

The 'Christian' cults & Freemasonry

Irenaeus was born in AD 130 and became leader at the church in Lyons. He wrote five large books against the heresies of his day, mainly the Gnostics. Aware of the subtleties of heretical teaching that made it so attractive to many he commented:

'Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than the truth itself.' (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* Book I, Preface 2).

Our summary overview will cover the following:

The Church of Latter-Day Saints of Jesus Christ (Mormons LDS), Seventh Day Adventism (SDA), Christadelphians (CD), Spiritism (SP), Christian Science (CS), The Watchtower Movement (JW), Freemasonry (F).

In summary:

- 1820 Joseph Smith saw visions and was founder of LDS
 - 1820s William Miller advent in 1844. Led to SDA c.1861 by Ellen G White and others.
 - 1830s John Thomas began serious Bible Study and founder of CD.
 - 1840s The Fox sisters heard 'knockings' from Old Splitfoot and revived SP.
 - 1860s Mary Baker Eddy preached non-existence of matter and founder of CS.
 - 1870s Charles Taze Russell worked out his advent views and founder of JW.
- Freemasonry (F) evolved from trades guilds in the Middle Ages.

The origin of the cults can be understood against the background of the contemporary social and spiritual climate. All originated in USA during 19th century. America was a new nation with wide spaces and fresh ideas. Western world riven with wars, led to longing for the advent and a new world. The rise of liberal criticism of the Bible led to an entrenched reaction for tradition.

The nineteenth century saw numerous dates offered for the return of Christ (Advent). All based on interpretations of Daniel and Revelation. Failures were 'spiritualized' as great unseen events. Many cults (JW, CD, SDA) were founded—and foundered—on the certain interpretation of advent prophecy! The following dates were 'reliably' offered by various individuals or groups:

1835 (or 38, 64, 66 Irvingites). 1844 (Miller 'the Great Disappointment' SDA). 1866 (Elliott & Cummings). 1867 (Brewer & Decker). 1868, (Thomas & later CD 1937). 1870 (3 individuals all connected with what became JW). 1889 (Russian Mennonites. 1873 (Barbour) then 1914 (Russell JW). 1927, 1942 (CD).

An example of dating: Russell (JW). Daniel's dreams show that the period of Gentile domination from the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 607 BC is 2,520 years. That brings us to AD 1914; failed, so reinterpreted as having taken place in heaven—devil is now confined to earth. Miller used same passage in Daniel and came to 1844.

The place of visions and supernatural: Joseph Smith (LDS), Ellen White (SDA), Foxe sisters (SP)

Strong, autocratic central government of the organization. A cult will collapse unless it is established as a big business.

JW: a 'theocratic' government. The central Board in US controls all. No dissent allowed. Those who leave are often cut off from their families.

LDS: a President and Board and all local congregations subject to this. Today's wealth \$ billions.
CS: firm government by the Board of Mother Church.
CD: an exception to this and many divisions resulted.

Seven common errors of the cults

1. A supreme authority in addition to the Bible. In practice, a denial of Bible as final and sufficient.
2. Denial of Reformation trio: *sola scriptura*, *sola gracia*, *sola fidei*.
3. Denial of the Trinity and full deity of Jesus Christ (except SDA).
4. Denial of the total depravity and bondage of the human will.
5. Belief in ultimate annihilation for unbelievers.
6. Denial of the propitiatory and substitutionary death of Christ.
7. Claim to be the exclusive recipients and dispensers of salvation.

See them in the light of 2 Corinthians 11:12–15.

Common origins of the cult founders

Russell (JW) came from a Presbyterian home 'indoctrinated by the Shorter Catechism'.

Miller (SDA) was a sincere evangelical Christian. Ellen White succeeded him, a strong Methodist..

Smith (LDS) came from a religious family and American 'hot-Gospel' preaching.

Thomas (CD) was the son of a Congregational minister.

Eddy (CS) father was in the Reformed faith.

