. From its small beginnings in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the early 1870s, it had become a thriving new religion by the time of Russell's death on October 31, 1916. During his years as President and Pastor of what was then known as the International Bible Students Association (IBSA), Russell wrote profusely. It can be truthfully said that his writings promoted a denial of every major evangelical belief: a total rejection of the Trinity, deity of Christ, personage and deity of the Holy Spirit, denial of a physical resurrection, a rejection of any eternal retribution for the lost, and a denial of a conscious awareness after death. Some of his aberrant teachings include the following: Christ's second advent having occurred invisibly in the fall of 1874, a second chance for salvation after the grave to some during the millennium, the "Times of the Gentiles" ending in 1914, and the body of believers are "The Christ," to mention a few. To such a man holding this unorthodox theology came such accolades as: "He was the greatest religious teacher since St. Paul, and did more than any other man of modern times to establish the faith of the people in the Scriptures" (J. F. Rutherford 443).

Some of these beliefs will be examined in more detail later, but for

now it is important to understand that today's Watchtower Society no longer teach many of Russell's theological views. The same cannot be said of the Bible Students who place a high value on their founder's writings maintaining in various degrees a solid continuity with them. Therefore, his publications are keys to understanding the modern rejuvenation of the numerous independent congregations' current teachings of God and man. Indeed, Russell's own works were regarded so highly as "gospel" truth that an early divergence from his doctrine brought about the schisms after his death which resulted in the major splits between what is known today as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the various independent groups of "Bible Students."

Russell used the printed page in very effective ways to spread his new found truth. These views were brought to the public in a non-ending stream of publications. His first magazine, co-published with N. H. Barbour, was entitled The Herald of the Morning. After Russell split with Barbour over some doctrinal differences, he began publishing Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence. This publication now has its more familiar name of *The Watchtower*, published by the WTBS. His magnum opus, *Studies in the Scriptures*, has sold tens of millions of copies. These books, in six volumes, hold the key to the entire theology of this American-made religion. Along with his *Studies* series, he also wrote books titled The Object and Manner of Our Lord's Return, Food for Thinking Christians,

Tabernacle Shadows, and many other still popular tomes using the "What Say Scriptures about ..." which included such topics as hell and spiritism.

Russell also had a popular touring exhibit advertised as "The Photo-Drama of Creation." This road show, according to early Watchtower sources, was seen by twelve million people. A book by the same name incorporating the photos and themes of the exhibition coincided with the tour. Adding to this partial list of his works are the twelve hundred congregations which voted him their Pastor, two thousand newspapers carrying his weekly sermons with fifteen million readers, and an international base of growing members (446-7). These early years brought about a very significant religious movement which even today bears his legacy. But the tranquil unity of these early Bible Students would soon begin to degrade in the immediate years after their Pastor's death.

When Russell died a power struggle ensued. The main player in this was Joseph Franklin Rutherford who would emerge victorious as the Society's second president amidst much controversy. At that time, depending on whose story of the events is read, problems developed between several prominent members. On the side of the future Bible Students these problems were basically twofold: the publication of the seventh volume of Studies in the Scriptures: The Finished Mystery, and the manner in which Rutherford wrest control of the Society. While on the other side the Watchtower Bible

& Tract Society claimed "a real conspiracy developed. The seed of rebellion was planted and then the trouble spread" (1975 Yearbook 88). The conspiracy referred to is when Paul S. L. Johnson, who later would form the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement, was assigned to go to England in order to make a report to Rutherford on the situation there. That event took place in the summer of 1917. Rutherford and the Society claimed Johnson tried to take control of the Watchtower while he was in England. The 1975 Yearbook states "throughout England, Johnson characterized himself as Russell's successor, contending that the mantle of Pastor Russell had fallen upon him as Elijah's cloak ('official garment') fell upon Elisha.... Johnson endeavored to take complete control of the British field of activity, even trying, without authority, to dismiss certain members of the London headquarters staff" (89). This led to the ultimate disfellowshipping of Johnson who denied the charges made by the Society as false. Nevertheless, this inner turmoil would ultimately lead to breakaway factions forming an independent Bible Student movement with an ever distancing from the larger group, the Watchtower.

