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# RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO CULTS: WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW

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## Scriptural Background

- Jude 3–4 (just one faith; immutable—“once for all”; we must contend earnestly for it; enemies)
- Acts 20:17–21, 25–31 (wolves from without; “from among your own selves...”)
- 2 Corinthians 11:2–4, 13–15 (another Jesus, gospel, spirit; false apostles; Satan an angel of light)
- Galatians 1:6–9 (though an angel—or Paul himself!—should preach another gospel...)
- 2 Peter 2:1 (false teachers among you; destructive heresies)

## Working Definitions/Two Dimensions

Behavioral (1)—Cults are “little groups” which break off from the “conventional consensus and espouse very different views of the real, the possible, and the moral.” (John Lofland)

Behavioral (2)—A cult is “an ideological organization held together by charismatic relationships and demanding total commitment.” (Benjamin Zablocki)

- *Types include: political, commercial, psychotherapy cults*

Theological—“Cult: A religious group originating as a heretical sect and maintaining fervent commitment to heresy.” (Robert M. Bowman, Jr.)

## Heresy: Definition, Six Main Categories (Robert M. Bowman, Jr.)

“...a teaching which opposes the essentials of the Christian faith, so that true Christians must divide themselves from those who hold it.”

Revelation—teachings that distort, deny, or add to Scripture in a way that leads people to destruction; false claims to apostolic or prophetic authority.

God—teachings that promote false gods or idolatrous distortions of the true God.

Christ—denials of His unique Lordship, His genuine humanity, His true identity.

Salvation—teaching legalism or licentiousness; denying the gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection; etc.

The church—deliberate attempts to lead people away from the fellowship of true Christians; utter rejection of the church.

The future—false predictions for which divine authority is claimed; claims that Christ’s return has taken place; etc.

## Some Categories of Cultic Groups and “New Religious Movements”

(adapted from Ronald M. Enroth)

### Type

Institutionalized  
Aberrational Christian  
Eastern mystical  
Psychospiritual/Self-improvement  
Eclectic/New Age  
Psychic/Occult/Astral

### Examples

Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism, SDA, New Apostolic  
Voice of God Recordings (William Branham)  
Hare Krishna (ISKCON), Transcendental Meditation  
Scientology, Landmark Forum (“large group awareness”)  
Happy Science  
Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC)

## How Are People Lured Into Cultic Groups?

### Two Interacting Forces (Michael Langone)

- The *tactics* the cult uses to recruit, convert, acculturate, and hold members
- The *personal vulnerability* of the potential recruit

### Four Basic Motives (Harold Bussell)

- Intellectual (a longing for rational answers to basic questions about the Bible and life; vulnerable to a lot of false “scholarship”—e.g., JW’s)
- Emotional (a need for love, for emotional stability, a “family”)
- Social (a need for a role and identity in a group with a cause)
- Spiritual (a longing for closeness to God, for supernatural or mystical experiences, for an “ideal” church)

### The DDD Syndrome (Michael Langone)

- Deception (false promises, hiding true identity, suppressing information)
- Dependence (alienating you from family, friends, critical voices)
- Dread (fear that you will be spiritually, socially doomed outside the group)

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## Responding to the Challenge of the Cults (“the unpaid bills of the church”)

- Wrong: ignorance, indifference, inertia
- Right: discipleship + discernment as the antidote to deception (Heb. 5:11–4)

### *Discernment Depends on Data:*

- Know the Word—2 Peter 3:14–18; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Timothy 2:15  
...and get grounded in the central doctrines of Scripture! (Recommended: *Christian Beliefs* by Wayne Grudem; *Basic Christianity* by John Stott)
- Know the Cults—their doctrines, their methods, their names (cf. Hymenaeus, Philetus, Alexander, Diotrephes)

### *Emulate the Attitude and Approach of the Apostles!*

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## What Can You Do? Six Steps in Recognizing and Responding to Cults

- Identify the group based on classic characteristics (above), good reference works
- Understand its claims and practices—and how they differ from biblical Christianity
- Answer its claims and practices from Scripture and other evidences
- Evangelize its followers sensitively and strategically (2 Timothy 2:24–26)
- Embrace those who find Christ and integrate them into a local church fellowship

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Helpful web sites: [www.irr.org](http://www.irr.org) | [www.apologeticsindex.org](http://www.apologeticsindex.org) | [www.watchman.org](http://www.watchman.org) | [www.mrm.org](http://www.mrm.org)

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