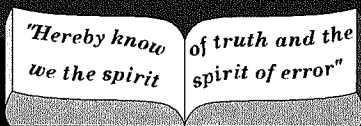


# The Discerner



Volume 22, Number 1

January • February • March 2002

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## EDITORIAL

*By William A. BeVier*

**O**ur first article in this issue may introduce a new subject to you. Gospel in the Stars, also known as GIS, is based upon the concept that God has revealed the Gospel in the heavenly bodies. All mankind has to do is gaze up in the heaven at night and come to the understanding he/she is a sinner and that Jesus Christ died for them. This is based upon an understanding of the zodiac.

Steve Lagoon has done a study of this concept and has written a response to it. To say the least, it is not found in the Bible, in spite of what some individuals are trying to tell us.

When one reads John 3:16-18; 3:36; 5:24; Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8-9, and the sermons of Peter and Paul in the book of Acts, nothing is seen referring us to the constellations of heaven in order to be reconciled to God and have our sins forgiven. The true Gospel is clearly defined in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 and how to save us from sins, but nothing is said

about the heavenly constellations. Paul wrote to Timothy: "Preach the Word" (logos, God's Word), not about the stars.

To cite a secular source, The Encyclopedia Americana, vol. 29, p. 719, 1956 Ed.): "The idea [zodiac] seems to have originated with the Chaldean astronomers about 2100 B.C." Again, "The constellations themselves bear no resemblance to the signs designated to them." Then, "The remnant of this superstition [the signs influence human life] is still seen in some almanacs." Concluding, "These [the signs] are but fanciful representations, and have no foundation in fact." The article also points out that because the heavenly bodies move in an ecliptic path, the constellations are constantly moving westward as related to points on the earth. They cannot present any fixed message from God, as does the Gospel in Scripture.

Our second article by Cory J. LaVasseur serves to remind us not only of the "consequences of ideas," but also of the similarities and differences between Mormonism and Islam. It also reminds us that Mormonism has not changed in its essential beliefs, though there is being a concerted effort made by the Mormons to be accepted "as Christians," claiming to be no different than any other Protestant group.

Our third article in this issue is by one of our Board members, a former missionary in Germany, who now has a new ministry as a teacher in Eastern Europe to which he frequently travels. His article lets us know that cults are not limited to the United States. I believe you will be interested in learning how he deals with the subject of cults with his students in Eastern Europe.

In our heading we give the information we have relocated our office from the west side of the Twin Cities in Minnesota to the east side. I share with you that this move has not been without extra financial expenses. If you can be of help in meeting these expenses, it would be appreciated.

# The Gospel in the Stars Controversy

By Steve Lagoon

In this article I wish to address a subject that has of late stirred up not a little bit of controversy. It has been called the “gospel in the stars controversy” (hereafter referred to as GIS). The Christian Research Institute reports that the GIS theory was originally formulated by “Miss Frances Rolleston, a nineteenth-century English classicist and linguist” who “popularized the theory with her book, Mazzaroth – The Constellations, published in 1863” (The “Gospel In the Stars’ Theory,” Christian Research Institute, Statement DG 205, available at this web address: <http://www.equip.org/free/DG205.html>).

GIS was further popularized in the second half of the nineteenth century by E. W. Bullinger (Witness of the Stars, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1893, 1967) and J. A. Seiss (The Gospel in the Stars, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1882, 1979).

## Dr. Kennedy’s Support for GIS

Unfortunately, one of the major proponents of this theory today, Dr. D. James Kennedy, is well known to evangelicals. Dr. Kennedy is one of the great Christian leaders of our day, and has done excellent work in the area of apologetics. His support of GIS is disappointing in that it tarnishes his otherwise outstanding reputation and ministry. Dr. Kennedy has promoted the GIS theory in his book The Real Meaning of the Zodiac, and on his radio broadcast as well. Dr. Kennedy is just one of many proponents of GIS, both past and present. An Internet search yields a large number of sites, both critical and supportive of GIS.

## What is “The Gospel in the Stars” Theory?

In brief, the theory claims that mankind can learn the “gospel” by observing the constellations of the zodiac. For instance, Dr. Kennedy states, “...the fact remains that there was a God-given Gospel in the stars which lays beyond and behind that which has now been corrupted” (Kennedy, The Real Meaning of the Zodiac, as quoted on the Apologetic Index Website: <http://www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex/h13a02.html>). Proponents of the theory, therefore, believe that constellations of the zodiac present a “gospel” message consistent with the Bible, which message has been corrupted by pagan peoples throughout history.

Dr. Kennedy claims that the Zodiac and its constellations were

known by the time of Job. He says, “I would call your attention to Job 38:32a: ‘Canst thou bring forth the Mazzaroth in his season?’ Mazzaroth is a Hebrew word, which means ‘the Constellations of the Zodiac.’ In what may be the oldest book in all of human history, we find that the constellations of the zodiac were already known and understood” (ibid.).

Proponents of GIS believe they have recovered the original meaning of the zodiac (the gospel) that had been distorted by pagan cultures.

### **A Chart Explaining GIS**

In an article on the website called Christian Answers Network, (<http://christiananswers.net/q-eden-c019.html>), a helpful chart is given which I repeat in substance.

<u>Constellation</u>	<u>Picture</u>	<u>Interpretations</u>
Virgo	Virgin	Virgin Mary
Libra	Scales	Sin not paid for
Scorpio	Scorpion	Sin brings death
Sagittarius	Archer	Demonism
Capricorn	Goat-fish	Earth corruption
Aquarius	Water pourer	Living water or Noah’s flood
Pisces	Fish	God’s remnant
Aries	Ram	Sacrifice
Taurus	Bull	Resurrection
Gemini	Twins	Christ’s dual nature
Cancer	Crab	Gathering of the redeemed
Leo	Lion	The King

We are informed that this chart is a fairly representative example of the “Gospel in the Stars” theory.

