

A "cult" is defined as many ways as there are groups, occupations, and individuals interested enough to bother mounting the attack: it's a dirty word (though in religion studies as a technical term, "cult" simply means the worship dimension of a community). If you wish to draw flies to yourself, rub sugar on your skin; but of course that would be stupid, as you desire to influence flies away from you, not toward you. But in case you wish the flies to attack someone else, you know what to do. In my sardonic analogy, all who have distaste or hatred for "cults" find something in them that draws our attacks if we point out that something. For cults are by definition extracultural, "beyond the fringe" of sect [which has one leg in society and one leg out] and church [which has both legs in society]....Cults are of at least these sorts:

1. *Personal*

Father Divine and Elvis Presley and Babe Ruth and Marilyn Monroe were cults centering in a person. Do you say only the first of this string was "religious"? Depends, doesn't it, how you define "religion." So put here your definition of "religion":

And here put a list of your own, of "personal cults" (or "cults of personality"):

2. *Personal-syncretistic* (Greek for "flowing together")

This type of cult is, as is the first type, agagocentric (leader-centered), but the leader shares the stage with a mix of religious traditions woven into a "new" revelation. Acts 8 gives us Simon Magus, who wanted to strand together his Samaritan (doubtless, Mesopotamian) magic with Jesus power, but didn't get his syncretistic cult off the ground--as Sun Moon has managed to do, stranding the Sinic and the Biblical. The Rev. Jimmy Jones began as church (Indianapolis), continued as sect (S.Francisco), and wound up as cult (Jonestown, Guyana)! So did the early Xns for Jesus: Jew./pagan stranding, then reversed the process.

3. *Exotic* (Greek for "far out")

Hare Krishna is neither personal (now that the one who brought it to America is dead) nor syncretistic, but a pure Hindu bhakti [love-oriented] sect functioning among us as a cult (as it is ex-otic to us, out of in the sense of unrelated to our culture).

4. *Syncretistic*

11 Mar 1832 on his deathbed, Goethe said he'd become a Hypsistarian, worshipping both Jesus and the sun as, respectively in the moral and natural spheres, "the Highest" (the Greek term for this being the base of the cult's name), and expressing admiration for this ancient cult's survival-courage against pagans, Jews, and Christians. Now, the ancient cult was Jewish-gnostic rather than Christian-gnostic (but on G. see 137 of CONFLICT AT COLOSSAE, ed./tr. Fred O. Francis & Wayne A. Meeks [Scholars Press/75]). Since Paul wrote "Colossians" to warn and strengthen that church against a Jewish syncretism that stranded into itself Iranian-Persian elements, Babylonian astrology, and Christianity (and is fighting the same heresy in Gal.4, as are the Pastorals in the train of Paul [1 & 2Tim., Titus]), let's have a look (the view being so similar to many occult cults in America today): For Paul, salvation is to be filled with Christ as the Head of the body, the church, into which one is baptized. In the counter-cult, all those terms have different meanings. "Salvation" is deification (apotheosis), becoming oneself divine, sharing the "Fulness" (Pleroma), becoming part of the Cosmic Body of "the Elements" (ancient oriental Aeon, gnostic-converted to the Light Powers against the Dark Powers, Spirit against matter). Hellenistic syncretism, here under Jewish auspices, had taken up the Indo-Iranian cosmogony myth of the World-Deity whose gigantic Body included all "the elements" in the universe--elements now Jewish-made into angels. Tough fight!