One of the modern congregations, the Bible Students congregation of New Brunswick, view their early history as beginning with an illegal claim to the presidency by Rutherford, who "established dictatorial control" and who began to do away with the writings of Russell. "Many individuals and congregations refused to surrender their Christian liberty or accept the new teachings.

As early as 1917, the exodus from the newly declared sovereign headquarters began" (Bible Students Congregation of New Brunswick, Oct. 1963). While another congregation, the Dawn Bible Students Association, placed deceitfulness on the part of Rutherford for the release of the seventh volume of Studies in the Scriptures as the catalyst, which spiraled into division. The Dawn stated soon after Russell's death, "in a remarkably short time a 'Seventh Volume' was published, with the claim that it was the posthumous work of Brother Russell. It created a stir among the brethren, resulting in divisions in many places. It was not truly the posthumous work of Brother Russell, and in some ways it was contrary to both the letter and the spirit of his teachings" (When Pastor Russell Died 6). The Dawn now sees the Bible Student movement as compared to the Watchtower in a clear-cut manner, "In city after city throughout America, as well as other parts of the world, there are but the two groups - those who are with the original organization and those who are not" (22).

It can be seen that within five years of Russell's death some of his closest mentors were expelled from President Rutherford's new order. These early Russellites began to form the splinter groups of Bible Students which still seek to maintain the continuity of Russell's teachings until this very day. Several of the present day organizations can claim a tradition going back to the original time of the major split: P. S. L. Johnson in the early 1920s founded the Laymen's Home Missionary

Movement which is very active, and in 1918 R. H. Streeter began to edit The Herald of Christ's Kingdom, a journal which is still published by the Pastoral Bible Institute, to note two. Today, this once small breakaway sect is no longer on the outer fringe of becoming a viable threat to the unsuspecting but rather is in the arena doing battle against every orthodox tenet held dearly by born-again Christians – and is doing so in grand style.

The Bible Student Movement Today

Although they are not as large in numbers as their distant counterpart, the Jehovah's Witnesses, this group of religious zealots is on the move. They no longer rely just on the small "classes," a term used for local cell groups to proselyte, or the printed word to get "the message out," but have now entered into the world of hi-tech as well. cable television and the world wide web are increasingly being used as effective conduits for their unorthodox beliefs. For example, one Bible Student organization, The Fort Worth Bible Students, is using cable TV for airing numerous broadcasts of their "The Divine Plan Program." In June of 1996 they added their outreach program to station WWOR-TV remarking, "The overruling providence of our loving heavenly Father has made it possible for time to become available for 'The Divine Plan Program' to be televised over WWOR-TV (New York City)... WWOR-TV covers the New York City area plus approximately *twenty-three million* (23,000,000) homes with cable throughout the U.S.A. Perhaps this is the greatest opportunity for

the 'household of faith' to proclaim the truth by visual means since the days of 'The Photo Drama' which was shown to large audiences approximately 80 years ago" (The Divine Plan Program Bulletin). This startling news is just from *one* of the organized groups of Russellites.

Another use of hi-tech involves the world wide web. This "soap box" offers an international audience and it is being utilized to promote Russell's own brand of the ancient heresy known as Arianism. The Internet continues to be a fruitful harbor in which to propagate this aberrant theology. Each of the major groups are already maintaining sophisticated sites and many individual members continue coming online with personal web pages enabling more propagating of Russell's teachings. These larger Bible Student organizations effectively use this new media. At their sites one can download articles, read newsletters, order publications, and contact the groups for further information. This hi-tech presence of the larger groups and individual followers is the newest foray into getting out the teachings of Russell, but not as discounting the time-proven printed page.