The Watchtower Movement (Jehovah's Witnesses)

Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916). Pennsylvania. Married and separated. Presbyterian, Congregational— abandoned both. Fascinated by advent dates. Christ's invisible presence began in 1874. In 1894: 'A few more years will wind up the present order of things and then the chastened world will stand face to face with the actual conditions of this established Kingdom of God.' Later 'The lease of power to the gentiles may end in October 1914 or 1915'. Satan thrown out of heaven.

First branch in London 1900. Russell succeeded by Judge Rutherford. Pacifists and no engagement with politics. Romans 13 has no reference to human governments. Much persecution. First called Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931. Claim: most ancient religious group with 6,000 years back to Adam. Jesus and Apostles were JWs.

Organization. Everything controlled by the Board of the International Society 'Theocratic Government'. Each Kingdom Hall must divide after 200 members. Presiding Minister (unpaid) with Assistant and others to arrange Bible Study groups. All studies, from congregation to homes, are prepared by the International Board.

Literature. By 1955 *New World Translation*. Anonymous translators. *Things in which it is impossible for God to lie*.

Trinity and Jesus: Jesus is 'divine', 'a god', but not God. He was God's first creation: 'God produced him from himself without any intermediary'. See separate notes for this.

Holy Spirit: the impersonal power of God

Immortality/eternal punishment: The soul 'is able to be wiped out of existence'. Immortality a gift.

Salvation and faith: Christ was a representative, not a substitute. He represented a perfect race to balance our sin.

Bible alone/inerrant: However, the writing of Russell and Judge Rutherford are not inspired but essential to understand the Bible. *NWT* add to the text eg Titus 2:13 'and **of** our Saviour' and 2 Peter 1:1 'of our God and **the** Saviour'. All interpretation comes from the Governing Body.

Christadelphians (CD)

John Thomas (1805–1871). London doctor but emigrated to US. Complete self-confidence in prophetic interpretation of the Apocalypse 'which have hitherto baffled the ingenuity and learning of some of the most celebrated illuminati of the religious world.' Published *Elpis Israel*.

Robert Roberts succeeded and formed a church and organization (Brothers of Christ). Literally scores of divisions and heretical views within the organization. Local congregations are independent. No paid ministry leadership. Against membership of clubs. Pacifists. Steady decline.

Trinity and Jesus: refer to Christ as 'God' but his deity was given to him by the Father. Christ had a beginning and a sinful nature, but without sin. The Trinity is 'not a mystery but a contradiction, an impossibility.'

Holy Spirit: the power of God. 'There is no manifestation of the Spirit in these days'.

Immortality and eternal punishment: Deny both. No personal devil; all sin IS the devil. No heaven.

Salvation and faith: Christ died as a representative, not a substitute. He died for himself also because of his sinful nature. Baptism essential for salvation. Only for CD and Jews.

Bible alone and inerrant: Orthodox but 'The knowledge of the Scripture in the writing of Dr Thomas has reached a finality.'

Seventh Day Adventist (SD)

William Miller (1781–1849). New York farmer. Baptist preacher. Confident that the Bible is so plain 'the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.' Using Daniel 8–9 Christ will return in 1844. When all failed, he was not 'downhearted' still believing in the advent. 1844 was the time Christ erased the record of sin in heaven. Miller never formed a church or organization though many followed him. He would not join SDA today.

Crozier and Edson saw a vision of Christ standing at the altar in heaven 23 Oct. 1844. Only then were sins forgiven. Ellen G White took up Miller's mantle and some consider her the founder of SDA c.1861. 2,000 visions.

Rachel Oakes Preston introduced the Saturday 'Sabbath' into the SDA movement. It became a central issue. In Ellen White's book *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* the immortality of the soul and Saturday Sabbath are the two great issues; claim both introduced by Church of Rome. For many in SDA there is no salvation if we do not keep Saturday.

Rev. 13–14. The Dragon is pagan Rome, the first Beast is the papacy, the second is the USA and the 'mark of the beast' is breaking the 4th Commandment.

Trinity and Jesus: Orthodox.

Holy Spirit: Orthodox.

Immortality/eternal punishment: After death the soul is unconscious. Immortality is given to believers. The rest 'covered with infamy they sink into hopeless, eternal oblivion.'

