

Cults and Other “Gospels”

Recognizing and Understanding the Differences



Introduction to Cults

- ♦ **Remember that we're all called to be wise when it comes to false teachings**
 - ♦ **I recommended six questions to ask about any religious groups that seem... off... to you...**
 1. **Does the group have a prophet/founder who is revered by followers and claims to have *special* revelation from God or from angels?**
 2. **Are there authoritative writings or scriptures *in addition to or instead of* the Bible?**
 3. **Does the group view itself as the one *true* church, founded because the *true* gospel was lost in the early centuries of the church?**
 4. **What does the group believe regarding the Trinity? Is Jesus fully God, the second person of the Trinity? Is the Holy Spirit fully God, the third person of the Trinity?**
 5. **How does the group believe we are *saved*? By grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ, or by faith plus good works?**
 6. **What belief does the group hold regarding life after death? What is its concept of Heaven and Hell?**



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 - ♦ **We will use these six questions to evaluate different cults—but I confess that my recent injury prevented me from being able to finish those notes in time, so I've adapted existing notes from a cult I hadn't planned to discuss in order to tide you over until we can use the structure that we've talked about...**

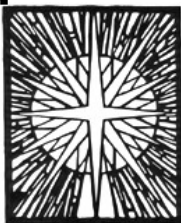
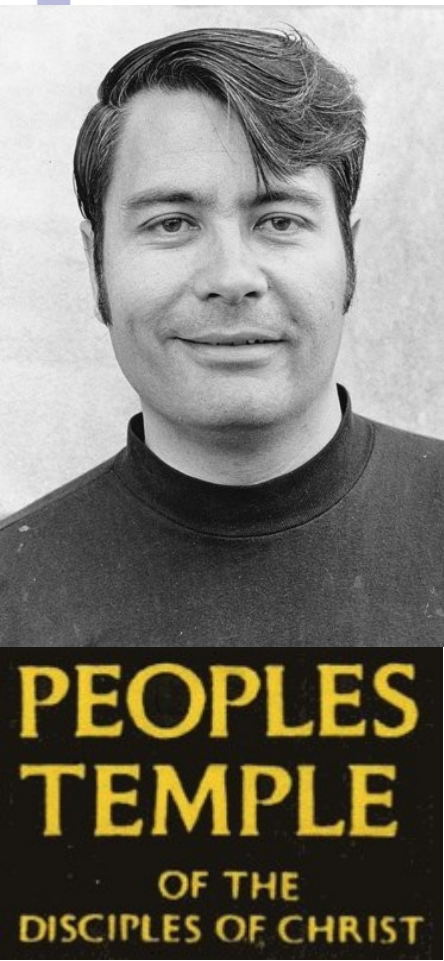


The Peoples Temple

- ◆ Remember that we're all called to be wise when it comes to false teachings
 - ◆ I recommended six questions to ask...
 - ◆ The Peoples Temple
 - ◆ Growing up in Indiana, Jim Jones found himself drawn to Marxism

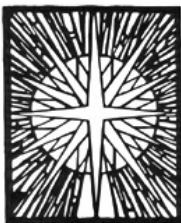
(NOTE: Famously, he once stated in a recording, “I decided, how can I demonstrate my Marxism? The thought was, infiltrate the church. So I consciously made a decision to look into that prospect... It had always been a sort of dual concept: a doubter, and yet a believer. Certainly I had great questions about anthropomorphic beings and a loving order to the universe, but Jesus Christ, to use a kid’s phrase, greatly turned me on...”)

(NOTE²: He also had a tendency as a child to hold funerals for small animals in his backyard—including one for a cat that he himself had stabbed to death... so he wasn't a healthy young man to begin with...)



