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*Saint Mark's Church
Sunday School*

Christian or Cult?
Code 12/SO/9

And Jesus answered and said to them: Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. (Matthew 24:4-5)

1. General Aims of the unit

To approach contemporary issues which affect our life on earth with education, intelligence and wisdom.

2. Special aims of the lesson

1. To instill a confidence in the teens that Christianity is the one true faith.
2. To help them understand that not all “religions” or flavours of Christianity lead to God.

3. Outcomes : By the end of this session , the teens are able to:

1. Recognise and list the differences between a cult and a religion as defined by society.
2. Recognise and list the differences between a cult and a religion as defined by the Holy Bible & the Holy Church
3. Understand and debate the reasons my people form and follow cults
4. Discuss whether famous religious organizations like Scientology, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists can be considered cults.
5. Accept that Jesus Christ through Christianity and the sacramental life of Orthodoxy is the ultimate goal of our life.

4. Verses : Matt 24:4-5, Matt 24:23-24

5. References : Attached Notes

Religion in Australia: Constitutional status

Section 116 of the 1900 Act to constitute the Commonwealth of Australia (Australian Constitution) provides that:

The [Commonwealth of Australia](#) shall not make any law establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.

In 1983, the High Court of Australia defined religion as *a complex of beliefs and practices which point to a set of values and an understanding of the meaning of existence*. The ABS 2001 Census Dictionary defines "No Religion" as a category of religion which has sub categories such as [agnosticism](#), [atheism](#), [Humanism](#) and [rationalism](#).

The [Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission](#) (HREOC) is able to inquire into allegations of discrimination on religious grounds.

HREOC's 1998^[20] addressing the human right to freedom of religion and belief in Australia against article 18 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) stated that *despite the legal protections that apply in different jurisdictions, many Australians suffer discrimination on the basis of religious belief or non-belief, including members of both mainstream and non-mainstream religions, and those of no religious persuasion*.

Many non-Christian adherents^[who?] have complained to HREOC that the dominance of traditional Christianity in civic life has the potential to marginalise large numbers of Australian citizens. An example of an HREOC response to such views is the *IsmaU project*,^[21] which examines possible racial prejudice against [Muslims](#) in Australia since the [11 September 2001 attacks](#) in the US, and the [Bali bombings](#)^[disambiguation needed].

Is Christianity a cult?

In order to answer this question, we must first understand what we mean by the word "cult." When people say that a religious group is a cult, they typically mean that it has one or more of the following characteristics:

1. [Overly aggressive](#) recruitment/evangelization
2. False/deceptive teaching, including [hyperexclusivism](#):
 - a. Prior to the beginning of the group, everyone was lost/condemned/without any true knowledge
 - b. Only a very small, exclusive set of people (i.e. the group members) will be saved/enter heaven
3. Use of [brainwashing](#) techniques, including:
 - a. Questioning of the group's teaching/leadership forbidden
 - b. Isolation (physical or forced isolation, or encouragement to break contact with family and friends)
 - c. Sleep deprivation and other abusive practices
4. [Financial exploitation](#) of members (ultimately profiting the leaders)
5. [Emotional exploitation](#) of young adults, the elderly, etc.

Unfortunately, there are Christian and pseudo-Christian individuals and groups who exhibit one or more of the above characteristics. The purpose of this article is not to prove that any and all Christians or Christian groups the reader may have encountered are not cults or using cultic techniques, but to demonstrate that Biblical-based Christianity is not a cult and does not support the use of cultic practices.

1. Overly aggressive evangelization

Granted, there are many Christians who are too aggressive in their attempts to share their faith, not to mention times in history when people were forcibly converted. Yet forced evangelism and/or conversion are not supported by the Bible.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience... ([1 Pet 3:15-16](#))

When Jesus sent his disciples out to preach, he told them to leave towns that didn't welcome them.[\[1\]](#) When the disciples wanted to punish a town that rejected him, rather than accepting their offer, he rebuked them.[\[2\]](#)

As secondary evidence, it is worth noting that an overseer of the church is to be "respectable, hospitable...not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome...He must also have a good reputation with outsiders..."[\[3\]](#) It's hard to imagine someone who is obnoxious or forceful with non-Christians meeting these qualifications. In fact, all Christians are called "to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men."[\[4\]](#)

2. False teaching: Hyperexclusivism

Of course, whether or not basic Christianity is true or false is a topic of much debate, and this site is devoted to providing reasons to believe in its truth. At any rate, when any group claims to have an exclusive hold on truth, we tend to immediately doubt the claims of that group.

