



A Course
In
CULT RELIGIONS

PART ONE

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

Pineland, Florida 33945

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RECOGNITION

The daily application of Christian Apologetics (the science of defending the Christian faith) is dependant upon not only a knowledge of the Word of God, but also a working knowledge of the beliefs of other religions. Down through the ages most wars have been fought over differences in such. Many have been martyred because of their religious beliefs. Heathen can be converted only as they see the fallacies of their own religion as compared with Biblical Christianity. Hence, it is imperative that witnessing Christians should have a broad understanding of cults and world religions.

In his book, "CULTS, WORLD RELIGIONS, AND YOU", Dr. Kenneth Boa has compiled a masterful collection of anti-Christian religions and their major beliefs in stark contrast with the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. The American Bible College uses this book with the author's gracious permission as a free textbook included with this course.

Dr. Boa is an outstanding evangelical Bible scholar who has authored other books that that will enrich your understanding of God's Word, and we encourage the purchase and reading of such.

The New American Standard Version quotes have been substituted in compliance with the King James Version as the A.B.C's standard Bible version. Additional comments are bracketed.

As the student seeks to win others to Christ, he will be confronted with questions coming from strange beliefs. These questions must be prayerfully answered in an enlightening, non-confrontational manner. I Peter 3:15 states "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." It is our desire that this course will aid you in being a more successful soul-winner for Christ.

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INTRODUCTION

The Purpose

This is the day of new religious cults and occult groups. Strange concepts that till recently were known only to a few in the West are now proliferating. Eastern mysticism and occult practices are gaining more adherents, especially among teenagers and young adults. More than ever, ours is a pluralistic society in which Christianity is no longer a consensus but just another option in a whole cafeteria of religious choices.

There are several reasons for this dramatic growth of non-Christian religions, cults, and the occult. One is the bankruptcy of the materialistic values our society has promoted. Materialism and empty humanism do not satisfy the spiritual needs that are a part of every human being, and many people are searching for some kind of personal and spiritual fulfillment. Along with this is an increasing experiential rather than factual orientation. People are trying to find meaning through emotional and mystical experiences, which are precisely the kinds of experiences offered by many religious and occult movements today.

Others turn to these movements because of loneliness, lack of personal identity, and alienation. By submitting to the teachings and requirements of the cult, they hope to find the love, acceptance, and fellowship they long for. Still others are attracted by the charisma of the authority figures in these religions or by the promise of power over one's circumstances and destiny. Some are drawn in by the exotic ideas and life-styles represented by the various religions and cults.

While it is unfortunate that so many have turned to non-Christian sources for the fulfillment of their spiritual needs, this should not be so surprising if we remember that a large number of Christian churches have lost their spiritual vitality. They have exchanged a life-giving relationship for an external religiosity. Thus, instead of attracting those who are on a spiritual quest, some Christian churches and enterprises repel them. The current religious alternatives should be seen as a *challenge* to the Christian community to get serious about the progress of the Gospel, the good news of new life in Christ.

This book is primarily directed to Christians, particularly those who find themselves un-informed and bewildered by these religious movements. Many such Christians are either afraid to share their faith with these people or think that it would be futile to do so. However, if you are a follower of Christ who is solidly

rooted in the Scriptures, you need not be afraid to present Him to anyone. This does not mean that God will call you to become a missionary to the cults, but He may give you some opportunities in this area. As these movements continue to spread, we should expect to encounter their members with increasing frequency.

Even if you do not have these opportunities, it is hoped that this presentation of some of the religious ideologies, to which people are committing themselves, will give you new perspectives on the needs people have and what they will do in their quest for truth. Some are willing to sacrifice their possessions, their rationality, and their volition in order to attain promised enlightenment or salvation.

There are four sections in this book. "Major Non-Christian Religions of the East" deals with world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Sikhism, Jainism, Confucianism, and Shinto were included for completeness, even though they seem to be disappearing. The Rabbinic Judaism of today is so different from Judeo-Christianity that it is included as a separate chapter. This section is designed to give an overview of the primary religions of man still in existence. [Part One syllabus deals with the first two sections. Part Two syllabus deals with book sections three – four.]

The second section, "Major Pseudo-Christian Religions of the West," is concerned with some of the more important religious movements developed in the Western Hemisphere. Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, and the Unity School of Christianity are all pseudo-Christian cults which originated in the United States. Though Seventh-Day Adventism is included in this section, it is not considered a cult because its current standpoint is harmonious with many of the primary doctrines of orthodox Christianity. Theosophy was created in America and England, but it does not claim to be "Christian" per se.