Many Bible Student organizations pride themselves on reprinting Charles Taze Russell's writings. Some of the larger organizations offer more publications, but essentially the published reprints of the 1916 edition of C. T. Russell's Studies in the Scriptures are very common to see and obtain (End Note #1). As a matter of fact, his writings are the glue which binds these independent

groups together. Indeed, Russell left a legacy of printed material during his lifetime. What is known today as the "Watchtower reprints" covering the years 1887-1916 with more than 5,000 pages is one such publication readily available. Monthly, bimonthly, quarterly magazines, newsletters, and journals are another effective means of disseminating Russellism. The Fort Worth Bible Students, The Bible Students of New Brunswick, Laymen's Home Missionary Movement, The Chicago Bible Students, and The Pastoral Bible Institute are just a few of the larger groups offering this type of material. Numerous small cell groups also publish quarterly newsletters adding to a frontal assault against evangelical beliefs.

These smaller, independent localized cells or classes are linked together by the larger groups' itinerant speakers who travel the country promoting the teachings of their "Pastor" C. T. Russell. Any independent class or congregation may request such speakers or area wide conventions or at the state level. The major journals contain a calendar of conventions which are held across the country and in many foreign lands as well. This gives the members of local cells a chance to meet with like-minded believers, to hear speakers, and have fellowship with each other. These are usually weekend events which are well planned and are held at major convention settings.

Finally, Russellism is promoted through an extensive amount of radio air time. The Bible Student programs can be heard in virtually every state on AM and FM radio and internationally through their short wave broadcasts which are beamed toward several countries world-wide. One such popular program is titled "Frank and Ernest," which can domestically be heard on more than thirty radio stations covering twenty-two states while internationally airing in nine countries and across Canada. These groups are beginning to reach an audience without limitations for teaching the theology of C. T. Russell.

On the positive side the Bible Students, unlike their close counterparts the J.W.s, allow their members to study other sources, although not without warnings about certain publications not supporting their beliefs. These Students are also more open in dialoging with non-Russellites, and to this author's experience less combative as compared to the J.W.s. However, there is much to disagree with them about and, indeed, Russell himself denied every historical orthodox teaching held as Biblical truth throughout the centuries by the early councils, expressed in particular by evangelical believers. What are the main areas of concern? The focus will now shift to the theological foundations taught by Russell and maintained today by his followers.

TO BE CONTINUED

VOLUNTEERING FOR OBLIVION (PART ONE)

THE NEW AGE PATH TO HEAVEN'S GATE

By Brooks Alexander

Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles called themselves "Bo" and "Peep" to symbolize the fact that they were "shepherds" of mankind. Ironically, "Little Bo Peep" is remembered in rhyme as the shepherd who *lost* her sheep and then *abandoned* them to find their own way home. The symbolism of their names apparently ran deeper than Applewhite and Nettles intended.

But to remark that "Bo" and "Peep" were treacherous shepherds is perhaps the most obvious thing we could say about them. Surely no one has to decode any esoteric nicknames to make that judgment. The widely broadcast video images of Applewhite preaching to his flock depict a man severely disconnected from reality. His delusionary [sic.] state was as plain as any such condition can be. Few false prophets have ever come draped with so many red flags.

Nevertheless, though his delusion was obvious, its final meaning was so perverse that it was literally inconceivable to most people ... that is, until it was demonstrated. Now, suddenly, it is conceivable—to everyone. But it is still incomprehensible. We accept its reality because it confronts us, but we still don't understand it.

Most of us have smugly assumed that people who join cults are too stupid, too naïve or too emotionally needy to see through the group's religious con-games. Heaven's Gate invalidates that assumption. Stupidity may get you killed, but it doesn't make you kill yourself. Even naïve people retain their instinct of self-preservation. And emotional need doesn't normally lead to castration.

The outcome of the Heaven's Gate delusion is so shocking and bizarre that it confounds our rational understanding. Somehow its members seem to have nullified two of the most basic human impulses—the sexual drive and the instinct for survival. The confused observer hardly knows whether to be more disturbed by the fact that the cultists embraced self-extinction or that they submitted to sexual mutilation.

