# Spiritual Soup

There are a great many other religious groups and organizations that preach messages contrary to the Bible’s clear plan of salvation through faith alone. The ones we’ve looked at so far are certainly the most prominent among them, but they are certainly not alone. Tonight we’re going to look at five others. This is going to be a whirlwind tour and by no means comprehensive, but each of these is a group you have a good chance of encountering during your time in High School and college – not to mention in the workforce after you graduate. I know I promised we’d be covering five groups tonight.

1. Universal Unitarianism
2. Christian Science
3. Secular Humanism
4. Scientology
5. Wicca

After beginning to study and praying over things, however, it simply isn’t safe for us to study Wicca. A meaningful study of it would be an invitation to forces we should not open ourselves to. That is all I plan to say about it, other than to discourage you from looking into it on your own. Trust me when I say it is dangerous and best left alone. Should you ever encounter a Wiccan, do not hesitate to witness to them, but do so by sharing your own testimony and praying for them only. For your own safety, do not look into what they believe.

# It’s All Relative: The Unitarians

There’s an old joke about an ecumenical gathering of churches that involves, among others, the Unitarians. In the middle of the meeting someone runs in yelling, “The building is on fire!” The Jews drew symbols on the doorposts hoping the fire would pass over. The Quakers praised God for the blessing fire brings, and the Southern Baptists wondered loudly whose sin had brought down the wrath of God upon them. The Unitarians toasted marshmallows. Frighteningly, that actually sums up Unitarian doctrine well, so… moving on… Just kidding. It does illustrate an important point, however. You can believe just about anything you want to believe and call yourself a Unitarian. They take ‘all are welcome, come as you are’ to a whole new level. They’re a practical lot, and their beliefs are typically an inch deep and a mile wide.

According to the Unitarian Church, they “are people of all ages, people of many backgrounds, and people of many beliefs. We create spirituality and community beyond boundaries, working for more justice and more love in our own lives and in the world.” That’s their core statement. Did you hear anything about Jesus in there? Me neither. Unitarianism affirms seven core principles, as follows:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

These aren’t bad things, nor are they necessarily unbiblical. That doesn’t make them scriptural, however. The Bible makes the worth of the human being very evident and certainly encourages justice. It encourages us to be accepting, with the caveat that we speak the truth in love. The Bible does not coerce belief – a decision to follow Christ must be freely and willingly made. We are to submit to human governments inasmuch as they do not trample on our beliefs or forbid us from worshiping as God deserves. In our case that is democracy. The Bible teaches community with our neighbors and freedom (as found in Christ). We are definitely called to be respectful of those around us. So you can see that there is nothing wrong with this part of their doctrine. Theirs is a sin of omission, not commission. It is not what they include in their core doctrine that makes them a cult group. It is what they leave out. To the Unitarians, truth is an open ended question.

Nowhere on their website will you find a reference to Jesus, or any other lower case god for that matter. Truth is whatever it means to you in the Unitarian Church. If you want to follow Jesus’ teachings, bully for you. You’re equally welcome if you want to worship the trees like a druid, believe in reincarnation like a Hindu, or nearly anything else so long as it doesn’t conflict with any of the seven principles we discussed. The one Unitarian I know is pretty sure that Elvis Presley was actually an incarnation of Christ. He’s an odd duck, but he’s also a really nice guy who wouldn’t hurt a fly.

Unitarians also have six core sources they use. In a way these are their holy books, but they aren’t seen as scriptural or necessarily even as inspired works. These are:

1. Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
2. Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
3. Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
4. Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
5. Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
6. Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

In short, Unitarians believe in a higher power even though they do not really define who he/she/it is. They have beliefs about life and death, but no ironclad answers. Maybe there’s and afterlife and maybe there isn’t. Neither view is right or wrong to a Unitarian. Perhaps their spirituality is best summed up by this quote from their own website: “Unitarian Universalism offers diverse and meaningful ways of connecting with the sacred. Whether we're sitting in Zen Buddhist meditation, listening for truth with Christian lectio divina, praying to the spirit of life, or chanting in a circle at winter solstice, our spirituality is unbounded.” It is also pretty much undefined.