The third section is called "Occult Religions and Systems." This includes six of the more prevalent occultic movements, including Satanism, witchcraft, astrology, and the Tarot. These and other occult practices are often thrown together in various combinations by those who use them.

The fourth section deals with "New Religions and Cults." In America alone there are literally hundreds of new religious movements which are actively seeking converts. They come from the East and the West, and many are variations and hybrids of older religions. Dozens of these groups are popping up each year, and

it would be impossible to survey more than a tiny fraction in a book of this size. Five of the most influential movements are described in this section: Transcendental Meditation, The Unification Church, The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, The Divine Light Mission, and The Way International.

Each movement considered in this book is handled in three ways. First, its background and teachings are described. This is followed by a brief biblical evaluation. Points of special interest to Christians who may encounter members of the movement are also listed.

This book is designed to provide *simple and organized* information about these non-Christian and pseudo-Christian religions. It attempts to give the reader a clear understanding of the movements in a *minimum* number of pages. The assumption is that most readers will want a brief but adequate overview. The few who may wish to become experts in a particular religion or cult could begin with the appropriate chapter in this book, turn to the bibliography at the end, and go on from there.

The Principles

Each religion and cult has its own distinctives. But there are a number of general biblical principles which Christians ought to apply no matter whom they encounter. The following presentation of some of these principles is based on a crucial New Testament verse: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer [to make a defense] to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear [reverence]" (1 Peter 3:15).

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts. .."

(1) Before you witness to another, be sure you have submitted your life to Jesus as Lord. He must be free to rule in your heart. This submission-commitment should be reinforced daily.

(2) Expect that God will work through you. Be confident in Him, not in yourself, realizing that the results must be left to Him. If you are praying for opportunities, expect God to work through you when one comes along. You may be planting a seed or watering one which has already been planted. "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6).

(3) This is a spiritual battle, not just a battle of knowledge or cleverness. Ephesians 6:10-18 describes the kind of armor believers should wear in this warfare. Our two offensive weapons are the Word of God and prayer. Use both during any encounter with a cultist.

(4) Search for any unloving attitudes you may have and confess them so you can be used more effectively. Prepare yourself spiritually so that you will be able to personally share God's love with others. Knowledge without love will profit little (see 1 Cor. 13:1-2).

(5) Be patient—it may take hours of discussion and many encounters before the claims and credentials of Christ break through to the other person. Decide at the outset whether you are willing to invest the time it takes.

(6) Check your motivations. Are you sharing Christ out of real concern for the person or because you feel it is your duty? One can do a good thing for the wrong reasons.

"... be ready always ..."

(1) Part of being ready is developing a good knowledge of the Bible. This requires reading and studying the Scriptures on a regular basis. You should try to read the Bible through once a year if possible. However, avoid the extreme of thinking that you must have an exhaustive understanding of its contents before you can be an effective witness.

(2) Know how to use specific passages from the Scriptures. You won't have time to run to a concordance or a reference book when you are sharing Christ. You should always be able to present a clear biblical case for the deity and exclusive claims of Jesus Christ. Be ready to share the way of salvation from the Bible. Emphasize the problem of man's sinfulness and God's loving provision. Know how to defend the historical resurrection of Christ. It would also help to be familiar with some Old Testament messianic prophecies that were fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

(3) Be able to defend the authority of the Bible as the revealed Word of God. There are good books which can help you in this kind of defense.

(4) Be ready to straighten out misconceptions about the meaning of Christianity. Many who are in the cults have rejected a caricature of Christianity, which they find unappealing because of their distorted perception about its teaching and the person and work of Jesus. It is often necessary to explain what Christianity is *not* before you can effectively explain what it *is*.

(5) It helps to have some understanding of the teaching of a particular religion or cult, especially if you have regular contact with a representative. You may want to obtain some of the official materials published by the cult. *"...to give an answer [make a defense]..."*

(1) Don't allow yourself to get sidetracked into minor issues. Always focus on the cardinal doctrines about

Christ and His work of salvation. Stress the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Do not waste time on peripheral doctrines or strange customs and dress.

(2) Never let a cultist use biblical proof texts out of context to support his cult's doctrines. Make him look at passages in both the immediate and broad contexts. Scripture is its own best interpreter, and clear passages should always be used to illuminate unclear passages.

(3) Remember your need for reliance upon the convicting and regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit. Pray that He works in this way through you during your conversation. If your witnessing is not done in His power, you are wasting your time.