The mind boggles. It gropes for answers on more familiar grounds—the suicides must have been the result of pressure-cooker indoctrination and manipulated conversion. Those factors are part of the standard sociological model of cultic "mine control." We are familiar with them from studying groups like the Moonies and the Hare Krishnas. We know that they can be used to create a highly

suggestible mental state in cult recruits. We know that the combined efforts of those and other factors can explain the conversion of ordinary people to some extraordinary beliefs.

But they don't explain the conversions to Heaven's Gate, because Heaven's Gate didn't rely on any of those factors until *after* conversion had occurred. There is no indication that recruits underwent any kind of cultic pressure or mind-control methods before leaving everything behind to follow the "all or nothing" UFO cult.

Rancho Santa Fe is markedly *unlike* Jonestown, whose members lined up to die because of indoctrinated fear—fear of outside forces and fear of their own leader. Heaven's Gate members lay down to die because of cosmic fatigue and world-weariness—a chosen and cultivated rejection of their own human nature, and especially their nature as bodily beings. Heaven's Gate is in a different category from People's Temple, and we shouldn't let their similarities obscure their more basic distinctions of method and motivation.

Rancho Santa Fe is a novel phenomenon. It is a warning signpost in the downward spiral of cultural dissolution. And Marshall Applewhite is the herald of a new kind of cult and a new kind of religious fervor—a transcendental zeal that radically despises the world, the body and the human condition. In that context, Heaven's Gate represents the (literally) terminal form of the ancient Gnostic delusion.

One thing that Heaven's Gate did share with the "standard brand" cults is the undoubted "charisma" of its leaders. The magnetism that "Bo" and "Peep" exuded may have eluded most of us, but it came through strong and clear to those who identified themselves as New Age "seekers" (more on that in a moment). The reports of members and ex-members from the earliest days onward agree that "the Two" held an extraordinary power of persuasion over other people—a power that Applewhite continued to exercise even after Nettles died in 1985.

Accounts given by members of the group who had met the Two describe them as exceptionally powerful people. One member even dropped out of the group after deciding they had "hypnotized" him. Another drop-out, while rejecting the notion of hypnosis, affirmed the magnetic attraction of the Two: "These two people are dangerous. They are not just run-of-the-mill con-artists. They have tremendous mental power. It is not hypnosis. It is thought transplant. They can do it in a matter of minutes."

Still another member recalled their charisma: "I've only met a few really powerful people in my life. It was obvious that they were locked into some energy source that gave them extraordinary powers" (Balch and Taylor, 1976; p. 18).

Those comments were made some 22 years ago, in the beginning stages of the movement. But it is clear that the same descriptions applied to "the Two" throughout their joint leadership, and applied to Applewhite right up to the end of his career.

However you choose to interpret that kind of dominating personal influence, it is clearly what shaped and sustained the group. Whatever its source, Applewhite's charisma enabled him to mold the minds of those who surrendered themselves to it. The most vulnerable among them allowed themselves be swept away to places to belief and behavior that, as normal human beings, we can barely recognize.

The question is not "how could people get so warped by surrendering to charismatic authority?" That is a well-documented process. The question is "what made those particular people such easy targets of charisma to begin with?" What turned them into eager sheep before they even met their "shepherd(s)"? What had prepared them to welcome the "implanted" thought of other people—and through them to think the unthinkable?

And there are larger questions. To what extent is their vulnerability the result of social factors that affect everyone—and how many people in society are therefore in a similarly vulnerable condition? How many more humanity-hating suicide cults are out there waiting to happen? For that matter why should their annihilating fervor always be turned inward, to manifest as mass suicide—

as it did with Heaven's Gate? Why should it not with equal ease turn outward, to become mass murder—as it did with Aum Shinrikyo, the cult that staged the Tokyo subway nerve-gas attacks? How many more of *those* are out there waiting to happen?

