

HARDNESS OF HEART

Can We Really Be Indifferent to the Cults?

by Paul Carden

Centers For Apologetics Research
P.O. Box 1196
San Juan Capistrano
CA 92693 USA
TheCenters@aol.com
www.TheCenters.org

Tel: 949.496.2000
Fax: 949.496.2244

*It is a beautiful privilege to work along with Christ,
but we shall not serve in that blessed apprenticeship long
without learning this lesson: that He has no pleasure in service rendered to Himself or
others that does not cost us blood!*

— F.B. Meyer

Alarmed by the accelerating growth of Jehovah’s Witnesses on world mission fields and exasperated by the church’s inaction, Walter Martin wrote in 1965 that “the gravity of the problem which confronts the Christian Church is apparent to all but the most adamantly obtuse.” One generation — and millions of cultists — later, award-winning historian of missions Ruth Tucker lamented: “I have come to the conclusion that one of the most serious and least recognized problems we face in overseas missions is that of the proliferation of cults....”

Given the scarcity of literature on the subject and the lack of broad, sustained, action to address the problem, it is evident that Tucker is right: few Christians in the field of missions seem to recognize the threat of the cults around the globe, consistently underestimating the cults’ determination, their resources, and the impact they make on evangelism and church-planting.

What accounts for the seeming indifference to the worldwide growth of the cults? Based on conversations with missionaries, missions executives, and lay believers, I’m prone to suspect at least four factors (which turn up in varying combinations):

1. They haven’t seen the data. But as I’ve written previously, the latest statistical evidence could hardly be more compelling: Barring unforeseen disasters, at its present rate of growth the Mormon church is projected to reach a staggering 260 million members and 370,000 full-time missionaries in only a few decades — and the Jehovah’s Witnesses will hit at least 130 million. At the same time, dozens of smaller, less-notorious cults and sects are multiplying and extending their harm into areas where the church is least able to resist and evangelize them.

2. They have a misplaced fatalism — a sense that little or nothing can be done anyway. Even as some Christians misappropriate Mark 14:7 to excuse their neglect of the poor, a surprising number simply shrug and say, in effect, “The cults you have with you always.”

3. Countering cults requires distasteful dirtywork. Some people have a deep-seated aversion to religious controversy or criticism. This is sometimes rooted in a timid temperament, but often hardened by exposure to abrasive apologists.

4. “It’s enough just to preach the gospel.” (After all, why lower yourself to grapple with error if you can simply declare the truth?) On the one hand, we must never underestimate

the power and efficacy of straightforward, biblical evangelism and teaching. But as the New Testament vividly demonstrates through Paul's ministry in Acts (e.g., 17:16–31) and the epistles, to effectively address heresy we must research, understand, and respond to specific errors, teachers, and movements.

When I discussed these four factors with a colleague from Mexico, he candidly suggested adding a fifth: "Hardness of heart." The founder of World Vision International, Bob Pierce, is widely known for his prayer: "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God." When will the church awaken to the heartbreak caused by cults and deceivers in the developing world? Pray for our effectiveness in sounding the call!

Stranger than Fiction: To my amazement, the long-declining Christian Science cult is showing signs of renewed strength. The June 9 edition of its national daily newspaper, the *Christian Science Monitor*, reports that worldwide sales of its main text, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, have reached more than 100,000 for the fourth year in a row. (The ironic tag line for its advertising campaign is "For People Who Aren't Afraid to Think.") The cult's financial outlook is also brightening: "Contributions have grown in recent years and the annual balanced budget has expanded by nearly \$20 million in the last six years." More disturbingly, the *Monitor* describes a sort of ecumenical shift in the cult's favor. For example, "At the Disciples Baptist Church in Boston, the Rev. Tina Saxon provided copies of *Science and Health* to every family with a child in Sunday School." The befuddled Dr. Saxon "called for tolerance and understanding among religions," saying: "If all of us...the Baptists, the Methodists, the Pentecostals, the Catholics, if all people who believe in God...don't come to some close belief in the spirit of the Christ, we are going to blow ourselves apart....We all need to come to the Christ consciousness."

Meanwhile, the Southern Baptist outreach to Utah provoked bizarre expressions of support for the Mormons. The June 8 *Los Angeles Times* quoted Rev. Eileen Lindner of the National Conference of Churches (and a Presbyterian) as criticizing the Southern Baptists because, in her view, calling the Mormon church a cult is "unwarranted" and "unkind." Lindner added that the Latter-day Saints "are absolutely saved....Are Mormons children of God? Of course they are." (Three months earlier, on March 3, Dr. Robert Schuller of the Reformed Church in America welcomed famous Mormon motivational guru Stephen R. Covey to the Crystal Cathedral as his "pulpit guest!" For a scathing appraisal of Covey's writings and religion, see the Feb. 23 issue of *The New Republic*.) Praise God for first-hand reports from Utah indicating that the Southern Baptists' proclamation of Christ turned many hearts to Him! ●

Effective prayer has two characteristics. First, we must allow the Holy Spirit to winnow away what is inconsistent with God's will. We cannot impose our will on God, but must wait for the solution of our life problems, which He will most certainly grant, sometimes by a flash, at other times by the slow unfolding of His will. When we cannot solve our problem in our own way, we must trust Him to deal with it in a better way; and He cannot fail.

Second, we must cease to worry. However long the interval, however strong the combination of adverse circumstances, we may still our hearts, in the patience of

*unwavering faith, sure that our Lord will not rest until He has finished the matter
in hand which we have entrusted to Him.*

— F.B. Meyer



Paul Carden is the executive director of the Centers for Apologetics Research (CFAR), an international network of cult research and education agencies serving eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Latin America, and Africa. To contact him, write to TheCenters@aol.com.

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