(4) Clearly distinguish between salvation by works and salvation by grace through faith. Every non-Christian religion and cult teaches some kind of works-approach to salvation or enlightenment. It may be meditation, devotional service, or moral living, but it demands human works. Because of this, no one but a biblical Christian can really be sure of his condition after death. No form of works will be sufficient to please a holy God. A sinner cannot atone for his own sins, or anyone else's, even if he is reincarnated a million times.

(5) Some cultists may claim that their position is not essentially different from Christianity; the problem is just one of semantics. But you must not let them minimize the radical differences, particularly when it comes to the question of who God is, who man is, and who Jesus Christ is. You must be ready to use the Scriptures lovingly but firmly. Read clear passages and let the Bible speak for itself.

(6) Many cultists appeal to a superior experience. When this happens, emphasize that experience alone can be quite misleading, no matter how intense. Satanists have powerful experiences but this does not mean that God is working through them. The truth of God's Word must be primary, and experience secondary. Experience should always be based on truth; truth is not determined by one's experiences.

(7) If you give a cultist any books or other material to read, be sure you have read it first. Make sure it is not written in an offensive or harsh tone. If you use literature, don't let it become a substitute for your use of the Bible itself.

"...to everyman that asketh you ..."

(1) Pray for opportunities in which people will ask you about your faith in Christ.

(2) It is wise to ask good questions and listen carefully to the answers. This will help you understand the basic position of the religion or cult being

represented. Ask penetrating questions of information and clarification. Your interest will not only increase their respect for you and your position, but it will also give you the understanding you need. Miscommunication can be a two-way street, and because of it Christians sometimes overlook the crucial issues and concentrate on the minor ones.

"...a reason of the hope that is in you..."

(1) Though you are not building the case for Christianity on your own testimony, it is often appropriate to use your personal experience to illustrate the power of Jesus' claims.

(2) The hope that is in you should be evident from your love and concern which springs from your vital personal relationship with God.

". .. with meekness [gentleness] and fear [reverence]..."

(1) The word "gentleness" tells us to be loving and patient when we defend the hope that is within us. Even if we bear witness to Christ, it is dishonoring to Him if we do it in an unloving manner. Do not quarrel when witnessing. "Reverence" tells us to treat the other person with respect. He is a person created in the image of God and one for whom Christ died. According to 2 Corinthians 4:4, "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Christ's love working through you is the light which can dispel this satanic blindness.

(2) Look for areas of common ground to establish personal points of contact. There is some truth in any religion or cult, otherwise no one would be attracted to it. Try to identify points of commonality and move from there. One common area is that of human needs. Try to find out why the person joined the cult and tell how Christ can better meet that need.

(3) Whenever possible, it is desirable to witness on a one-to-one basis. Cultists usually like to work in teams of two or more, however, and this seriously hampers the chances of getting through to them.

Major Non-Christian Religions of the East

1.

Hinduism

Background and Teachings

Hinduism is difficult to describe because it has absorbed innumerable customs and concepts and has branched off into many other religions, some radically different from their source. There are so many schools of Hindu thought today that almost anything we say about this vast religion must be qualified.

The earliest stage of Hinduism is usually called the pre-Vedic period, beginning about 3,000 years ago. Little is known about the pre-Vedic Indians who lived in the Indus Valley of northern India and the Dravidians who populated the Indian peninsula. By the time of Abraham, they had developed a civilization similar to that of the early Mesopotamians. Their polytheistic religion, a sort of proto-Hinduism, was in some ways like early witchcraft. The pre-Vedic Hindus especially worshiped a Mother Goddess and a horned god in the posture of a yogi. They also offered sacrifices to the various gods, but they did not have temples.

The Vedic period began around 1500 B.C., when a central Asian people called Aryans invaded northern India and progressively pressed toward the south. These light-skinned conquerors imposed their Vedic civilization and religion on the Indians. Vedic religion differed greatly from the Dravidian religion—the Aryans worshiped the powers of nature rather than images. The most important of their [Aryan] gods were Indra, a god of the atmosphere and stars; Varuna, a sky god; and Agni, the fire god. There were many other gods, one of which was Soma, the god of the soma plant.

The Aryans developed an elaborate system of sacrifices which later led to the formation of a priesthood (the Brahmins). They also absorbed the Dravidian gods and concepts into their religion, and this assimilation resulted in a complicated array of gods and goddesses.

