

The Measuring Rod for Religions

Any belief should be compared to what is said in the word of God. Here are seven major measuring rods that can be used to evaluate a church or belief system that differs from ours. The *articles of faith* of Tabernacle Baptist Church provide details and scripture references.

- 1. Sources of Authority** (TAB Articles of faith §1)
The Bible (66 OT/NT books) is the word of God and our complete and final authority.
- 2. Doctrines about God** (TAB Articles of faith §2a)
There is only one true God, who is three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – all of them are equal in every divine attribute.
- 3. Doctrines about Jesus Christ** (TAB Articles of faith §2b)
Jesus Christ is the Son of God, perfect in godhood and perfect in manhood. His life was sinless and his death on the cross a complete and substitutionary sacrifice for our sin. He arose bodily from the dead, sits at the right hand of the father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead and to set up his kingdom.
- 4. Doctrines about the Holy Spirit** (TAB Articles of faith §2c)
The Holy spirit is a person, who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.
- 5. Doctrines about Man** (TAB Articles of faith §4)
Man and woman were created in the image of God with immortable souls. By their own choice they fell from their sinless state and are now sinful in nature and under God's curse. Man is without excuse for his sin and subject to condemnation to everlasting hell.
- 6. Doctrines about Salvation** (TAB Articles of faith §6)
Salvation comes *only* through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who believe, repent, and receive Christ by faith have their sins forgiven and become children of God.
- 7. Doctrines about Things to Come** (TAB Articles of faith §16)
Christ will return, the saints will be raptured, and the Great Tribulation will follow. At its end Christ will establish his *millenial kingdom*, which will end with the judgment of the nations, the punishment of the wicked in hell, and the eternal life of the saints in heaven.

Most cults either oppose or severely twist the *trinity of God*, the *deity of Christ*, the *personality of the Holy Spirit*, and the *immortality of the soul*. Their teachings

about the last things have similar elements as those of orthodox Christianity, but assign very different meanings to them.

Dealing with Cultists

You must be in command of the conversation and actively steer the discussion.

1. Do not argue
2. Do not ridicule the cultist
3. Do not denigrate the character of the cults founder
4. Know and use the word of God
5. Be prepared: know what the cultist believes
6. Give your own testimony
7. Exalt the Lord Jesus Christ
8. Depend consciously upon the Holy Spirit

Cults to be discussed

Pseudo-Christian Cults

- 2. Mormonism*
- 3. Jehova's Witnesses*
- 4. The Way International*
- 5. Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God*
- 6. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church*

Cults influenced by Hinduism

- 7. Christian Science*
- 8. Scientology*

The Seduction of Christianity

- 9. The New Age Movement*

2 Mormonism

1. Sources of Authority

The Bible (KJV) *and* the book of Mormon *and* prophecies

2. Doctrines about God

God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three *separate* Gods.

God, the father, and God, the Son are material beings.

God is omnipresent by sensing everywhere – Omnipotent through his angels.

Eternal progression: God evolved and humans can enter into godhood as well

3. Doctrines about Jesus Christ

The promised Messiah, Redeemer and Savior

First-born among the spirit children of God (angels, demons, humans) but not essentially different

Became God through obedience and devotion to the truth

4. Doctrines about the Holy Spirit

Different from God, the father, and God, the Son. Entirely spirit.

5. Doctrines about Man

Created by God: not bringing into being but organizing elements into *spirit children*

Stages of Eternal Progression: premortal existence – mortal life – spirit world – immortality. Choices in (pre-)mortal life determine role in later stages

There is *no original sin*: Adam chose to trespass in order to obey Genesis 1:28

6. Doctrines about Salvation

Unconditional salvation: Christ's atonement provided immortality for all

Conditional salvation: obedience, righteousness, and faithfulness lead to godhood in eternity

7. Doctrines about Things to come

The sphere of exaltation: for the obedient. They will be Gods

The terrestrial kingdom: for the latecomers and the lukewarm

The lower kingdom: for those who refused Christ. They serve God without having his presence

Perdition: eternal fire for the rebels (unpardonable sin), with a chance for pardon

Special Aspects:

Polygamy: established by Joseph Smith, abandoned in 1890

Racism: inferiority of Black and Native Americans taught until 1978

3 Jehova's Witnesses

1. Sources of Authority

The Bible is the ultimate source of authority. However, the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* is biased and deviates from traditional translations (and the original text) whenever this is necessary to verify specific doctrines.

2. Doctrines about God

Jehova God is the only true and sovereign God. The doctrine of the trinity is vehemently denied.

3. Doctrines about Jesus Christ

The first created (spiritual) being, “a god” inferior to Jehova, creator of all material things and beings, the promised Messiah and Redeemer. Died on a *stake* and rose as a *spirit*.

4. Doctrines about the Holy Spirit

Jehova's invisible energizing force, not a person (never capitalized in the translation)

5. Doctrines about Man

Man does not *have* a soul that is separate from the human body but *is a soul*. The soul is *not* immortal. Death is the end of existence. Resurrection means re-creation. Immortality is given as a reward for faithfulness.