The Peoples Temple

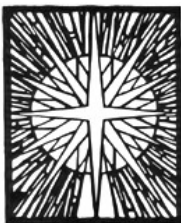
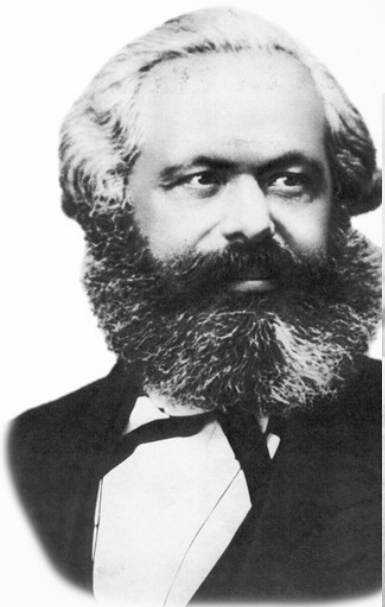
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 - ♦ In 1952, Jones became a student pastor in Sommerset Southside Methodist Church but left in 1954 to form Community Unity Church—changing its name in 1956 to Peoples Temple
(NOTE: It's not “People's Temple” or even “Peoples' Temple”—since Jones taught that apostrophes suggest ownership, and that God clearly wants everything and everyone in our lives to belong to everyone in our lives... a church-ified version of what Karl Marx had preached in his teachings on Socialism...)



The Peoples Temple

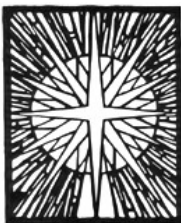
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 - ◆ A dynamic preacher, Jones began to involve the church in multiple community action programs, specifically ones that crossed racial boundaries

(NOTE: This wasn't due to Jones' actual religious beliefs, but because he was following Marx's example of reaching to the most marginalized, disaffected classes—and consciously following the model of Father Divine, who had developed the International Peace Mission movement during the Depression by integrating the races and preaching his own Divinity



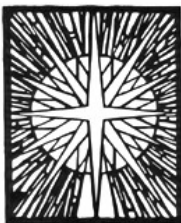
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 - ◆ **A dynamic preacher, Jones began to involve the church in multiple community action programs, specifically ones that crossed racial boundaries**
 - ◆ **They took over nursing homes, brought food to the poor, even changed bedpans of African Americans in the hospitals**
 - ◆ **In 1959, he allied himself with the Disciples of Christ—who summarized their doctrine thus: “I'll tell you what I think, but read the Bible for yourself, and then study and pray about it. Decide in what ways God is calling you to be a follower of Jesus...”**



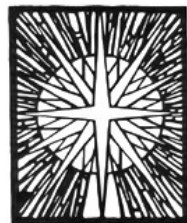
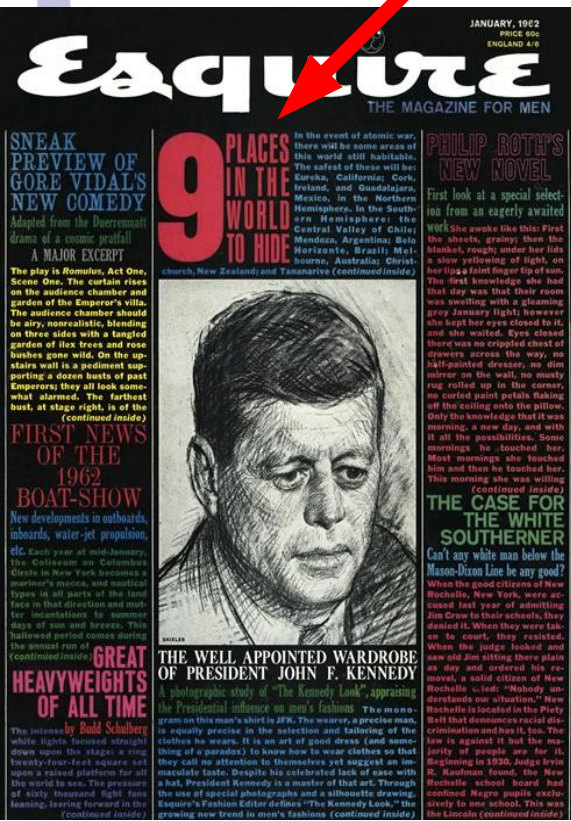
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 - ◆ They took over nursing homes, brought food to the poor, even changed bedpans of African Americans in the hospitals
 - ◆ In 1960, Indianapolis Mayor Charles Boswell named Jones the Director of the city's new Human Rights Commission... and in 1961, Jones and his wife were the first white couple in Indiana to adopt a black child—the model of racial integration



The Peoples Temple

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 - In the early 1960s, Jones began to become utterly convinced that nuclear war was inevitable. He read an article in *Esquire* that said that South America was the safest place to survive the war, so he began to make trips there to plan for an eventual move to Brazil or Guyana.
 - But in the meantime, he informed his growing congregation that the world would be destroyed on July 15, 1967, so they needed to at least move to a remote area of northern California to be safe—which they did.