### **Further Examples of GIS**

Furthermore, Larry Pahl produced a chart entitled: “The 48 Zodiacal Constellations and Their Fulfillment in the Gospel Story,” in which he gives both the “pagan” meanings of the constellations and their alleged real Gospel meanings. He lists a total of 48 constellations, four in each of the twelve houses of the Zodiac (web address is: <http://members.aol.com/larrypahl/5stars.html>).

As an example, in the house of Scorpio, Pahl lists the pagan meaning of the constellation of Hercules as “wounded in his heel, the other foot over the Dragon’s head, holding in one hand the Golden Apples and the three-headed Dog off [sic.] hell, and in the other the uplifted club.” Pahl then lists what he thinks is the “true” gospel meaning of

the same constellation as “Christ, the true Hercules, the toiling Vanquisher of evil, wounded in His heel (the cross) but crushing Satan, the head of evil.”

One GIS proponent gives the alleged real meaning to a number of stars in the constellation of Orion and actually suggests that, “Orion is only one of 48 constellations that can be expounded upon in this same manner” (Arne Herstad, And Let Be for Signs, 1998, available at the web site: <http://pwl.netcom.com/~horse/star.html>). I shudder to think how much time can be wasted studying and learning the “true” meanings of hundreds and hundreds of stars.

### **Problems with the Theory**

This theory is interesting and provocative on the face of it. Nonetheless, when one digs below the surface, a number of objections arise which seem to be fatal to the theory.

For example, if the real meaning of the zodiac had been corrupted by pagan peoples and lost to mankind, how was it recovered? How would we know if we have recovered it accurately? Has a copy of an ancient document containing the original or real meaning been found somewhere?

Also, if the Gospel was already written in the stars from the beginning of creation, then it follows that Adam and Eve would have understood it, even before their fall into sin. It seems strange that Adam and Eve would be able to understand that man would fall into sin and need a redeemer, before they in fact, fell. It would also mean that anyone could have known about the virgin birth long before it was “revealed” by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14) and fulfilled in the birth of Christ (Matthew 1:22-23).

GIS proponents assert that the real meaning of the zodiac was corrupted and/or lost by ancient man. If this is the case, how did early mankind learn the “true” meaning in the first place? Did God tell Adam and Eve Himself? There is no mention of this in the Bible, and hence it is mere conjecture to suppose that ancient man had such an understanding. In fact, there is not the slightest bit of solid evidence that anyone in ancient times believed this gospel in the stars theory.

Another option could be that the “gospel in the stars” message was so clear that Adam and Eve (and the rest of mankind) could understand it without needing God to explain it to them. But if this is the case, how could it have ever been lost or corrupted? Anyone, at any time, should be able to read it!

### **Is GIS “Natural” or “Special” Revelation?**

This leads to the problem of how to classify this “gospel revelation.” Theologians normally distinguish between two types of revela-

tion: "Natural" and "Special." Special revelation is a specific verbal or written (or both) message from God to man such as the various writings that make up the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Natural (also called "general") revelation is a message from God that man can (and should) receive by observing the created order (Romans 1:18-23).

I would like to know how proponents classify the "gospel in the stars." Is it natural or special revelation? With "special" revelation, hermeneutical principles are used, so that anyone can arrive at the correct interpretation of a passage. Through the use of sound exegetical tools, the reader can arrive at the meaning intended by the original author (and by God). This removes the subjectivity from the process. However, the GIS theory is loaded with subjectivity. Even though it claims to give a very specific message, it is fraught with inconsistencies. It is not a specific verbal message given through a prophet or other messenger that can be written in an inspired, infallible, and inerrant text, and therefore cannot be classified as special revelation.

On the other hand, proponents claim that GIS is a very specific (gospel) message. So much so, that they can fill pages with detailed explanations of the 48 constellations found in the 12 houses of the Zodiac. This seems to go way beyond anything that could be classified as natural or general revelation.

### **Is GIS Salvific?**

Further, GIS supporters should tell us if this "gospel in the stars" is salvific. GIS proponents claim that the zodiac constellations tell mankind of his lost and sinful condition (Scorpius the Scorpion), that our sins must be paid for (Libra the Scales), that there would need to be a sacrificial death (Aries the Ram), that the one who would die for our sins would be born of a virgin (Virgo the Virgin), that he would have a dual-nature being both God and man (Gemini the Twins), that he would rise from the dead (Taurus the Bull), as the victorious King of Kings (Leo the Lion). This seems to be a rather explicit presentation of the Gospel, similar to that presented in Scripture. Do GIS supporters believe that observing this gospel in the stars alone can save people, or do they need more?

### **Scriptural Arguments Used by GIS Proponents**

At this point, let us consider the alleged scriptural support for GIS by its proponents.

One of the most often used passages is Psalm 19:1-6 which says:

<sup>1</sup>The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. <sup>2</sup>Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. <sup>3</sup>There is no speech

or language where their voice is not heard. <sup>4</sup>Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, <sup>5</sup>which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. <sup>6</sup>It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat (*All scriptural quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society, New York*).

Despite the efforts of GIS adherents, this passage says nothing about a “gospel in the stars.” It is describing the wonders of the universe and how this natural phenomenon brings glory to God. It is describing “natural” revelation as was discussed earlier. Some GIS supporters point to the description of the sun as it makes its “circuit” and suppose this is evidence for the zodiac. Such an interpretation is fanciful and foolish. The passage merely describes (in a poetical way) the daily course of the sun as it advances from sunrise to sunset.

### **Romans 1:19-20**

In Romans 1:19-20, the apostle Paul said,

<sup>19</sup>...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

GIS advocates believe that this passage supports their claim. There is no doubt that the natural order does “tell” mankind something, but it is total and unfounded conjecture to suppose that Paul was referring to the idea that the Gospel message was spelled out in the stars.