6. Doctrines about Salvation

Only faithful Witnesses *can* be saved and enjoy paradise on earth. The 144,000 most faithful ones will share in heavenly glory with Jesus Christ. All other souls will be annihilated.

7. Doctrines about Things to come

God's kingdom is entirely heavenly. The second coming was in 1914. The selection of the 144,000 and the period of judgment began in 1918. After the battle of Armageddon Christ will reign for 1000 years and the faithful will be resurrected. Only those who pass the millennial test will enter paradise. The lake of fire means annihilation, not eternal punishment.

4 The Way International

1. **Sources of Authority** The Bible, often re-interpreted by the founder.
Aramaic text of the New Testament
Power for abundant living classes have a high authority as well
2. **Doctrines about God** God the Father (Elohim) is the only true and sovereign God. The doctrine of the trinity is vehemently denied.
3. **Doctrines about Jesus Christ**
The *created* Word of God – the Son of God, brought into existence by God in Mary’s womb, the perfect man; the promised Messiah, who died as a substitute for our sins and was raised again by God on the third day – but *NOT God himself*.
4. **Doctrines about the Holy Spirit**
Synonymous for God the Father – not a separate person. Distinguished from *holy spirit* (uncapitalized), which is a gift of God to the believers.
5. **Doctrines about Man**
Orthodox: man was created in God’s image, sinned and experienced spiritual death. All humans have a sinful nature and need redemption.
6. **Doctrines about Salvation**
Salvation is by faith in Christ alone (although Christ is not God).
Salvation brings deliverance from the powers of darkness, including sicknesses and disabilities.
A believer receives the gift of holy spirit in *all* 9 manifestations (tongues, interpretation, prophecy, word of wisdom, discerning spirits, faith, miracles, and healing). Speaking in tongues is *the* visible sign of salvation.
7. **Doctrines about Things to come**
Orthodox: Jesus Christ will return personally, the just and unjust will rise and be judged, resulting either in eternal life or eternal punishment.

Special Aspects:

Strong authoritative structure

Adultery not viewed as sin (not taught publicly)

Deviations from orthodox doctrines are viewed by many Christians as acceptable

5 **Armstrongism – The Worldwide Church of God**

1. **Sources of Authority**

The Bible – but the Worldwide Church of God has the only true interpretation of the Word of God.

2. **Doctrines about God**

The trinity is denied. God is a family, currently consisting of God the Father and God the son. All faithful believers will eventually become God as well.

3. **Doctrines about Jesus Christ**

Co-eternal with God the Father but an inferior God. He is the Yahweh (Jehova) of the Old Testament. Became the Son of God in Mary's womb.

4. **Doctrines about the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is the very power of God. His personality is denied.

5. **Doctrines about Man**

Man was created as a living soul with a *potential* for immortality. Only at resurrection the righteous will become immortal. The others will be annihilated.

The fall was planned and permitted by God.

6. **Doctrines about Salvation**

Salvation requires faith in Christ *and* keeping the law, in particular *Water Baptism, Sabbath observance, Observance of annual (Jewish) feast days, keeping the 10 commandments, dietary regulations, extreme tithing.*

7. **Doctrines about Things to come**

After the tribulation there will be a period of God's wrath before Christ will return. During the millenium those 'who haven't had a chance to hear the truth' will get a second chance. The unfaithful will be annihilated after the judgment.

Special Aspects:

Through Radio, Television, and *The Plain Truth* magazine, *Armstrongism* has influenced millions of Americans who never joined the *Worldwide Church of God*.

After the death of Armstrong 1986, the doctrines of the *Worldwide Church of God* have been changed to a more orthodox position. The *Worldwide Church of God* can by now be counted as bible-believing church. The authoritarian leadership structure and a certain lack of fiscal responsibility is still a cause for concern.

6 Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church

1. Sources of Authority

The Bible, interpreted according to Sun Myung Moon's *Divine Principle*.

2. Doctrines about God

God is the creator, absolute reality, eternally self-existent. God was incomplete before creation. He needs creation and mankind as his bride.

3. Doctrines about Jesus Christ

Jesus is not God, but a man who attained the purpose of creation. He came as Messiah, looking for his chosen bride to become the *True Parents* of a new lineage of God. His mission failed because he was murdered before he achieved his goal. He was resurrected as a spirit being and made *spiritual* salvation possible.

He will be born again as Lord of the Second Advent, find his true bride and thus bring physical salvation to man kind. All religions will be united under him.

Sun Myung Moon is the new Messiah, the *True Parent* of mankind.

4. Doctrines about the Holy Spirit

Feminine counterpart of God. A form of energy, not a person. The *True Mother*.

5. Doctrines about Man

Man was created in the image of God with the purpose of an unselfish life. *Evil* is the emergence of selfishness in the world. The fall was both *spiritual* and *physical*. Eve had intercourse with Lucifer and premarital sex with Adam. Sin entered the perfect lineage of God and the evil lineage of Satan was multiplied.

6. Doctrines about Salvation

God needs to restore the sinless lineage and to create *True Parents* whose children have no original sin. This will be the beginning of the kingdom of God on earth.