The Peoples Temple

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 - ◆ In the early 1960s, Jones began to become utterly convinced that nuclear war was inevitable
 - ◆ His church had begun to see him as a living god—and he himself preached,
“You prayed to your sky God and he never heard your prayers. You asked and begged and pleaded in your suffering, and he never gave you any food. He never gave you a bed, and he never provided a home. But I, your Socialist worker God, have given you *all* these things!”

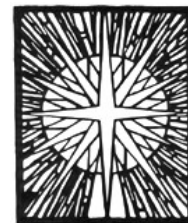


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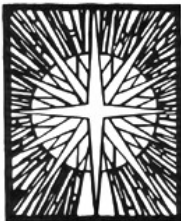
Funky little teaching moment...

- ◆ Actually, he preached a lot of stuff like that...
 - ◆ “If you're holding on to that 'sky god,' I'll nose him out, ten lengths every time! Will you tell me you believe in God out there? So what? What's your sky God ever done? Two out of three nations in the world are hungry. Misery in every one of your homes. The only happiness you've found is when you've come to this *earth* God!”
 - ◆ “What you need to believe in is what you can see... If you see me as your friend, I'll be your friend. As you see me as your father, I'll be your father, for those of you that don't have a father... If you see me as your savior, I'll be your savior. If you see me as your God, I'll be your God...”
 - ◆ “I will do all the miracles you said *your* God would do but never did... I see some are not aware what God is. The only thing that brings perfect freedom, justice, and equality, perfect love in all its beauty and holiness is socialism. Socialism! I have taken myself a body... I come as God Socialist... and I must say it's a great effort to be God.”



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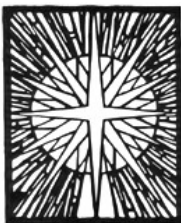
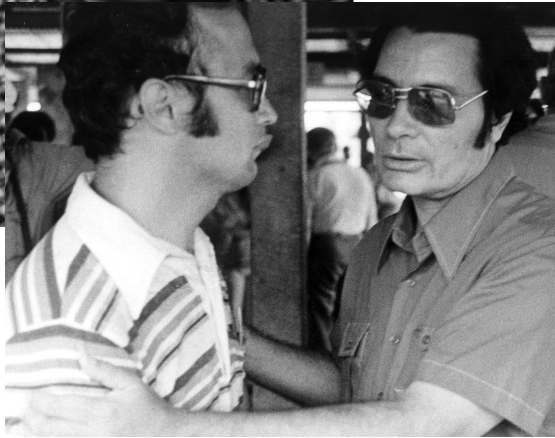
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 - ◆ In 1975, San Francisco awarded him with the Martin Luther King, Jr. award for his “tireless service to the community” and his amazing example to everyone of racial integration—but before we judge too quickly, how easy would it be for people on the *outside*, only *sorta* paying attention, to discern that this church was actually a cult?



The Peoples Temple

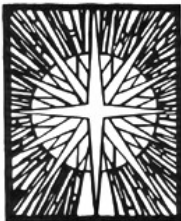
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 - ◆ **In 1973, Jones was arrested for soliciting an undercover policeman for homosexual sex in a gay theater's public restroom**
 - ◆ **He then began having his church members reach out to homosexuals and prostitutes in the community, proclaiming that the church should be a safe zone for such people**

(NOTE: Jones also began pressuring both males and females in the church to have sex with him, calling it a “communion” that would bring them closer to God)
(Again, God Socialist wants everything and everyone in our lives to belong to everyone else in our lives...)