Witnessing to Universalists is a challenge. They do not believe there is an absolute truth. If you show them the gospel they will call it ‘your truth’. You must convince them that it is not just your truth, but *the* truth. The best way to do that is to walk them through everything we have learned in this class. Show them that different faiths have irreconcilable differences and thus cannot all be valid. If you can make them question their idea that truth is relative, then you have taken a very solid first step. More than anything you should pray for them. God can move their hearts in a way your words never can.

# Grape Nuts: Christian Science

Returning to the joke about the building catching on fire during an ecumenical gathering, the Congregationalists took a vote on whether to fight the fire or evacuate. The evangelicals took up a collection for a new building fund. The Christian Scientists simply declared that there was no fire.

Despite its name, The Church of Christ, Scientist is not what it seems. It is not scientific in the least, and neither is it Christian. It is a pantheistic outgrowth of Eastern Mysticism, and a cult in the truest sense of the word. Founded by Mary Baker Eddy in the late 19th century based on supposed revelation she received from God, the church has grown to become the largest faith healing movement in the world. They revere the words of Mary Baker Eddy, as preserved in her book *Science and Health* as much as they do the Bible. The most telling of Christian Science’s core beliefs is that the things we see (matter), the bad things we experience (sickness, evil, and death), and the bad things we do (sin) are not real. They are an illusion. Sound familiar? If you were paying attention in week four then it should. This is the heart of Hinduism repackaged for American consumption. Because these things are not real, man by nature is spiritual, not material. We only need to realize that so we can move beyond it when we die, advancing to a ‘higher plane of existence’. That is the goal of the Christian Scientist: To fully understand both his spiritual nature and the unreality of matter.

Where did Eddy get this idea from? Why, the Bible of course! The belief is based on two verses in Genesis; Genesis 1:27 and 31, to be precise. “So God created man in his *own*image. . . . And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold,*it was*very good.” So, they reason, in order for this to be so we must be innately perfect because God is innately perfect. If we are perfect, then all the bad stuff must not be real. Indeed, if you stopped reading the Bible there you might come to that conclusion. But then the fall of man happened. There is a far darker aspect to the belief that all we perceive is an illusion, as well. If sickness is not real, the Scientists conclude, there is no need to treat sickness. Prayer alone is sufficient. There is power in prayer, and indeed God can heal any ailment. On that point I do not argue. The Scientists, however, completely eschew modern medicine. That fact makes this cult not only dangerous, but often deadly. Many members of the church have died from treatable conditions because of their staunch refusal of medical treatment, opting instead to ‘treat’ their malady with prayer alone.

There are several other core teachings of the church that, while not lethal, are equally dangerous to the soul. Like many cults, Christian Science denies the trinity. Their own website sums this up well under their basic teachings. “What is God?” reads one subheading on the page. The same section goes on to explain that “God [is] our all-powerful, ever-present, tenderly loving Father-Mother, maintains our wholly spiritual identity and relationship with Him as forever perfect, made in His "image" and "likeness" (See Genesis 1:26).” They twist the identity of Jesus as well. Nowhere on the church’s website is Christ called the Son of God. In fact, according to their doctrine, the Christ is a spirit that indwelled a man named Jesus. Indeed, they twist a verse all of you recently memorized: 1st Timothy 2:5. In their ‘Common English Bible’ the verse reads, "There is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the ***human*** Christ Jesus” (emphasis mine). Moreover, Jesus’ ‘seeming’ death on the cross and subsequent resurrection had nothing to do with saving us from sin, which you will recall is an illusion anyhow to the Scientist. Rather, the crucifixion proves the unreality of sin, disease, and death. The Holy Spirit exists, and is considered a person, but he is not one with God. Finally, like most cults, they only accept what the Bible says when it lines up with their doctrine. The key quote on this comes from Mary Baker Eddy herself, who once remarked that, “The Bible is full of errors. It was recorded by dull disciples and in a decaying language.” Logically therefore, it must be reinterpreted through the lens of Christian Science.

