



STATEMENT DC-973

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **Evangelizing the Cults and Renewing the Mind**

**by Bob Passantino**

**When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations** (Baker Book House, 1997)

by Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes

This is the third in a series from Geisler and his colleagues, the first and second being *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (with Thomas Howe) and *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook of Christian Evidences* (with Ronald M. Brooks). Ron Rhodes, a former Christian Research Institute editor, has written several books on Christian doctrine and the cults. In some ways this book reminds me of Walter Martin's *Cults Reference Bible*, published almost 20 years ago. As with Martin's book, this book covers cultic beliefs verse-by-verse. Unlike Martin's book, this book doesn't reproduce the biblical text, but simply lists the cultic misinterpretations and Christian responses in the order of the biblical books. This makes *When Cultists Ask* book much easier to page through if one is looking for a particular argument, and it keeps the cost below what Martin's book sold for years ago.

This is a book that even experienced cult critics should add to their libraries. If Christians are dialoguing with a cultist and are stumped by a particular cultic Bible misinterpretation, they can quickly look it up and learn (or refresh their memory) about a sound biblical response. Scripture and topic indexes further enhance this process.

*When Cultists Ask* gives more than cultic misinterpretations. It also includes arguments from Roman Catholicism (which they explain is not properly designated a cult), Islam (a world religion, not a cult), the Word-Faith movement (which has a wide variety of proponents, some who sound as cultic as any cultist, and some who can be considered Christians with aberrant teachings), and Free Masonry (which most people do not consider to be religiously competitive with Christianity, despite some of its religious-sounding literature and practices). The book focuses on Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and the New Age movement. Other cults with less representation include the Church Universal and Triumphant, The Family (formerly known as the Children of God), Christian Science, the Boston Church of Christ movement, Bahai, the Unification Church (the Moonies), and Seventh-day Adventist. (CRI and many other cult apologetics organizations do not classify Seventh-day Adventism as a cult, but as a sect.)

One wishes this book were more comprehensive. The groups covered most completely are the ones Geisler and Rhodes already specialize in; it would have been helpful if they had given as much attention to the groups with which they were not previously well-versed. Another improvement would have been if they had more clearly acknowledged that many Christians commonly misinterpret certain passages or believe certain heresies they think are biblical. Many Christians, for example, misunderstand the biblical doctrine of the Trinity in a heretical modalistic

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sense (confusing the persons of the Trinity, such as saying the Trinity is like one person with three different modes or occupations). Even without such improvements, this is a valuable book for any Christian who wants to improve his or her ability to defend the truth and share the gospel.

**Love Your God with All Your Mind** (NavPress, 1997)

by J. P. Moreland

I often encounter two objections when I attempt to explain the value of apologetics to Christians who are unfamiliar with the concept. First, people respond by saying, "I guess it's all right to think about philosophy, history, and evidence after you've been a Christian for a long time and you run out of things to do. But I'm too busy becoming a mature Christian to devote any time to that intellectual stuff." Others add another objection, "Besides, it sounds to me like you're making reason your 'God.' Faith and reason don't mix. Too much dependence on evidence and reason undermines your devotion to God, and people who aren't Christians cannot understand the gospel anyway, no matter how much evidence and argumentation you give them. Get back to your 'first love' — God as the beginning and ending of your faith. Don't get sucked into the idolatry of reason and evidence."

Over the years, I have learned how to answer such objections. I have also learned how to present a *positive* case for apologetics from Scripture (special revelation), common knowledge (general revelation), and reason (the ability to make sense of God's revelation). Contrary to objection one, the new Christian must build his faith on the reality of the gospel — the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in our behalf as prophesied in Scripture (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Good thinking and good evidence are integral to the *foundation* of a maturing faith; they are not trivial pursuits for Christians with too much time on their hands. Contrary to objection two, divorcing faith from reason is unbiblical and non-Christian. No wonder the loudest proponents of this view are secularists who would love to see Christianity disappear altogether. The ability to learn about the One in whom we have placed our faith leads us to never-ending discoveries of the wonders of God's creation and His desire for us to grow in faith, understanding, and Christlike love.

Now I have a new answer for these two objections: J. P. Moreland's *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*. Moreland is recognized among philosophers (including quite a few secular ones) as a talented, intelligent, and formidable defender of the Christian faith in the intellectual arena. Christians not well versed in apologetics or philosophy may find his other books too intellectually challenging to read. This book, however, is an immanently readable, clearly explained defense of thinking "Christianly" that should inspire all Christian readers to pursue reason, evidence, and apologetics as an integral part of sanctification.

This book gives Christians the reasons and courage to act against the faulty assumptions discussed above. Chapter Four, "Harassing the Hobgoblins of the Christian Mind," explains how unsuspecting Christians might sincerely believe they are doing God's will by abandoning evidence, reason, and apologetics-oriented evangelism. By showing the negative consequences of such "empty mind" Christianity, Moreland reinforces his argument. Finally, Moreland teaches Christians how to "put on Christ" in our thinking, learning, teaching, evangelism, and defense of Christianity.

Moreland's goal is to wake up the church to the triumphant faith Christians *could* have. He has successfully "translated" philosophy into a form that Christians with little or no experience in this area can understand and use. Its 10 short but compelling chapters and useful appendices make this a book Christians will consult over and over again as they look for the principles and resources that provide the best in Christian apologetics.

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