There are no definitive answers to those questions, but two pioneering studies provide some important clues. One study looked at the group that eventually became the Heaven's Gate cult, during the early stages of its development. The other study examined the link between the resurgence of superstition and the waning of Christian faith among the general population. Taken together, they present a stereoscopic view of our cultural condition, with a depth of focus that enables us to understand what is happening now, as well as what has led up to it.

Into the Depths

The first study was the work of two adventurous sociologists from the University of Montana—one a professor, the other a graduate student. Professor Robert Balch and student David Taylor enlisted as "followers" of "Bo" and "Peep" at a recruitment rally in Oakland, California, in the fall of 1975. For almost two months, they lived as "participant observers" with the group, which was then known as "Human Individual Metamorphosis" (acronym: HIM). They immersed themselves in HIM's cultic world, and shared every aspect of its members' daily lives, including their nomadic existence and their wanderings from one remote campsite to another.

After seven weeks of submersion in the group, Balch and Taylor cut their ties, resurfaced and swam back to their ivory tower. Back in their native environment, they dried off their emotions, organized their observations and marshaled their conclusions. In March 1976, they presented their findings in a paper delivered to the annual meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association. They later popularized their insights for an article in *Psychology Today* ("Salvation in a UFO"; October, 1976).

Balch and Taylor's paper was entitled "Walking Out the Door of Your Life" (eerily prescient in retrospect); subtitled "Becoming a member of a Contemporary UFO Cult." Their work gives us a look at the inner workings of what became the Heaven's Gate cult, almost at the point of its inception.

The paper provides some fascinating details about the group's beliefs and behavior. For example, Balch and Taylor describe how members would set up a public meeting to preach their message, then organize themselves for spiritual warfare:

Shortly before the meeting one couple is chosen to present the message During the meeting the spokesmen are usually flanked by other members of the group who act as "buffers," i.e., they absorb the negative energy generated by hostile members of the crowd (usually Jesus Freaks). (Balch and Taylor, 3/26/76; p. 8).

Such details aside, Balch and Taylor's paper broke new ground

with its description of how recruits got involved with and became committed to the cult. The researchers expected the "conversion process" to conform to the standard sociological model, in which a potential cult member, facing an anxious transition point in his life, is drawn by charisma and/or group acceptance into a situation of enforced isolation from outside influences, and subjected to an intense process of indoctrination and peer pressure that leaves him little time alone to think for himself. Eventually, the recruit is manipulated into "deciding" to join the cult and to submit to its leader's authority.

To their surprise, the sociologists found that while some of those elements were conspicuously present (charismatic leadership, for example), some others were conspicuously absent. Balch and Taylor found that, far from cultivating a monolithic "group-think," the cult was actually "highly individualistic" (*Ibid.*, p. 5). The researchers also discovered that incoming recruits were generally *not* trying to resolve some crisis or deal with some desperate alienation in their lives: "We found little evidence of severe disappointments or personal disorganization in their previous lives Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the UFO people we met is their *ordinariness*" (*Ibid.*, p. 11; emphasis in the original).

The Connecting Thread

So what *was* the common quality that made all of those "ordinary" people submit to "Bo" and "Peep's" charisma without strong-arm techniques of mind-control? What made

them so willing to accept “the Two’s” charismatic authority in the face of such ample reason to doubt it? What had prepared them for such an easy surrender of their wills?

Balch and Taylor came up with an unexpected answer. Most of the cult members shared two things in common. The first was a New Age worldview, and the second was a conscious identity as a New Age “seeker”—often accompanied by a broad, if superficial, experience with a variety of “spiritual paths.”

Virtually all of them had been deeply involved in religious and spiritual “trips” for many years before they heard the message. However, very few of the UFO people appear to have been deeply involved with orthodox Christianity. As one member put it, “I don’t know anyone who was into Christ before coming on this trip.”