Theologian Charles C. Ryrie gives an overview of what “natural” revelation does tell man about God.

The relevant biblical passages tell us authoritatively what can be learned from general revelation. This is not to say that everybody will understand all or any of these things, but these are what God has communicated through the various avenues of general revelation. 1. His glory (Ps. 19:1). 2. His power in creating the universe (v. 1). 3. His supremacy (Rom. 1:20). 4. His divine nature (v. 20). 5. His providential control of nature (Acts 14:17). 6. His goodness (Matt. 5:45). 7. His intelligence (Acts 17:29). 8. His living existence (v. 28) (*Charles C. Ryrie, Basic Theology, Scripture Press Publications-Victor Books: Wheaton, IL, 1986, 33*).



The GIS theory goes well beyond these basic things that one can reason or deduct from nature and claims that the stars give a detailed and explicit description of the “gospel.” Unfortunately, simply wishing it to be so does not make it so. What we need is evidence, scriptural evidence, and yet there is none.

### **Genesis 1:1-18**

GIS advocates also point to Genesis 1:14-18 which says:

<sup>14</sup>And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars, <sup>17</sup>God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup>to govern the day and night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good.

Again, GIS advocates note the statement in verse 14 “and let them serve as signs” and argue that the stars are a sign of the Gospel message. As has been pointed out in the past, such an interpretation is exegetical malpractice. All this passage actually says is the obvious. Man can use the heavenly bodies (the sun, moon, and stars) as markers for determining the passage of time through a day, and through the seasons of the year. Nothing more and nothing less.

### **God Named the Stars!**

GIS supporters often string together Psalm 147:4 with Isaiah 40:26 to prove that God himself named the stars of the zodiac. Psalm 147:4 says, “He determines the number of the stars and calls them by name.” Isaiah 40:26b reads, “He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name.” After showing that God calls the constellations by the same names as is found in the zodiac (see for instance Job 38:31-32; Amos 5:8). The GIS conclusion then is that God is responsible for giving the constellations and stars of the zodiac their traditional names. In other words, they see this as proof that God is responsible for the zodiac.

I must disagree for the following obvious reasons. Take a constellation like Orion which God referred to in Job 38:31. The World Book Encyclopedia gives this background on Orion:

Orion was a handsome and energetic hunter in Greek mythology. He was a giant with the power to walk through the sea and on its surface. Orion had a troubled love life. His wife was sent to Hades after she boasted

that she was more beautiful than the goddess Hera (see Hades). Because Orion seduced his fiancée, Merope, her father, King Oenopion, blinded him. Helios, the sun god, restored Orion's sight. According to one myth, Artemis, the goddess of hunting, killed Orion because he tried to rape her. Another myth says that Artemis considered marrying Orion, but her jealous brother Apollo tricked her into hitting Orion with an arrow while he was swimming. In her sorrow at his death, Artemis placed Orion in the sky as a constellation (*The World Book Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14, p. 862, World Book, Inc., Chicago, IL, 1993).

It seems outrageous to suppose that God would name a constellation after such a character from Greek mythology, but that is what is required if the GIS theory is correct. GIS proponents would like to argue that the Greek mythology about Orion is a corruption of its original meaning. But this mythological meaning is the meaning it had at the time the books of Psalms and Isaiah were written and given to mankind. The same problem is evident for the constellations Hercules, Cetus, and virtually every other constellation of the zodiac.

It is far more reasonable to conclude that God referred to the stars and constellations by the names they were known on earth, rather than the names He had given them. God didn't use the traditional names of the stars to endorse the mythological ideas associated with them, but rather so people would understand what He was teaching them.

### **Job 38:32 and the Name "Massaroth"**

Probably the biblical passage most often appealed to as support for GIS is Job 38:32. Especially important is the Hebrew word "Mazzaroth" found there (Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? — KJV). There is no agreement as to its meaning. The New International Version translates it simply as "constellations," and the New American Standard has it as "constellation." Because of the difficulty in translation, some translations such as the RSV, ASV, KJV and the NKJV leave the word (Mazzaroth) untranslated. However, there is a significant body of scholarship that favors translation such as is found in the New English Bible that has it "Can you bring out the signs of the zodiac in their season?"

In agreement, Keil-Delitzsch comment that, "The question in ver. 32a therefore means: canst thou bring forth the appointed zodiac sign for each month..." (Keil & Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 4, p. 324, "Job," Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, Reprinted 1975).

Albert Barnes' commentary on this passage is informative. He said "[Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season?]", margin, "the

twelve signs,” that is the twelve signs of the zodiac.

There has been much diversity of opinion about the meaning of this word. It occurs nowhere else in the Scriptures, and, of course, it is not easy to determine its signification. The Septuagint retains the word maxsurooth without attempting to translate it. Jerome renders it, “Luciferum-Lucifer,” the morning star. The Chaldee, “sh-T-r-y m-z-l-y – the constellation of the planets.” Coverdale, “the morning-star;” and so Luther renders it. Rosenmuller, “signa celestia” – the celestial signs, and so Herder, Umbreit, Gesenius, and Noyes, “the zodiac.”

Gesenius regards the word mazaarowt (OT: 4216), as the same as mazaalowt (OT: 4208), properly “lodgings, inns;” and hence, the “lodgings” of the sun, or the places or “houses” in which he appears in the heavens, and thus as meaning the signs in the zodiac. Most of the Hebrew interpreters adopt this view, but it rests on no certain foundation, and as we are not certain as to the meaning of the word, the only safe way is to retain the original, as is done in our common version. I do not see how it is possible to determine its meaning with certainty, and probably it is to be regarded as a name given to some constellation or cluster of stars supposed to exert an influence over the seasons, or connected with some change in the seasons, “which we cannot now accurately understand” (from Barnes’ Note, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1997 by BibleSoft).