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 - ◆ The church even actively campaigned for Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California
 - ◆ By 1976, he was regularly meeting with leaders such as Governor Jerry Brown, Vice Presidential candidate Walter Mondale, and even speaking alongside Rosalynn Carter herself at the grand opening of the San Francisco Democratic Party Headquarters

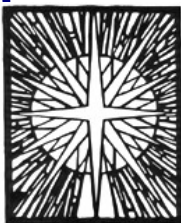


The Peoples Temple



Funky little teaching moment...

- ◆ **But even with all of that political clout, Jones couldn't entirely escape the ripple effects of his sins**
 - ◆ **Jones had forced longtime church member Tim Stoen to sign an affidavit declaring that he had personally asked Jones to have sex with his wife, Grace Stoen, to keep her from leaving the church—asserting Jones was thus the biological father of their son, John**
 - ◆ **Grace left the church anyway, various news agencies got wind of the story, and reporters began to dig deeper into what the church was really about**
 - ◆ **By 1977, San Francisco was awash with scandals about the church, and high-level officials from the Governor's office on down scrambled to cover for Jones and his followers**
 - ◆ **Soon, details emerged about the Temple's illegal strong-arm tactics within the community, Jones' abuses of the Temple's members, their illegal smuggling of guns and ammunition to their compound in Guyana, Jones' own growing drug problems, etc.**

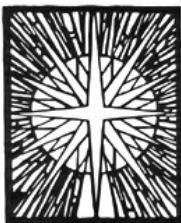


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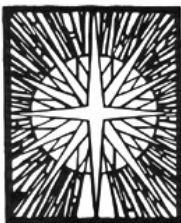
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 - ◆ **But the very night that the first major story was scheduled to hit the papers, Jones moved with about 1,000 of his followers down to Guyana—including cuckolded Tim Stoen, who quit his job as Assistant District Attorney to follow them, taking little John with him**
 - ◆ **Jones forced Stoen to give John to him—then publicly berated him in front of the church for his weakness as a man**



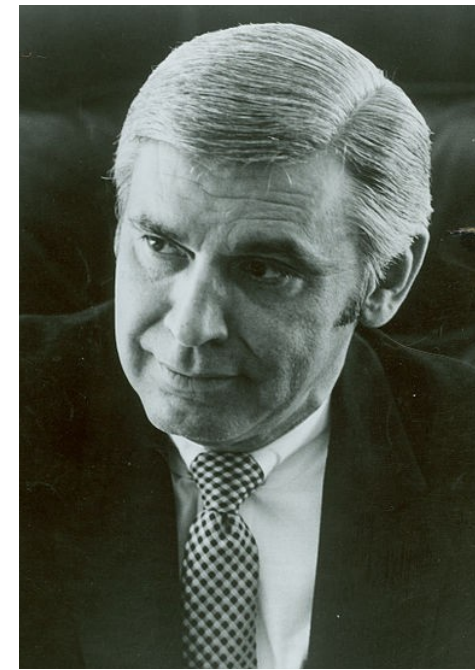
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 - ◆ Once in Guyana, Jones preached that the world would soon end in nuclear horror, and that those who opposed him would come to kidnap and torture them because they followed Jones
 - ◆ So they began holding drills called “White Nights,” where the whole community would be asked to drink poison rather than fall into the hands of their enemies—never knowing if the poison would be real this time, but simply called to step out in their faith in Jones



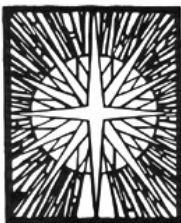
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 - ◆ **In 1978, Jones' legal issues followed him to Guyana and Congressman Leo Ryan led a team down there to investigate the cult**
 - ◆ **Cult members murdered the investigatory team, and Jones—fearing reprisals for the act—preached that now was the time to truly leave this world together as a church family, rather than to face the horrors to come alone**





- ◆ His aides prepared a large metal tub with grape Flavor Aid, poisoned with cyanide, chloral hydrate, Valium, and several other potent tranquilizers
- ◆ 909 members of the Peoples Temple—304 of them children—died of cyanide poisoning, with parents handing their own children cups of poison to drink... and with Jones ultimately shooting himself in the head





- ♦ What should we—as *Christians*—learn from cults such as the Peoples Temple today?

