

Various Cults

What is a cult?

Walter Martin, who wrote one of the definitive works on the subject of cults defines it this way: "Any religious group which differs significantly in one or more respects as to belief or practice from those religious groups which are regarded as the normative expressions of religion in our total culture."

- To summarize, a cult is any group of people that has religious beliefs, that doesn't fit into one of the more mainstream religions.

Hebrew Roots

- Background
 - Other names
 - Hebraic Roots, Jewish Roots, Nazarine Judaism, etc.
 - Beliefs
 - Generally believe that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, and that salvation comes through him.
 - Hold to the Torah - OT law - law of Moses
 - Including observing Sabbath, feasts, holy days, etc.
 - Learning and Speaking Hebrew
 - Using only Hebrew names for God, "Yahweh", and "Yeshua"
 - IN the early 20th century, there were several groups that generally held to these positions, but they were more ecclesialogically organized, and had a structure and hierarchy to their leadership, some of which continue on today. These include Messianic Judaism, The Sacred Name Movement, the Worldwide Church of God, and then finally the Church of God.
 - It was out of the Church of God that The Hebrew Roots movement began to take shape and gain traction in the late 1980's and early 1990's, under the leadership of Dean Wheelock and his wife Susan. They have a legal copyright on the name "Hebrew Roots".
 - This "movement" as it has been called, has been more grassroots in nature, and has largely existed online. There are very few formal gatherings and meetings, and many of its adherents will attend a Jewish synagogue in order to participate in corporate worship.
 - Within this group there are differing levels of commitment to this belief system:
 - You "should" obey the law of Moses (most)
 - You "must" obey the law of Moses for salvation (some)
 - Reject the writings of Paul (less)
 - Reject Jesus outright. (even fewer)
 - Dual Righteousness - Faith and Works
 - Jesus was a Jew and he followed/obeyed the Torah, so we should too
- Primary Problem with this belief system:

- Denial of the work of Christ
- Accepting a general belief Belief in Christ as savior, while generally rejecting that his perfect obedience counts for us and that he has fulfilled the Mosaic law.
 - “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.” Colossians 2:16-17

Black Hebrew Israelites

- Background
 - also called Hebrew Israelites, Black Hebrews, Black Israelites, and African Hebrew Israelites
 - Began getting traction in the late 1880s - coming on the heels of the Jim Crow laws
 - Frank Cherry - The Church of the Living God, the Pillar Ground Truth for All Nations
 - William Saunders Crowdy - Church of God and Saints of Christ
 - Both of these men had visions of Black people being the direct descendants of the tribes of ancient Israel - Jacob (and whites are Edomites - Esau)
- Beliefs
 - Like the Hebrew Roots Movement, the Black Hebrew Israelites are not centralized or cohesive in their beliefs. There are many groups that would claim the moniker of Black Hebrew Israelites, but their beliefs and practices vary greatly.
 - Some are like Hebrew roots, in that they have Christological perspective while adopting Jewish customs
 - Some cling more tightly to the Jewish heritage and strive for greater faithfulness to the practices of Orthodox Judaism
 - Some are more nationalistic and are quite far from traditional Judaism, leaning toward more toward anti-semitic and anti-white views.
 - Extremists
 - Militant / anti-Semite / anti-White
 - The most consistent area of agreement between all these differing groups that would fall under this heading is the belief that they are the true descendants of biblical Jews. Therefore they are God’s chosen people, rejecting the biblical doctrine of election, where God chooses his people based only on his sovereign good pleasure, not because of anything in us.
- Primary Problem with this belief system
 - Distinction based on race
 - “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28
 - For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:11-13
 - Elevates Works over Faith for salvation

Witchcraft/Wicca

- Background
 - Existed essentially since the beginning of recorded history

- Pharaoh had sorcerers that were able to imitate some of the miracles that God did through Moses: Turning a staff into a snake, etc.
- 1 Samuel 28
 - Medium of Endor
- Exodus 22:18 & Leviticus 20:27
 - Salem Witch Trials - 16th and 17th centuries in Europe and America
 - Over 100 years later, Margaret Murray - "The Witch-Cult in Western Europe" (1921)
- Traditional Wicca
 - Gerald Brousseau Gardner - 1950's and 60's
 - Witchcraft Today (1954)
 - Believe in "The Goddess" (sometimes "The God" is added)
 - Pantheistic
 - Deny the Creator / Creature distinction
 - Look for power / fulfillment / joy by "tapping into" this
 - Also often polytheistic
 - If you want to practice Wicca and still be a Hindu, or Buddhist, or even Christian, they're happy to have you.
 - But generally they want Spirituality *apart from* traditional religion
 - They do indeed practice magic
 - They have rituals and ceremonies where they call upon deities to assist them, or attempt to speak to the dead, or communicate with/pray to celestial bodies like the moon and stars.
 - Deny the existence of Satan - they want to distance themselves from Satanism because of the negative image that comes with it. Although the reality is you are with a part of the kingdom of God, or you are a part of the kingdom of the enemy.
 - Their general creed is: "If it harm none, do what you will."
 - Organized Covens and Priesthood
 - witches (men and women) - worshipping practicing in the nude
- Differences between tradition Wicca and modern Wicca
 - Distance themselves from the term "witch"
 - Decreased the nudity
 - Later publications encouraged self-initiation, abandoning the organized Coven/Priesthood
- Primary Problem with this belief system
 - Complete denial of a good creator God who is distinct from his creation