Does Christianity make such a claim? It does claim that [Jesus is the only way to God](#), but it also claims that this path is available to everyone and has been taken by people throughout all of history. It does not restrict membership in heaven to a certain number of people, people who belong to a certain race,[\[5\]](#) or those who joined a very specific church or denomination.[\[6\]](#) Nor does it claim that before the appearance of Jesus (or Abraham or Moses), no one had any access to truth or knowledge of God.[\[7\]](#)

3. Brainwashing

Does Christianity forbid asking hard questions about its doctrines? Again, while some individual Christians have frowned on skeptics, inquisitive children and others who ask hard questions, this is not something prohibited by the Bible, but rather encouraged by it. Jesus not only answered questions from his disciples and nonbelievers, he even brought up a hard question of his own:

Then Jesus said to them, "How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms:

The Lord said to my Lord:
"Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet."

David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" ([Lk 20:41-44](#))

See also the collection of [verses promoting critical thinking](#).

Does Christianity forbid questioning of its leaders and their doctrine or behavior? While the Bible does teach respect for authority figures, it also teaches that all people fall short of perfection.[\[8\]](#) Accusations can be brought against church leaders, if there is a reasonable amount of evidence.[\[9\]](#)

Does Christianity promote isolation of Christians from nonbelievers and their views? While the Bible does caution against being influenced by the evils present in society, it doesn't advocate isolation from society, but rather says that believers ought to participate in society in order to influence it.[\[10\]](#)

Finally, it should go without saying that Christianity is opposed to all forms of physical and emotional abuse. Not only is one of the central tenets of Christianity to love other people as one loves oneself,[\[11\]](#) the Bible also teaches that harming another person is harming someone created by God and loved by God and is comparable to harming God himself.[\[12\]](#)

4. Financial exploitation

Unfortunately, there are Christian organizations whose primary focus is fundraising and who may even resort to deception in order to line the pockets of their leaders. This practice is directly opposed to the teachings of the Bible, which condemns greed and trusting in wealth,[\[13\]](#) giving under compulsion[\[14\]](#) and exploitation of the poor.[\[15\]](#) Despite what such organizations might claim, the Bible doesn't promise material riches to those who follow God or make large donations.[\[16\]](#)

The apostle Paul explained his attitude towards profiting from his preaching in [1 Corinthians 9:11-18](#). While pastors and missionaries do have a right to be paid for their work, he voluntarily waived this right so that people wouldn't think he was motivated by greed.

5. Emotional exploitation

Do Christians target young adults, the elderly and others who might be vulnerable to exploitation? Christians often do focus evangelistic efforts on a particular segment of society. Is this exploitation? It might be if the evangelists used some of the techniques listed above to bully or deceive their audience, or if their teaching is false and ultimately harmful.

However, the question assumes that evangelization in general, and Christianity in particular, is harmful, which is not necessarily the case. If Christianity is true, then becoming a Christian is not harmful, but is beneficial in many ways (see [Why investigate Christianity?](#) for the benefits of Christianity). Since Christianity does fulfill needs, it should be no surprise that people with deeply felt needs are often the ones who become Christians.

If Christians are following Biblical principles when evangelizing, then they are letting people know in a gentle and respectful manner that God cares for them and is able to meet their needs. This is no more exploitive than a food pantry or homeless shelter advertising its services to those it was intended to provide for. Just as churches and religious groups may be exploitive, a homeless shelter could be abusive by harrasing people on the streets, bullying them to come inside and then prohibiting them from leaving. The fact that such an organization *can* be abusive doesn't mean that all such organizations are abusive or that having such organizations is a bad idea.