The Vedic period was followed by the Upanishadic period, about 600 B.C. During this time Hinduism began dividing, into the popular religion of the masses and a more philosophical religion. The Upanishads were sacred books which reinterpreted the Vedic religion and boiled all the gods down into a single

principle or absolute universal soul. This monistic or pantheistic viewpoint held that the universe is God, and God is the universe. The impersonal universal soul was called Brahman, and this form of Hinduism was called Brahmanism.

During the Upanishadic period, the Hindu concept of salvation shifted from an emphasis on fulfillment and on life to an emphasis on release and escape from life. Life on earth began to be viewed quite pessimistically as the doctrines of *karma* and *samasara* grew.

The law of karma was a moral law of cause and effect which could not be violated. It was called "the law of the deed," and one could build either good or evil karma depending on his deeds.

The doctrine of *samasara*—transmigration—taught that all life goes through an endless succession of rebirths [basically re-incarnation]. *Every* living thing is on the wheel of life, and each new rebirth depends on the karma built up in its past lives. Salvation—breaking away from this wheel—could be achieved by philosophical speculation on the words of the sages and by meditation. Release and liberation from the wheel of life (*moksha* or *mukti*) would finally come when one realized his individual soul (the *Atman*) was identical with the universal soul (Brahman).

Hinduism was now so philosophical in theory and so corrupt and legalistic in practice that reform movements arose within it. Two of the most prominent were Buddhism and Jainism. Another reform was a movement back to the worship of a supreme personal God. Not that Hinduism became monotheistic; polytheism was never really eliminated. Instead, a triad of Hindu gods was often used to represent the impersonal and absolute Brahman (neuter). Brahma (the masculine form of the word *Brahman*) was regarded as the Creator, Vishnu as the Preserver, and Shiva as the Destroyer .

Many Hindus (called Vaishnavites) chose to worship the god Vishnu and his 10 incarnations. These incarnations, called *avatars*, or descents of God to earth to save the world from grave perils, were a fish, an amphibian, a boar, a man-lion, a dwarf, Parasurama, Ravana, Krishna, Buddha, and Kalkin, who is yet to come. The seventh and eighth incarnations of Vishnu, Ravana and Krishna, are the most important and are worshiped more than Vishnu himself.

Other Hindus (called Shaivites) worship the god Shiva and his wife, who is variously represented as Durga, Kali, Sati, Parvati, Deva, and others. Many of these representations, especially Kali, are quite sinister and bloodthirsty. Among the Kali worshippers is a cult

known as the Shakti, which encourages such immoral practices as temple prostitution.

After the time of Christ, philosophical Hinduism was dominated by Vedantic thought. The *Vedanta*, a philosophical Hindu book based on the earlier Upanishads, teaches that man needs liberation. Individuals go through stages of wanting pleasure and worldly success. If they mature, their desires may turn to self-renunciation and moral duty (*dharma*). But the deepest need, whether people recognize it or not, is for liberation (*moksha*).

Moksha occurs when a person extends his being (*sat*), awareness (*chit*), and bliss (*ananda*) to an infinite level. Since Brahman, the impersonal absolute, is infinite being, awareness, and bliss, the only way a man can attain *moksha* is to come to the realization that his hidden self (*atman*) is actually the same as Brahman. A common phrase used to describe this is "Thou art that" (*tat twam asi*). Salvation is therefore achieved by detachment from the finite self and attachment to reality as a whole. This is when a person reaches *nirvana*, a state of passionless peace.

Three basic approaches are used to achieve this salvation. (1) Salvation by knowledge (*Jnana Yoga*) is acquired by listening to the sages and the scriptures, practicing meditation by turning awareness inward, and realizing the Atman-Brahman identity. (2) Salvation by devotion (*Bhakti Yoga*) is less philosophical and more popular. In this technique, God is thought of in a more personal way. The devotee chooses a particular manifestation of God, and hopes to break through to a union with God. (3) To gain salvation by correct works (*Karma Yoga*), one must perform ceremonies, sacrifices, pilgrimages and other good actions without attachment or desire for their rewards. All of these methods may in varying degrees also involve *Raja Yoga*, an involved technique of meditation which includes control over the body, breathing, and the thoughts. The main goal of Yoga is *samadhi*, a union between the devotee and the Absolute.

Hindu philosophy regards this world as an intermediate place, a training ground for the soul. There are innumerable galaxies and other worlds like our own, and the moral law of karma pervades all. The universe goes through endless temporal cycles during which it is repeatedly created and destroyed.

In an ultimate sense, however, this world with its pleasures and pains, its rights and wrongs, is all deceptive. It is all *maya* or illusion, because all things are really one. Why does the universe exist at all? It is

lila, a great game played by God, the cosmic dance of the divine.