The apparent significance of the meaning of Mazzaroth in Job 38:32 is that GIS advocates claim it proves that God approved and even endorsed the gospel of the zodiac. Further, they consider the passage in Job as proof that as early as Job (c. 2150 BC), the zodiac was understood among the nations, including believers.

However, the correct meaning of Mazzaroth is far from established. It is a reliable principle in hermeneutics that we should not base too much on one unclear passage in Scripture.

### **An Analogy**

For the sake of argument, even if Job 38:32 is referring to the constellations of the zodiac, this need not be assumed to be an endorsement of the gospel in the stars theory.

In Acts 17:28; the apostle Paul quotes Greek poets in his sermon to the Athenians. Commenting on this passage, Richard N. Longnecker says:

In support of this teaching about man, Paul quotes two maxims from Greek poets. The first comes from a quatrain attributed to the Cretan poet Epimenides (c. 600 BC), which appeared first in his poem Cretica and is put on the lips of Minos, Zeus’ son, in honor of his father: “They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one – the

Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies! But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest forever. For in thee we live and move and have our being....” The second comes from the Cilician poet Aratus (c. 315-240 BC), “It is with Zeus that every one of us in every way has to do, for we are also his offspring” (Phaenomena 5); which is also found in Cleanthes’ (331-233 BC) earlier Hymn to Zeus, Line 4.

By such maxims, Paul is not suggesting that God is to be thought of in terms of the Zeus of Greek polytheism or Stoic pantheism. He is rather arguing that the poets, his hearers recognized as authorities, have to some extent corroborated his message. In his search for a measure of common ground with his hearers, he is, so to speak, disinfecting and rebaptizing the poets’ words for his own purpose. (*Richard Longnecker, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, p. 476. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1981. All emphasis in original.*)

The point, then, is that just because Paul makes references to pagan poets and philosophers that does not mean that he endorses all their beliefs. In the same way, just because God may have made reference to the constellations of the zodiac that were recognized by people living in Job’s time, this does not mean that He endorsed the idea that there were specific messages in the stars as GIS adherents suggest.

If that were so, then astrologers could claim that God was endorsing astrology in Job 38:32 since He makes reference to astrological constellations. As the old saying goes, “You can’t have your cake and eat it too.”

### **Other Problems with GIS**

And what of the problem that not everyone on earth can see all the constellations? Will some have only a part of this “gospel” message? The Christian Research Institute notes, “Moreover, the zodiac signs do not even appear above the Arctic Circle (66 degrees latitude) – which means that there is no ‘Gospel in the Stars’ for many Eskimos, Siberians, Greenlanders, and Scandinavians” (The ‘Gospel In The Stars’ Theory, Christian Research Institute, Statement DG 205). [The constellations seen in the Northern Hemisphere are different from those in the Southern Hemisphere. Does that mean a different gospel or two gospels? Ed.]

When one studies the constellations, the subjectivity of the constellations is obvious. In most cases, the characters for each constellation bear no actual resemblance to the pattern we actually observe in the night sky. It is no different than when children lie on their

backs and imagine different characters they see in the passing clouds overhead. Along these lines, the Christian Research Institute says:

There is no uniform zodiac constellation. Some claim there are twenty-four zodiac signs, while others count eight, ten, or fourteen. The oldest Babylonian charts do not even contain the complete zodiac constellation. And unlike the popular Western view, the Chinese interpreted their constellation charts with characters such as the rabbit, mouse, and dog (*The 'Gospel In the Stars' Theory*, Christian Research Institute, Statement DG 205).

### **Concluding Remarks**

A few concluding remarks are in order. In assessing the GIS theory, I want to avoid two extremes. It is neither rank heresy nor is it truth. In my opinion, it is a false teaching that serves no purpose to the kingdom of God, but rather is a faddish distraction from sound teaching. This teaching (GIS) fits into the category of what Christian Research Institute President Hank Hanegraaff calls "Magic Apologetics," and Hanegraaff is right to condemn it. I do not agree that GIS is a version of "Christian Astrology." Dr. Kennedy and other proponents have painstakingly condemned pagan astrology, but believe that GIS is rightly classified as a form of "revelational truth," rather than pagan astrology.

I believe that GIS will eventually assume its rightful place on the trash heap of faddish false teaching in the church along with such bedfellows as the Y2K panic and the so-called Bible Code. Nonetheless, since GIS does not touch on an area involving essential Christian teaching, it is not fair to classify it as cultic.

# The Consequences of Ideas

*By Cory LaVasseur*

**T**he consequences of ideas are often severe, at times even deadly. This has been witnessed throughout history, but rarely can the lines be so clearly seen as on September 11, 2001. A band of men, zealously religious and motivated by a history of inflammatory rhetoric by their leaders, followed their firmly held beliefs to the point of attacking and killing more than 3,000 unarmed, innocent civilians in the United States. These evil acts were the predictable outcome of what philosophers and academics regularly discuss and debate, but less frequently face in the real world. Whether political, religious, moral, or social, the views people hold lead to natural results. Dividing lines are drawn between groups of people by the choices they make in response to their values. The integrity of an individual or an organization can be verified by evaluating the consequences of their ideas.

When pondering the potential or realized consequences of our convictions, we have three basic choices with regard to how we act. 1. We can defend the ideas and accept whatever the consequences; 2. We can change our attitudes and adjust our behavior accordingly; or 3. We can attempt to hide our true convictions in hopes of avoiding negative consequences. The third choice is the least desirable, yet seems all too common in American culture. History, both recent and distant past, can be an invaluable resource to help us evaluate our own ideas. It can aid us in choosing our courses of action, both as individuals and as the various communities to which we belong. Religious systems have a way of illustrating these choices vividly, especially when compared and contrasted with each other.

