

Heaven's Gate or Hell's Portal?

April 1997

We have all read with consternation of the mass suicide of the “Heaven’s Gate” cult (a misnomer if there ever was one). The thirty-nine deaths are reminiscent of the 1978 murder/suicides of the Jonestown, Guyana cult and the more recent suicides among the Order of the Solar Temple in Canada, Switzerland and France. What is going on?

In a nutshell: *A man who will not stand for something is likely to fall for anything.* A *Time* magazine article asks, “Could the Heaven’s Gaters distinguish pop fable from cold truth? Can we?” (4/7/97, p. 42).

It has been noted that TV’s *The X-Files* and *Star Trek* were big influences upon the cult’s members. Now I admit to having watched both of these shows upon occasion, but I do not believe that a giant UFO is trailing the Hale-Bopp comet, that sexual neutering is the key to spiritual liberation, or that the new millennium signals the end of time.

These people were deceived. They could not distinguish reality from fiction. But neither can the Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists or other cult groups. What makes people susceptible to such preposterous notions?

First, such people are empty, longing for significance and meaning. If they do not find it through mainline religion, materialism or some other conventional avenue, they just might consider the unconventional.

Secondly, this weakness creates vulnerability to authority figures. Jonestown had Jim Jones; the Branch Davidians had David Koresh; and Heaven’s Gate had Marshall Herff Applewhite. One woman said of Applewhite in a suicide message: “Once He is gone there is nothing left here on the face of the earth for me” (ibid, p. 32). A strong personality, charisma and a smattering of intellect can wield great influence over sheep.

Finally, some type of brainwashing or thought-modification usually accompanies cultic devotion. This involves severing ties with one’s former associates and adopting the regimented, controlled existence of the new regime.

But lying behind all of these influences is just plain ignorance. God’s true revelation and our unswerving adherence to it is the antidote for cultic deception (or just plain old run of the mill false doctrine). Don’t be a sheep! Think for yourself! Know what you believe and *why*.

We not only must **know** the will of God but be **satisfied** with it. Christianity can seem mundane, even boring, when compared to the flights of fancy taken on the Starship Enterprise. But if God asks us to grind out a faithful existence in total obscurity and with no earthly comforts, then that is what we are obligated to give Him.

We must all be diligent, for some of our brethren *have* fallen prey to the “Boston Movement,” a quasi-cultic group which sprang from the Crossroads church in the mid 70’s. What a blessing it is to have the truth at our fingertips!