Salvation and faith: Ultimately Satan bears the sin of the world (Scapegoat). For many, observance of Saturday Sabbath essential. Salvation is by constant repentance. We may lose it.

Bible alone and inerrant? Although Ellen White claimed 'inspiration' though not equal to the Bible. 'Her writings are regarded by thousands as an inspired commentary.' eg Rev.12–14 'The application of the symbols admit of no question.'

Church of the Latter-Day Saints of Jesus Christ—Mormons (LDS)

Joseph Smith (1806–1844). Farming family Palmyra. His first visions at age 14. Mormon, a 4th century prophet appeared to JS. Gold plates hidden in AD 421. By aged 21 he had translated them and had history of the American people. The Reformation was only a return to error. JS must give the truth. Three apostles bestowed on him the 'Priesthood of Melchizedek'.

1830 the *Book of Mormon* published. Followers suffered opposition for polygamy and financial wrong. JS arrested but a mob broke into jail and murdered him. 1844 Brigham Young (1801–1877) took charge: 'He took a broken, bankrupt and rejected people and welded them into a dynamic, cohesive force.'

1840 Mission to England. Successful. Young eventually had 19 wives (at least).

1844 'The Great Trek' to Salt Lake City in Utah.

Baptism ('indispensable') also on behalf of the dead. 1 Cor. 15:29 is 'unambiguous'. Marriage 'for time and eternity'. Multiple wives—condemned in *Book of Mormon* 1830. Allowed by revelation in D&C 1843. Since 1890 little used.

Today a wealthy organization. 2024 \$293 billion. 17.5 million members and growing.

Literature: *The Book of Mormon*. Uninspired, uninteresting, inaccurate. Three separate families that fled from Israel in time of Zedekiah and Babylonian destruction and came to America. Origin of the gold plates and 'a skin blackness' being a mark of God's curse on the Lamanites.

The Doctrine and Covenants 1876. 257pp revelation to Joseph Smith.

The Pearl of Great Price. Expansion of Genesis account from creation to Noah. Book of Abraham found in a mummy case and translated by JS. *Articles of faith*

Trinity and Jesus: Jesus was created by the Father and was mortal. God gave him deity. The Father also has a real physical body. God cannot be in more than one place at a time. The Trinity: 'It cannot rationally be construed to mean that they are one in substance and in person.'

Holy Spirit: A person and separate being from God but part of the Godhead.

Immortality/eternal punishment: Rejected. Punishment 'graded according to the sin.' Four levels of reward and we have all eternity to progress.

Salvation and faith: The Fall was a victory; without the Fall Adam would have no children. No original sin. Children are innocent to the age of 8 years. We all had a 'premortal' childhood. Atonement is not a substitution. Salvation is by baptism (essential) and works. All who sin in ignorance or without a knowledge of the Gospel are saved: 'Where there is no law given, there is no punishment.'

Bible not final and not inerrant: *The Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, Doctrines and Covenants* are inspired. God still gives revelation to the leaders today. The Bible is not final authority.

Christian Science neither Christian nor science

Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910). A spinal weakness all her life but claimed self-healed. 1875 published *Science and Health with a key to the Scriptures*. Hugely successful. 1881 Massachusetts Metaphysical College. Rapid growth in 1930s and 40s. Declining today. Run by the Mother Church in Boston.

For CS, the material world is an illusion. Mankind is incapable of suffering and death. This, and our body, is our distorted view of our self, a powerful illusion. We must elevate consciousness above mortality. It works on psychosomatic principles for everything. Practitioners convince a patient that suffering is unreal and then present the positive idea that the body is perfect. A belief in Malicious

Animal Magnetism—thinking evil of others and so affecting them. The way to combat this is to deny its reality.

Trinity and Jesus: God is spiritual and nothing unspiritual exists. The Trinity is 'God as light, truth and love.' 'Jesus is the human man and Christ is the divine idea'. He demonstrated divine science in his victory over death.

Holy Spirit: is Christian Science.

Immortality and eternal punishment: Heaven and hell are states of mind. We make our own hell or heaven.