Mormonism offers us a case in point. In the fall of 1857 a group of 137 emigrants from Arkansas and Missouri, led by Charles Fancher, were making their way through southern Utah on their way to California. Their arrival in the area unfortunately coincided with difficult circumstances.

For years, and culminating in the spring and summer of 1857, tension between "the Saints" (under territorial governor and LDS Church president Brigham Young) and the United States government (under President Buchanan) had steadily increased. The reasons for this friction are too numerous to address in this article, but they basically consisted of: 1. the Mormons' desire for complete independence from the Federal government, and 2. the Federal government's disapproval of Mormon disloyalty to the United States. Although Brigham Young had been appointed territorial governor, the Federal government appointed other officials to the United States Territory who proved to be lacking in character and sound judgment according

to the Mormons (*Journal of Discourses*, 5:118). This angered LDS Church leaders, causing them to speak out with a barrage of rhetoric denouncing, condemning, and outright threatening the United States government. The mood of the day is typified in the following quotations: "President B. Young is his Sermon declared that the thread was cut between us and the U.S. and that the Almighty recognized [sic] us as a free and independent people..." –Hosea Stout, as quoted in *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?*, Jerald & Sandra Tanner, 494. "...I want to tell them that, though they continue to send poor pusillanimous curses here to be Government officers, we will not submit to it, troops or no troops." –Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 5:212. "Come on with your thousands of illegally-ordered troops, and I will promise you, in the name of Israel's God, that you shall melt away as the snow before a July sun.... I shall treat every army and every armed company that attempts to come here as a mob [The congregation responded, 'Amen.']" –Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 5:230, 231. "If any of us are called to lay down our lives in the defense of our religion, God will save us in celestial glory, and he will preserve us, though all the world be against us [President B. Young: "This is true"]" –George A. Smith, *Journal of Discourses* 5:224. These sweeping affronts fanned the flames of public fear and discontent. President Buchanan ordered troops to march to Utah to put down the rebellion and replace Brigham Young as governor.

In conjunction with this political unrest, LDS Church leaders were vigorously espousing the doctrine of Blood Atonement (See *Journal of Discourses* 1:72, 73; 2:186, 311; 3:247; 4:53, 54). This was the Mormon teaching that some transgressions were so grievous that they required the offender to atone for his sins by shedding of his own blood (i.e., being killed for it). Members of the Fancher wagon train had been accused of committing some of these offenses (e.g., stealing from and persecuting the Saints). The consequences of the ideas promoted by LDS leaders were soon to be realized.

In short, the week of September 7, 1857 began with a Mormon-incited Indian attack on the Fancher party and ended on September 11 with a murderous attack by the Mormons themselves ("As a result of the conversation that night [September 7], it was agreed that they would stir up the Indians further and encourage them to attack the company and rob them of their cattle and goods." –*Mountain Meadows Massacre*, Juanita Brooks, 77). Believing the Mormons would rescue them from the attacking Indians, the Fancher party had agreed to terms of surrender and given up their weapons. As soon as they started marching off to a nearby town, they were murdered—all but seventeen children ("On the morning of Friday the 11<sup>th</sup>, Lee [John Doyle Lee] induced the emigrants to surrender under promise of protection and conveyance to a place of safety. They were led to a place where the Indians were in ambush, and at a given signal a volley of shots rang out, both Indians and white men participating in the outrage. Seventeen children of ten-

der age—ranging in age from a few months to seven years—were all that were spared.” —*Essentials in Church History*, 515-516, as quoted in *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?*, 499). This event has gone down in history as the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

Another religion that has been accused of encouraging extreme behavior is Islam. Muslims are required to live by ancient cultural standards that seem outdated or even outrageous in modernity. However, many Muslims worldwide seem unaffected by criticism from the West for matters such as their treatment of women and their standards of dress. Groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and Al-Qaida [sic] take their scripture, the Quran, quite literally when it commands Muslims to slay “Pagans” (including Christians and Jews) wherever they are found:

But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratum (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.... Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, not hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, not acknowledge the religion of Truth (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jisya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. The Jews call Uzair a son of Allah, and the Christians call Christ the son of Allah. That is a saying from their mouth (in this) they imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah’s curse on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth! — Sura 9:5, 29-30.

These people, believing that great rewards await them in the afterlife, are willing to plot and carry out unimaginable atrocities in the name of their religion:

And their Lord hath accepted of them, and answered them: “Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be male of female: Ye are members, one of another: Those who have left their homes, or been driven out there from, or suffered harm in My Cause, or fought or been slain, — verily, I will blot out from them their iniquities, and admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing beneath; - A reward from the presence of Allah, and from His presence is the best of rewards.” — Sura 3:195.

Western social or moral standards meant nothing to those who believed Allah wished them to assault the United States on September 11, 2001, murdering thousands of innocent people. The consequences of those ideas will never be forgotten.



The Crusaders of the Middle Ages believed in retaking the Holy Land from Muslims and spreading Christianity by means of conquering lands. They followed leaders such as Pope Urban II, Eugenius III, and Innocent III, killing in the name of their religion.

Roman Catholic inquisitors of the thirteenth century carried out trials, imprisonments, and punishments upon those who would not conform to their religious system. Even today the consequences of those ideas can be seen worldwide in the ever increasing membership in Protestant denominations.

The authorities responsible for the promotion of the foregoing ideas and for their resulting actions have plotted greatly different courses in the aftermath of the cited events. The current war in Afghanistan is the outcome of that country's religious leaders refusal to back down from their radical beliefs. They chose to embrace and defend the evil actions of their terrorist allies and are now facing the consequences.

The Roman Catholic Church has long since changed its mode of operation when it comes to non-Catholics, heretics, and leaders of Protestant denominations. In fact, in recent years the Pope has even apologized for the ills perpetuated by Roman Catholicism in the past.