Restoration cannot be fulfilled by God's power alone. Salvation comes through accepting the True Parents, following them, and doing what the Messiah requires. Marriage of couples matched and blessed by the *True Parents* is essential.

7. Doctrines about Things to come

There is no physical resurrection. After death, a spirit man will go through stages of perfection: a *form-spirit stage* under the Law, a *life-spirit stage* under Jesus Christ, and a *divine-spirit stage* under the Lord of the Second Advent.

Spirit men who did not accomplish their mission on earth will be reincarnated. Eventually all of mankind will be saved. Hell is only a temporary condition.

7 Christian Science

A Hindu philosophy, with its teaching of truth-realization, absorption into the infinite, and freedom from the bondage of illusion and ignorance, has found a revival under a new name, *Christian Science*.

1. Sources of Authority

The Bible as we have it is unreliable. The book *Science and Health with Key to the Scripture* is necessary for a proper understanding.

All subsequent study *must* relate to the principles “*God is All-in-All*” and “*matter, death, sin, and evil are unreal*”.

2. Doctrines about God

God is all there really is – a principle, not really a person who cares. The trinity is denied.

3. Doctrines about Jesus Christ

Jesus, the man, is not the same as the divine Christ. Jesus came to demonstrate by miracles and his resurrection that the power of the spirit overrules material sense. His death was an illusion and his resurrection the spiritualization of the higher idea of immortality.

4. Doctrines about the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not a person, but the *Divine Science*.

5. Doctrines about Man

Man is entirely spiritual – the reflection of God’s mind. Individuality is an illusion. Sin, sickness, and death does not exist. Healing means realizing the truth.

6. Doctrines about Salvation

Sin and Satan do not exist. Salvation means recognizing the belief in sin as error.

7. Doctrines about Things to come

Heaven and hell are not real places. Death is just the step into the next phase. There is no bodily resurrection, no final judgment

8 Scientology

1. Sources of Authority

Scientology's courses and auditing services

2. Doctrines about God

A vague concept. A multitude of *Thetans* form the equivalent to a supreme being (pantheism)

3. Doctrines about Jesus Christ

None: Christ's deity and mission is rejected as figments of unenlightened minds.

4. Doctrines about the Holy Spirit

None

5. Doctrines about Man

Man is a spiritual and immortal being, a *Thetan*, basically good and divine. The spirit acts in the physical world but is not part of it (i.e. not a body). Sin does not exist. Death is endlessly repeatable through reincarnation. The "fall" was only a fall into the bondage of matter.

6. Doctrines about Salvation

There is no sin or need for atonement. However, *Engrams*, mental pictures of past extreme experiences, need to be neutralized to free the Thetan from bondage.

Scientology's courses and auditing services first lead to a *clear* status and then through numerous levels of "*Operating Thetan*" back to the original Thetan abilities. Courses are protected by copyrights. It costs about \$365,000 to advance through OT level VIII.

7. Doctrines about Things to come

None – there is no heaven or hell

Special Aspects:

1. Scientology is a business under the cover of religion

In most European countries not recognized as tax-exempt religious organization.

2. A long, well-documented, history of abusing followers and harassing critics. "*A multi-national racket masquerading as religion*" (Reader's Digest, 1981)

3. A threat to democracy (government and society):

Scientology operates secret service aiming at bringing the government and society into a state of complete compliance with the goals of Scientology.

4. Involvement with the Occult

9 The New Age Movement

1. Sources of Authority

None – truth is relativistic, not absolute. Many influential writings.

2. Doctrines about God

God is an impersonal life force, omnipresent (God is in All), benevolent

3. Doctrines about Jesus Christ

Jesus evolved spiritually to the state of *the Christ*. He is the way-shower, whose function is to awaken humanity and illumine the path.

4. Doctrines about the Holy Spirit

None

5. Doctrines about Man

Man is basically immortal, good and divine, able to create his own reality, but ignorant of his capabilities. Sin does not exist. Death is endlessly repeated through reincarnation.

6. Doctrines about Salvation

There is no sin or need for atonement. Resolving and clearing one's *Karma* in millions of reincarnations will eventually lead the soul into the Nirvana.

7. Doctrines about Things to come

The Aquarian age is dawning. It will bring peace and enlightenment and reunite man with God

New Age Practices and Beliefs:

- **Astrology:** Man's fate is linked to stars
- **Channelling:** Man can be linked to spirits
- **Psychics:** Man can predict and influence his own future
- **Transcendental Meditation & Yoga:** Relaxation and meditation techniques with a spiritual background
- **Hare Krishna:** Seeking unity with Krishna, the ultimate Godhood
- **UFO's:** Man is not alone, salvation comes through higher developed aliens

Also related: Aura, Black and White Magic, Chakras, Chi Energy, Crystals, Druidism, Eastern Mysticism, Firewalking, Gaia, Gnosticism, Hinduism, Human Potential Movement, Mind Science, Native American Spirituality, Near-death Experiences, Nirvana, Parapsychology, Reincarnation, Shamanism, Spiritism, Tai Chi, Taoism, Tarot Cards, Theosophy, Transpersonal Psychology, Witchcraft, Yin-Yang, Zen.