Salvation and faith: Sin does not exist, therefore atonement and salvation are merely attitudes of mind. The cross is not for sin but merely an example of 'Christ-mindedness triumphing over evil and death.' Sin is healed by knowing it to be unreal. Salvation is an attitude of mind

Bible alone and inerrant? It is inspired but dismissed when convenient. Eddy said of her book *Science and Health*: 'No human pen or tongue taught me the science contained in this book.' Changes in every edition.

Spiritism

The most ancient of all cults with roots in the earliest evidence of humanity and among many tribes.

Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). Brilliant Swedish philosopher, inventor and scientist. 1743 a spiritual crisis, left science and focussed on dreams and visions. Claimed he could visit the afterlife, and talk with angels, devils and many others including Luther. *Heaven and Hell* (1758)

Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910). Influenced by Swedenborg. Claimed, under hypnosis, to give messages from spirits. Published, many books including *The Voice of Nature*. Much of his work described as 'gobbledegook' and 'science fantasy'.

Margaretta (1822–1893) and Catherine (1837–1892) Fox claimed to be in touch with 'Old Splitfoot', a pedlar who had been murdered and buried under the cellar. They 'heard' his rapping and objects moved etc. Their elder sister Leah (1813–1890) took charge of them and they enjoyed great success as mediums. In 1888 Margaretta confessed it was all a hoax but the movement took off. Their rebuilt house in Hydeville (NY) became a Mecca for Spiritualists. 1863 The National Spiritualist Association of USA.

Aided by two World Wars thousands turned to mediums to contact their relatives. *The Betty Book* by Stewart Edward White, the story of his wife as one of the most popular mediums. Hugely influential. Arthur Conan Doyle, Oliver Lodge, Harry Edwards et al. Miracles are psychic phenomena. Prophecy is via a medium. Discernment of spirits is clairvoyance.

Trinity and Jesus: No personal God. Whatever ministers to our soul is our god. Christ was simply an advanced spirit and the greatest medium.

Holy Spirit: We all have psychic force in our minds and this is helped by joining hands and concentrating together. The best are mediums.

Immortality and eternal punishment: Death is to be free from all limitations. Spirit enters the spirit world and can interact with the living. After death the spirit can progress to higher levels of consciousness. Some believe in re-incarnation.

Salvation and faith: Any idea of atonement is result of a deranged mind. Sin can be purified in a 'spiritual' life. Christ's death simply and acts of love and forgiveness.

Bible alone and inerrant? Messages of the spirits via mediums etc supersede the Bible. No final authority. See Rudyard Kipling: *The road to Endor* Deuteronomy 18:11–12; Isaiah 8:19; Leviticus 20:6; Saul and Endor 1 Samuel 28.

Freemasonry

Darkness Visible by Walton Hannah 1952 answered by *Light Invisible* by Vindex 1952.

British origin from the guilds of tradesmen ('trades unions'). A gild of masons in Lincoln 1313. Secret signs to test membership. Lodge=place of work. Warden=i/c of Lodge. Apprentice=under contract. Master Mason=i/c building work.

A 'secret' society of passwords, signs, handgrips and promises as far back as 17th century.

A fraternity of 'Just, upright and free men, of mature age, sound judgement, and strict morals'. Gay man can join and can stay if transitions.

Members include Royalty (George VI and Philip of Edinburgh), Politicians (Churchill, Eisenhower, Roosevelt), Military (Nelson, Wellington), Clergy (bishops and archbishops, Fisher. RC forbids it). 6 million in world (175,000 in UK).

Prayers to The Great Architect of the Universe. Truth in all religions. Masons move 'from darkness to light'. A religion of good works. They believe in immortality of the soul. The name of Christ is never mentioned in a lodge. A secret and class society. Much pageantry, many strict and binding oaths (pledges) A mock religion of pagan syncretism which includes religious names and symbols (JAH-BUL-ON).

An Entered Apprentice comes as 'a poor candidate in a state of darkness...humbly soliciting to be admitted to the mysteries and privileges of freemasonry.' 33 degrees, each with its signs, passwords and oaths of obligation (many are horrific).