Not only did John Paul II renew expressions of regret for the "sorrowful memories" that mark the history of the divisions among Christians, as Paul VI and the Second Vatican Council had done, but he also extended a request for forgiveness to a multitude of historical events in which the Church, or individual groups of Christians, were implicated in different respects. —Statement of the International Theological Commission, 12/99.

In contrast, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has followed a pattern of denial and deception regarding the teachings and practices of its past leaders. The Church could choose to identify with early Church leaders and defend to actions that proceeded from their convictions; or it could choose to honestly divulge the facts about the massacre and distance itself from the authorities and the atrocities of the past. Instead, the Church tries to "have its cake and eat it too." It tries to divorce the current leadership and teachings from the doctrines of the past, while at the same time defending the personalities of the past. Basing life, belief, and practice on the teachings of man rather than on the solid foundation of God's Word as found in the Bible creates enormous problems. If a group's focus is on the person in authority, the whole organization suffers a loss of credibility when the leader changes position on a particular issue. Furthermore, this leaves the group members, who are following the leader, in confusion until they either separate from the group (at great personal cost) or assimilate the new teachings. The latter is the sad truth for most. The result is a population that possesses little, if any, personal decision making ability. Members have been conditioned to fear indepen-

dent thought, and therefore are easy targets for manipulation. The group leader is then in a position of great power and able to wield it to the accomplishment of his own agenda, whether for good or evil. However, when the basis for faith is unchanging principle and unchanging Scripture (as is the case with orthodox Christianity) the leaders of a particular denomination or local group can change direction without leading the rest astray. One of the most important aspects of Biblical Christianity is the element of personal discernment that is required of every believer. The apostles themselves instruct us to refer to Scripture to confirm the validity of what they taught (see Acts 17:11; II Timothy 3:15).

Unlike Islamic extremists who choose to stand by their radical beliefs, or the Roman Catholics who have claimed to change their ways, the LDS Church has chosen to ignore and suppress information about past Mormon responsibility in the Mountain Meadows Massacre of the fall of 1857. As evidenced by remarks of Gordon B. Hinckley, current President of the LDS, at the dedication of the rebuilt monument to the victims of the Mountain Meadows Massacre:

Let the book of the past be closed. Let peace come into our hearts. Let friendship and love be extended.... This is an emotional experience for me. I come as peacemaker. This is not a time for recrimination or the assignment of blame. No one can explain what happened in these meadows 142 years ago.... We can only say the past is long since gone. It cannot be recalled. It cannot be changed. It is time to leave the entire matter in the hands of God, who deals justly in all things.... I sit in the chair that Brigham Young occupied as President of the Church at the time of the tragedy. I have read very much of the history of what occurred here. There is no question in my mind that he was opposed to what happened.... That which we have done here [placing the new monument at the massacre site] must never be construed as an acknowledgement on the part of the Church of any complicity in the occurrences of that fateful and tragic day. But we have an obligation. We have a moral responsibility. We have a Christian duty to honor, respect, and to do all feasible to remember and recognize those who died here. *The Ensign*, 11/99, 111-112.

See also Hinckley's remarks as quoted in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, 3/14/00: "Well, I would place blame on the local people,... I've never thought for one minute—and I've read the history of that tragic episode—that Brigham Young had anything to do with it. It was a local decision and it was tragic. We can't understand it in this time." This course of action is one more piece in an ever-growing body of evidence showing the LDS Church to be more interested in saving face than in living up to the consequences of its ideas.

## Addendum

*By William A. BeVier*

The Mountain Meadows Massacre has a particular reference for my family. Solomon Francis BeVier, my great grandfather, was a dispatch rider in the West in 1857 (this was three years before the Pony Express operated). Family records indicate he came upon the Mountain Meadows Massacre soon after it happened. The Mormons with their Indian allies had killed all the adults and taken away a reported 17 young children. The one child they left behind was a small blind girl (the Mormons normally reject handicaps). My great grandfather took the child to the nearest dispatch station and she was eventually returned to relatives in Arkansas. After the Civil War my great grandfather lived for a time in Arkansas and later wrote that he had visited the girl, by then a woman, in Little Rock.

In view of the recent International Olympics held in Salt Lake City, it is fitting we reconsider what has occurred in the history of the hosts of the games. Right now the World Wide Web has a multitude of pages dealing with the Mountain Meadows Massacre, partially in response to what has happened in recent years at the actual site and the official Mormon reaction to what happened there. The Mormon Church decided to erect a new monument at the site, though continuing to disclaim any responsibility, e.g., Indians did the massacring. Using a bulldozer the Mormons sought to prepare a place for the monument. Archaeologists were present as observers. In the preparation over 20 body remains were uncovered, including personal items of clothing. Some of the skeleton remains revealed the people had been shot at close range and some mutilated. This substantiated the testimony of eyewitnesses at the final trial of John Doyle Lee, the Mormon bishop in charge of the Mormon militia who conducted the massacre with the help of some "friendly" Indians.

President Hinckley, current leader (President, Seer, Revelator) of the Mormon Church continues to deny Mormon leadership, Cf., Brigham Young, had anything to do with the massacre. The facts of the case prove otherwise. Young sent one of his associates, a "bishop," to organize and rally the Mormon militia for the attack on the wagon train. Lee was directed to lead the attack, though he claimed at his last trial in 1877 that he tried to be excused. After the massacre, Young wrote a letter, predating it as if written before the massacre, instructing his people to let the wagon train pass.

Lee became the "scape-goat" for the massacre. At a trial in 1858 before a Mormon judge and jury he was acquitted. In 1877 he was tried again. Some of the children taken prisoner by the Mormons had grown up, remembered what had happened, and testified not only

against Lee but other Mormons who were involved in the massacre. Also, several former Mormons who had left the church but were present during the massacre testified against Lee and several others. The prosecutor in 1877 was a "Gentile," i.e., non-Mormon. Lee had been in seclusion in southern Utah since 1858, but was found by U.S. marshals and was brought to trial.