Christian Science

- Background
 - Founded by Mary Baker Eddy
 - She experienced a "miraculous" healing after being injured from a slip and fall on some ice. She read the story of Jesus healing a paralytic and was miraculously healed.
 - Her conclusion was that the scriptures have the power to heal, and so she began to seek to find out how.
 - Wrote "Science and Health" in 1875
 - This book has since become considered a sacred and inspired writing that is studied alongside the scriptures. She changed the title to "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures".

- The last 100 pages of the book are testimonies of people who claim to have been healed just by reading it.
 - Focus on healing
 - Prayer and scripture reading are taught to be used as methods of bringing “truth” to bear on a physical ailment, injury, etc. Many Christian Science practitioners reject medicine.
 - Very gnostic position -- “Spirit is the real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal.”
 - While claiming to follow the scriptures as her only authority, she rejected several central doctrines of orthodox Christianity:
 - The trinity -- “The theory of three person in one God (that is, a personal Trinity or Tri-unity) suggest polytheism . . .”
 - The atonement
 - “One sacrifice, however great, is insufficient to pay the debt of sin. The atonement requires constant self-immolation on the sinner’s part. That God’s wrath should be vented upon His beloved Son, is divinely unnatural. Such a theory is man-made”
 - “The material blood of Jesus was no more efficacious to cleanse from sin when it was shed upon ‘the accursed tree,’ than when it was flowing in his veins as he went daily about his Father’s business”
 - The very deity of Christ - “If there had never existed such a person as the Galilean Prophet, it would make no difference to me.”
 - So she denies these central doctrines while continuing to claim the Bible’s authority.
 - Regarding the Creation narrative, she has accepted the creation of man in the image of God as described in Genesis, but rejects the rest of the creation narrative because the material world is “bad”.

Scientology

- Background
 - Founded by L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986)
 - Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health
 - Started as a new take on psychotherapy, ended up as a religion
 - He wrote many other books (many science fiction) - never claims any divine revelation. He just claims to have figured it all out.
 - Famous adherents -- Tom Cruise, John Travolta, Kirstie Alley
 - Terminology
 - Bad experiences = “engrams”
 - Subconscious = “reactive mind”
 - Counseling = “auditing”
 - Counselor = “Auditor”
 - Counslee = “Pre-Clear”
 - Soul = “Thetan”
 - Regular non-scientology person = “Wog”
 - The goal is to use auditing to remove engrams from the reactive mind, leading to the complete elimination of the reactive mind, and leaving the person “Clear”
 - Levels of Scientology
 - PreClear

- Clear
- Operating Thetan (1-8)
 - There have been promises of the creation of OT levels 9-15, but they haven't come out yet.
 - The purpose of these levels is purportedly to get you closer and closer to perfection, meaning that your "reactive mind" is completely and forever removed, and you no longer are creating new engrams, so you have gained control over yourself, your future, and even
 - Currently, Level 8 is only administered aboard the Scientology Cruise ship, called the "Freewinds".
- Each of these levels costs \$ - like taking a course.
 - Starts off between \$650-800
 - OT XII is between 30K-40K (per year!)
- L. Ron Hubbard Quote:
 - "Writing for a penny a word is ridiculous. If a man really wants to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion."
- Primary Problem
 - Denial of the Triune God
 - Gnosticism

In summary, all these cults have at least one thing in common. The adherents (and sometimes their leaders as well) are looking for something. They are looking for meaning, for purpose, for value, and for comfort in a broken and sinful world. What they seek will never be found in the control on their own minds, or over their environment, or over their circumstances. The comfort and peace that is sought by the Hebrew Roots, the Black Hebrew Israelites, Wicca, The Church of Christian Science, and the Church of Scientology, is only found in the good news of the kingdom, That God is setting this sin-scarred world to rights through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ. May we love and pray for those who have been wooed into belief in these false teachings -- only the atoning work of Christ can rescue them.