Instead, members of the UFO group seemed to have immersed themselves in what Ellwood (1973) called the “alternative reality,” a metaphysical world-

view where reincarnation, discarnate spirits, psychic powers, lost continents, flying saucers, and heavenly masters are taken for granted. (*Ibid.*, p. 12)

Balch and Taylor concluded that a New Age worldview and a New Age “seeker” identity were keys to becoming committed members of the cult. The New Age worldview jettisons absolutes, eliminates guidelines and sets the mind adrift without bearings or moorings. The “seeker” identity normalizes the experience of being adrift in the New Age sea. It validates the revolving-door spirituality of the New Age by making the adoption of new enthusiasms a familiar and comforting routine. It lends the self-conscious pilgrim a sense of momentum “on the path” and gives him a sense of expectation that the next, higher and perhaps final revelation is just around the corner.

TO BE CONTINUED

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GOD'S ALL SUFFICIENT WORD VS. PSYCHOLOGY

By Michael E. Amatucci

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Sadly, today it seems a multitude of Christians are turning to and relying upon the psychological theories, opinions, myths, assumptions, systems of men. They are trying to find solutions to their problems in life. The Scriptures tell us plainly that many of our problems of life stem from the old nature, "the works of the flesh." Adultery-Fornication-Uncleanness-Lewdness-Idolatry-Sorcery-Hatred-Contentions-Jealousies-Outbursts of Wrath-Selfish Ambitions-Discensions-Heresies-Envy-Murders-Drunkenness-Revelries, and the like (Gal. 5:19-21 NKJV). The Apostle Paul through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is telling the Christian churches in Galatia in vs. 19-21 to stop practicing sin! Many Christians today are replacing words like sin and repentance with words like addiction, sick, mental illness; this is merely blame shifting. Sin is sin and needs to be dealt with through the Scriptures, prayer and confession. [I Jn. 1:9]; not through man's psychological systems, but through the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture warns us to "beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit" (Col. 2:8), that's just what psychology is, with over 250 theories and 10,000 techniques. It's a system of conflicting-chaotic opinions. We seem

to think that because the psychologist is a professional, and licensed he must have the solutions and answers. Proverbs says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but, it's end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12). The Apostle Paul said, "The wisdom of this world is foolishness" (I Cor. 3:19). Let me say there are people with organic problems that require medical intervention. I'm not speaking here about them. I'm trying to relate here to soul or mind problems, i.e., works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). God's all-sufficient word addresses problems of life, and gives us solutions, directions and answers! Why should a Christian turn to a psychologist in those types of pagan-secular systems, when God Almighty has already laid out a precise plan for problems we will face in our lives? Second Peter 1:3 says, "As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." Also, look at 2 Tim 3:17, "That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

God's Word is sufficient to handle our problems (or sin) and certainly prescribes the way to alleviate it. God's Word does not change. His holy Word is ageless-timeless. Let me

encourage you to trust Him, “and not be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of man, in the cunning craftiness or deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:14-15).

Let me encourage you, Christian, to “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1-5).

Having said this, now a word to churches, Bible colleges, and seminaries. Those of you who include and require psychology, psychological counseling and the like for all of the reasons above plus accountability as being teachers of the Bible, why should you mix the opinions of unregenerate men and integrate them with the Word of God? A so-called Christian psychologist may change the words around, dress them up with Christian words—does this make it Christian? No. If you change the name of a rattlesnake, it’s still a rattlesnake, it’s bite can kill you.

God’s Word is pure and holy, don’t pollute it with pagan philosophies. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Today many are following “other ways” and “other directions” (Matt. 7:13). Let me exhort you to “touch not the unclean thing” (1 Cor. 6:17). Make sure in matters of living your counsel comes from the Word of God and not the unregenerate (Psalm 1:1-6). Just because something may appear to work or have some truth in it does not mean it’s all right and that a Christian should embrace it. We are told to “test all things” (1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1).

I’ll close with this:

“For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul, and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Heb. 4:12.

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