

What Is a Cult?

by Pastor Sidney Hatch

Everywhere we turn we are confronted by literature, films, or lectures on the cults. Perhaps, then, I shall be excused if I indulge in a few general observations on the theme, What is a cult?

In order to understand the nature of a cult we must recognize first that there are two great principles of revealed truth: the unity of God and the mortality of man.

Moses, Jesus, and Paul unite in their testimony that “God is one.” There is one God who is one in person and being (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29; Gal. 3:20; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6). And Genesis 2:7 and 3:19 tell us clearly that man is a material and mortal being. “The first man is of the earth,” Paul says. He is “corruptible” and “mortal” (1 Cor. 15:47, 53, 54).

Yet traditional “orthodoxy” tells us that God is three and man is immortal.

“Mainstream” Christianity speaks of “Trinitarian monotheism” and would have us believe that God is a three-in-one being. But all this is like talking about “round squares” or “square circles.” Such things are not legitimate objects of knowledge, and are beyond even the omniscience of God. The idea of “Trinitarian monotheism” is a paradoxical invention of theologians.

So also, we are told that man is “dichotomous,” that he is two parts. One part, his body, is mortal and returns to dust. But the other part, his “soul,” is immaterial, and lives on after death.

But this is to attribute to man a form of natural immortality. It violates the second great principle of revealed truth, the mortality of man, and has no scriptural basis except the words of the serpent: “You surely will not die” (Gen. 3:4).

No doubt some will oppose what I write here with the objection, “But almost everybody believes that God is a triune being, and that man has a soul!” Yes, “almost everybody” does, and that is the problem! Has it ever occurred to “almost everybody” that they may be a cult?

Today’s “historic” or “mainstream” religion came from the days of Constantine. For political reasons, and the unity of his empire, this fourth-century Roman ruler metamorphosed Christianity. He took it over and changed all its standards.

Constantine and his successors could not have accomplished this feat, of course, had it not been for the intrusion of false doctrine into the church.

The so-called “apologists” arose, men whose goal was to blend Christianity and Greek philosophy. They said that although God was one, He was also three Persons. They taught also that “soul” and “body” were separate things, the “soul” being immortal. Thus Christianity became virtually a Christianized Greek philosophy.

What Constantine accomplished was political and doctrinal. The “apologists,” however, provided the philosophical prerequisites.

In the sixth century, the Emperor Justinian made it a crime to deny the doctrine of the Trinity and also the doctrine of infant baptism. To deny either one was a capital offense — a crime punishable by death!

Thus was established the cult of Constantine! It kept the name “Christian,” but it was a far cry from the clear monotheism of the New Testament: one God, and Jesus the Messiah, the virgin-born Son of God. Compare 1 Corinthians 8:6 where Paul says, “But to us [Christians] there is one God, the Father.” Jesus, as the “one Lord Messiah” is God’s anointed ruler for the earth. He is the one “my lord” (*adoni*) of Psalm 110:1. *Adoni* is never, in all of its 195 occurrences, a title for Deity.

Evidence that this new empire-church was a cult was not only its departure from the Bible, but also its impact upon society and history. It produced, not the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22), but more than a thousand years of violent persecution against its opponents. Europe sank into the dark ages.

A cult, then, is any movement or system of teaching which denies the unity of God’s nature and the mortality of man’s nature. God is one and man is mortal. These are the two basic principles of biblical revelation. They transcend all other truth, and all other truth is related to them in some way. For example, “the man Christ Jesus” is, as Paul says, the “one mediator between God and men” (1 Tim. 2:5).

I have observed that much of today’s anti-cult material is produced by people who believe that God is three and man is dichotomous (or trichotomous). It never seems to occur to such people that they may be a cult — the oldest and biggest cult of all, that cult whose influence penetrates to the farthest reaches of Christendom.

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