Only Lee was ever prosecuted. All the others managed to elude arrest or moved out of the area, some going to Mexico. Found guilty, Lee was executed by a firing squad in 1878 at Mountain Meadows. This was one year after the death of Brigham Young.

J. H. Beadle wrote an interesting record of these events as an eyewitness to some of them. He was in the West traveling for several years. He met Brigham Young personally and spent five days with John Doyle Lee in 1872, at first not knowing who he was because he was going by the name of Doyle.

Beadle later wrote a book titled *Western Wilds and the Men Who Redeem Them* (1879). The book has long been out of print, but it includes eyewitness accounts of Lee's capture, his trial, and his execution. Beadle wrote: "Evidence is yet to be developed which will convince the most skeptical that Brigham Young was the accomplice and shield of murderers. This is a hard saying, but rest assured it will be proved." Beadle's statements have been proven to all but the "most skeptical."

# Teaching about the Cults in Eastern Europe

*By Laurence J. Sutherland*

## INTRODUCTION WITH STATISTICS

Since 1994, I have been instructing on the cults in Eastern Europe (in this article, Eastern Europe refers to the former Soviet Union, see chart below) namely in Latvia, Ukraine, and Romania. During this time I have held seven weekend seminars and 20 modular courses of one-two weeks with over 450 students. Most of my students have had years of exposure to some of these cults but have lacked basic facts about their backgrounds and teachings. Most of all they need to know how to confront both the older standard cults and the newer so-called "Youth Religions" (Unification Church, Scientology, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation). I have worked with four various evangelical groups such as Baptist, Pentecostals, Lutherans, and Independents in four Bible Schools and Bible Colleges.

Researchers have documented a formidable influx of cults into Eastern Europe since the "fall of the Berlin Wall" in 1989. In "East-West Report" (May 1993) and 15 May 1998), Paul Carden cites the following statistics for the former Soviet Union:

	<u>1993</u>	<u>1998</u>
Jehovah's Witnesses	66,211	225,000
Mormons	3,400	8,500
Unification Church ("Moonies")	400	under 3,000
ISKCON (Hare Krishna)	15,000	10,000

While these statistics indicate only modest cult numbers compared with Western countries, one must start with 1989/1990 figures to determine the inroads of the cults in the last decade. In most Eastern European countries there has been significant percentage growth between 1993 and 1998. The Mormons, for example, had 3,400 adherents in 1993 and in 1998 circa. 8,500; Jehovah's Witnesses have grown from 66,111 to 225,000 adherents in the same period. Field reports from evangelicals and church planters indicate that many diverse

newer cults are also asserting themselves. Since Eastern Europeans have had very little exposure to many of these groups prior to 1989, these statistics make the growth cited above significant and alarming. Almost every Eastern European country espouses religious freedom that allows the cults to exist along with the traditional, more established churches. Oftentimes, though, evangelicals and cults are linked together. Attempts to suppress cult activity means, therefore, suppression of evangelistic/missionary efforts by evangelicals from the West.

### **WHY ARE THE CULTS GROWING IN EASTERN EUROPE?**

The same reasons that prompt people in the West to accept the cults holds true for Eastern Europe:

1. Cult leaders tend to be very driven and charismatic, often embracing messianic visions. They prey on people who are ignorant of biblical truth or are uncertain in their own belief systems.
2. Pop culture and confusing media messages often present irresistible temptations for young minds. The "Youth Religions" that combine Eastern mysticism and psychic techniques are especially fascinating and challenging to modern youth, but also to older adults without biblical roots.
3. Encrusted traditional religious thought patterns that give few or inadequate answers to life's questions have disappointed many earnest seekers. The cults promise often simplistic, though confusing, and errant answers that challenge conventional thinking.
4. The cults offer friendships and intimacy that traditional religious groups often take for granted or neglect. I am amazed, for instance, that the cults are reaching out so strongly to deaf people in these countries.
5. Who will give answers to the questions that humanism, secularism, hedonism, and materialism pose? Who will give the seeker answers that satisfy the deepest needs of the soul? Often the "early bird gets the worm." The cults take advantage of the laxity of Christian to witness for their Savior.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

On March 9, 2002 I returned from my eighth annual tour to Romania and Ukraine. In Sibiu, Romania I taught in a weekend seminar program of 15 hours. Sibiu lies in the former German area called Transylvania. Since this area is not far from the legendary home of Count Dracula (he is reported to have been an actual historical figure in the 1800's), it is not hard to relate my teaching about Satanism and occultism to local situations. In fact, a student told me that once relatives of Anton La Vey still live in the area. Anton La Vey, of Romanian background, was perhaps the most famous American Satanist in recent history. He started the Church of Satan in the USA in 1966, authored the "Satanic Bible," and popularized Satanism in the film "Rosemary's Baby" in the 1960's.

Likewise, I have taught each year since 1994 at the Zaporozhye Bible College in Zaporozhye, Ukraine. This school has an eight-year history and has a present enrollment of 120 residential and 80 extension students. The Jehovah's Witnesses have long been in Ukraine. The Mormons or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (latter designation preferred by their adherents) are newcomers to Ukraine, but already they are showing unusual strength. My students continue to report on these newcomers who seem to present such a positive image for youth and society. Both young men and women from the United States work the streets of Zaporozhye and seem to be well received. The general population regards the young Mormons as paragons of virtue since they don't drink alcohol, tea, coffee, or even coca cola; neither do they smoke, chew, or consume drugs. They wear business suits and ties, are well mannered, friendly, and conscientious. There are now over 60,000 Mormon missionaries in the world who don't have any problems with financial support (the LDS Church is reportedly the richest institution west of the Mississippi River in the USA). The LDS Church has built a temple in Kiev, the largest city of Ukraine where they carry on their secret and cultic rites of celestial marriages and proxy baptisms for the dead.