How should you witness to a Christian Scientist? First, remember three key things:

1. Devout Christian Scientists have a deep love for God, Jesus, and the Bible (as they understand them). Address them with sensitivity and respect, and with an appreciation for their devotion.
2. Christian Scientists often sound quite knowledgeable about the Bible. Remember that much of their Bible knowledge consists of partial verses taken out of context and assigned new, “spiritualized” meanings. Ask them to define their terms when they quote the Bible. (“What do you mean by the word ‘atonement’?”) When they quote verses out of context, challenge them to look at those verses along with the verses before and after them.
3. Most Christian Scientists hold Mary Baker Eddy in very high esteem. They have been taught to dismiss negative information about her as lies and ignorance. Avoid joking about her or making accusations that you cannot clearly support. If you don’t appreciate wisecracks about Jesus, don’t make them about Mary Baker Eddy.

Things to discuss with Christian Scientists:

1. Ask sincere, respectful questions designed to help the Christian Scientist evaluate his or her beliefs and loyalties. For example:
   * “Which book do you hold in higher esteem – *Science and Health,* or the Bible?” The answer will probably be either “both books,” or “the Bible.” Then say, “Mrs. Eddy wrote that the Bible contains ‘manifest mistakes in the ancient versions… thirty thousand different readings in the Old Testament, and… three hundred thousand in the New…’ She also stated that the disciples were ‘dull.’ On the other hand, she states that her own writings – including *Science and Health*and even the *Manual* (the By-Laws of The Mother Church) – are ‘[God]-inspired’ and infallible. How, then, can you esteem the Bible as much as you do Mrs. Eddy’s writings?”
   * Christian Scientists are taught that Mrs. Eddy discovered Christian Science after being healed from a serious fall on the ice in February of 1866. She was expected to die, but rose from her bed on the third day, healed and free. Ask, “If she was really healed, then why did she try to sue the city for damages? Court records show that, during the summer of 1866 (several months after the accident), she requested money from the city on the grounds that she was ‘still suffering.’”
   * People who become disenchanted with Christian Science are sometimes reluctant to leave their religion because it still has many good points (“its people have such a positive attitude and are so friendly…”). Point out that the good parts of Christian Science are also in biblical Christianity. Find out what virtues they don’t want to leave, and give examples of how these “good things” can also be found in a Christian church.
   * Christian Science is supposedly validated by its healings. Believers will undoubtedly tell you about a healing they or a loved one have experienced and may point to over 50,000 “authenticated” healings published in Christian Science literature. Several responses may be helpful:
     1. Agree with them that God does heal, but point out that healings occur even in non-Christian Science churches – including those that do not emphasize “faith healing.” Healings do not *prove* that one religion is the truth because healings occur in many religions.
     2. Point out that the apostle Paul did not consider healing to be a sign of his spirituality. “Three times” he asked God to heal his “thorn in the flesh,” (2 Cor.12:8-9), and he then was content to trust God’s sovereignty when God denied his request. Paul also suggested that Timothy “use a little wine” (1 Tim. 5:23) for medicinal purposes. If insufficient “spiritual understanding” had caused Timothy’s ailment, Paul would have encouraged him to pray more about the situation instead of prescribing some wine.
     3. Don’t be intimidated by the “more than 50,000 authenticated testimonies of healing.” When compared to estimated membership numbers, this figure represents roughly *one* documented healing per *ten* Christian Scientists per *lifetime*!
2. *Listen* to what the Christian Scientist has to say, but be ready to give calm, clearly stated challenges to biblical errors. Nothing is quite as disarming as a calm, assured response.