In the 19th century, some reform movements again sprang up within Hinduism. One of these was the Brahma Samaj, founded by Ram Mohan Ray, which was influenced to some extent by Christianity. Another reform movement, the Arya Samaj, also promoted social reform but was much more militant in its adherence to Hinduism.

Hinduism also went through a sort of renaissance, which began in the last half of the 19th century and continued into the 20th. Ramakrishna and his disciple Vivekenanda began a movement now known as the Ramakrishna Mission (also called the Vedanta Society). This movement stresses the unity of all religions, but emphasizes Vedantic Hinduism above all others, with a missionary zeal.

Other modern names of importance in Hinduism are Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Ghandi, Sri Aurobindo, and Radhakrishnan.

Most of what we have been describing is *philosophical Hinduism*. We should keep in mind that the Hinduism of the masses is very different. Popular Hinduism emphasizes the observance of the caste system. The four original castes or stations of life were the Brahmins (priests), the Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), the Vaisyas (craftsmen, farmers, artisans), and the Sudras (laborers, servants). Below these were the outcastes, or "untouchables." These social and occupational groups have now been further divided into about 3,000 subcastes.

Another strong element in popular Hinduism is worship of the images of many gods. There are several levels of gods and goddesses ranging from the supreme triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, to such lesser Vedic gods as Indra and Agni, down to a host of village gods, demigods, demons, and genii. Hinduism of the masses is an extremely idolatrous and polytheistic religion, as evidenced by the millions of gods and innumerable temples and cults. Religious practices include pilgrimages, food restrictions, special postures and gestures, possession by the gods, sacred places, recitation of sacred formulae, phallic emblems, and geometrical patterns. India abounds with spiritual teachers (*gurus*) and wandering holy men (*sadhuis* and *swamis*). Indians are immersed in folklore and legends about the exploits of the various gods and goddesses.

Here are some of the important scriptures of Hinduism. There are many books and they often contradict one another:

Sruti—revealed scripture (canonical)

Vedas (Rig-Veda, Sama-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Atharva-Veda)

Brahmanas

Aranyakas

Upanishads

Bhagavad Gita (the last part of the Mahabharata)

Smriti—tradition (semicanonical)

Sutras

Codes of Law

Agamas

Mahabharata

Ramayana

Darsanas

Puranas

Biblical Evaluation

(1) In philosophical Hinduism, God is generally an It, not a Person as in the Bible.

(2) In popular Hinduism, there are great multitudes of gods and goddesses. This is polytheistic and idolatrous in practice.

(3) Popular Hinduism also abounds in immoral practices, superstition, fear, and occultism. Demon worship and possession by the gods can also be found.

(4) The caste system is rigid, unjust, and cruel. There were very few attempts to reform this system before the time when Hinduism was influenced by Christian ideas.

(5) There is no recognition of sin and moral guilt. Sin is an illusion. In an ultimate sense, man is God. He is therefore not separated from God by his sin, as the Bible teaches.

(6) Hinduism is a works system. Forgiveness of sin does not fit into the picture of karma (the law of cause and effect). Each person has many lives in which to achieve salvation. There is a slow, evolving process toward the highest.

(7) Hinduism denies the exclusive claims of Christ and despises the Christian teaching that Christ is the only way to God.

Things to Keep in Mind

(1) Various forms of Hinduism (particularly Vedantic ideas) have become popular with young people in America. The most important issue that must be handled is the Hindu argument that all religions are the same. Many Hindus feel their religion is vastly superior to Christianity because it is more tolerant. Christians should point out that the Vedantic view of God also represents a particular religion and that it cannot include the unique claims of Christ. Hinduism

can no more "tolerate" biblical Christianity than biblical Christianity can tolerate Hinduism.

(2) Christians should not only emphasize the unique claims of Christ, but should connect these with the fact that no other religion offers a real solution to the problem of *sin*. Only the substitutionary work of Christ adequately copes with man's sinfulness.

Hinduism only covers up the problem by calling sin an illusion.

(3) We must be careful to explain all our terms, because many "religious" words have a different meaning to the Hindu.

(4) Another important approach to take is that of authority. The Hindu must be asked what group or teaching within Hinduism he represents. He may respond by referring to the many different groups within Christianity, but the essential issue is still *authority*. All the books of the Bible present a harmonious picture of God's plan of redemption; most of the Hindu scriptures contradict one another. A Hindu cannot consistently accept all of the Hindu scriptures because of their many contradictions.

END OF SAMPLE