The "newer" cults have invaded Latvia by storm. On one of the main streets of Riga (population 900,000), Hare Krishna young people dance in their orange costumes and also invite needy people to their building quarters for rice and other produce. Here and there I have observed Satanic symbols/graffiti scratched on houses, apartments and business buildings, and

walls. My students at the Riga International Bible Institute have related some horrific stories of occult activity. Latvia has also experienced a resurgence of pre-Christian/neo-paganism in the last few years.

## INSTRUCTION FORMAT

Over the years I have used a similar instruction format in the various schools:

- I. Introduction, Definitions, and Study Parameters
- II. An In-depth Study of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons
- III. Occultism, Satanism, and Witchcraft
- IV. New Age Movement – Its Involvement in Eastern Mysticism and the Occult
- V. Examination

In introducing the cults, we proceed immediately to the Word of God that forms the plumb line and guideline as we evaluate the cults. Second Peter 2:1-3:4 is our basic text. This text expounds the false teachings, destructive character and influence of the cults, and God's ultimate judgment of cultists. Then we attempt to analyze the cults in theological terms, suggest factors that favor the growth of particular cults, and categorize the cults according to historical developments, essential features and core teachings, and how best to confront the cult. For instance, both the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses are "made in USA" during the 1800's, whereas the Unification Church, Hare Krishna, Scientology, and Transcendental Meditation present basically Eastern mysticism that originated in Asia (Hinduism and Buddhism) in the 1950's.

Finally, we suggest tips in the confrontation with the cults. In this regard, my students are always amused and fascinated with my suggestion of how to deal with the Jehovah's Witnesses at the door. I tell the JW's that I will allow them to say their piece for five minutes at the door. During this time I will not interrupt them. After that, they must listen to me for five minutes as well, also without interruption. I give them a short refutation of their erroneous views and my personal testimony. Lastly, I challenge them to believe in Jesus as the Son of God "who takes away the sin of the world" and offers eternal life solely by faith and without any self-effort. Then I say "Goodbye," or "Das Vadanija" (Russian) and go back into the house. We also use role-playing to dramatize an encounter with the cultists. Some students really rise to the occasion here!



The area of occultism (dealing with the "hidden things") has been added to the curriculum because of the enormous growth of the occult activity in the entire world over the last 40 years. Ankerberg cites the statistic that 100,000,000 Americans are dabbling or are deeply involved in the occult (John Ankerberg, "The Facts on the Occult," p. 8, 1991). In Eastern Europe occult activity has been promulgated by Western literature, but also from indigenous sources. It is not unusual for five or six students in a class of 20 to report about such activity in their countries. From personal observation I have seen numerous occult symbols such as the pentagram, AC-DC, 666, A (anarchy) on trees, fences, buildings, and cars in these countries. The study of this activity makes even the most mature Christian shudder when we talk about Satanism with its blasphemous and sordid teachings and practices. One of my interpreters refused to interpret a satanic vow for fear that it might accidentally rub off on her. I try to quickly go over references and statements linking deviant sex with satanic initiation rites, etc.

The New Age Movement (NAM) began officially with the Age of Aquarius (Aquarius is one of the 12 signs of the zodiac used by astrologists) in the 1950's. Though NAM is more a movement or networking than a particular cult, it has had a profound effect on modern society including Christians. More than ever before, Christians are faced with Eastern mystical concepts such as reincarnation, cosmic consciousness, mantas, meditation, biofeedback, visualization, pantheism, monism, channeling, etc. Western or European Christians alike does not understand most of these terms, although older cults such as Theosophy (Ukraine), Swedenborgianism (Sweden), and Christian Science (United States) reflect similar ideas. The Youth Religions are freighted with pre-NAM seminal ideas a well. Proponents of NAM such as Shirley MacLaine, David Spangler, Jose Silva, and Marilyn Ferguson openly engage in various occult rites.

While looking at Satanism, witchcraft, and New Age Movement, my students also want to know about music forms that become tools for anti-Christian lyrics and demonstrations. I always allow some time for this subject because music is such a powerful weapon to strengthen or destroy Christian values. It remains to be seen if Eastern European Christians can hold back the flood of rock and heavy metal music with its bias against Jesus Christ and the Gospel. Personally, I love the Ukrainian choral and folk music that rolls over the listener-like

the deep surges of the Volga River and the Romanian hymns with their gentle and lilting rhythms that penetrate the most callous heart; I would not like to see Eastern European Christians surrender their great indigenous musicology for fad-dish Western styles.

The course concludes with an examination that is as comprehensive as the material presented in the classroom. In Zaporozhye school proctors minister examinations. If any cheating whatsoever is detected, the student fails the course and may even be expelled from the school. In Latvia and Romania the individual teachers administer examinations. I have caught students looking around. One Russian student in Latvia told me once that he was merely helping another student. He further explained: "We Russians, we help one another!" Results are comparable to examinations that I have given in Germany and in the USA. In my eight years of teaching in Eastern Europe I have only failed five or six students – not bad, considering the 450 students I have had in my classes.

### **A FINAL THOUGHT**

Especially in Eastern Europe teaching must not only have academic, but also practical, "holistic" components. Someone in the classroom may not be totally bereft of Bible knowledge or even a Bible, another student may not have eaten a solid meal for days, still another may have been a cult member and is now battling with "disfellowshipping" (his former cult members have banned him from their fellowship completely). I ask the Lord constantly how to teach and to minister holistically in every session. The times between and after classes become moments when God has given me multiplied opportunities to help students cope with their life situations. This, too, is extremely gratifying to me.

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