# The Self-Made Man: Secular Humanism

Frequently confused with atheism, which merely states that there is no god and nothing supernatural, or agnosticism which actively questions the existence of god (or gods), Secular Humanism (aka the Free Thought Movement) goes beyond denying things divine. According to secularhumanism.org (yes, they have a website), “Secular humanism is comprehensive, touching every aspect of life including issues of values, meaning, and identity. Thus it is broader than atheism, which concerns only the nonexistence of god or the supernatural. Important as that may be, there’s a lot more to life… and secular humanism addresses it.” Atheism and agnosticism deal only with the question of god. They are silent on larger questions of values and meaning.

Secular Humanism claims to provide liberation for man, but does it really? Humanist writings are the only place you will see the word meaning capitalized, other than at the beginning of a sentence. They distinguish between ‘Big M Meaning’ and ‘Small m Meaning’. This, effectively, makes the search for meaning their god… or more accurately their idol. How so? From their own website: “If Meaning in life is not ordained from on high, what small-m meanings can we work out among ourselves? If eternal life is an illusion, how can we make the most of our only lives? As social beings sharing a godless world, how should we coexist?”

Here is their manifesto:

* We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems.
* We deplore efforts to denigrate human intelligence, to seek to explain the world in supernatural terms, and to look outside nature for salvation.
* We believe that scientific discovery and technology can contribute to the betterment of human life.
* We believe in an open and pluralistic society and that democracy is the best guarantee of protecting human rights from authoritarian elites and repressive majorities.
* We are committed to the principle of the separation of church and state.
* We cultivate the arts of negotiation and compromise as a means of resolving differences and achieving mutual understanding.
* We are concerned with securing justice and fairness in society and with eliminating discrimination and intolerance.
* We believe in supporting the disadvantaged and the handicapped so that they will be able to help themselves.
* We attempt to transcend divisive parochial loyalties based on race, religion, gender, nationality, creed, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and strive to work together for the common good of humanity.
* We want to protect and enhance the earth, to preserve it for future generations, and to avoid inflicting needless suffering on other species.
* We believe in enjoying life here and now and in developing our creative talents to their fullest.
* We believe in the cultivation of moral excellence.
* We respect the right to privacy. Mature adults should be allowed to fulfill their aspirations, to express their sexual preferences, to exercise reproductive freedom, to have access to comprehensive and informed health-care, and to die with dignity.
* We believe in the common moral decencies: altruism, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility. Humanist ethics is amenable to critical, rational guidance. There are normative standards that we discover together. Moral principles are tested by their consequences.
* We are deeply concerned with the moral education of our children. We want to nourish reason and compassion.
* We are engaged by the arts no less than by the sciences.
* We are citizens of the universe and are excited by discoveries still to be made in the cosmos.
* We are skeptical of untested claims to knowledge, and we are open to novel ideas and seek new departures in our thinking.
* We affirm humanism as a realistic alternative to theologies of despair and ideologies of violence and as a source of rich personal significance and genuine satisfaction in the service to others.
* We believe in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality.
* We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest that we are capable of as human beings.

Here’s the rub: Humanism sounds nice, but in reality it ensnares people in an endless search for their Big-M meaning. What is the meaning of life? All humans are, by nature, worshippers of something. We naturally seek it. It is part of how we are wired. To us it is a need for God. If you deny the existence of God, or anything divine, then your mind will naturally fill that void with something. That something becomes ‘why are we here?’ Sorry, but the meaning of life is not 42. It is to worship and serve God. Humanists are amazingly good at distraction and redirection. They have to be… nothing they try ultimately provides lasting satisfaction. Someone somewhere can find temporary happiness in stuff, travel, intellectual pursuits, pleasure, and nearly anything else you can think of. It all fades in time because, ultimately, everything but God is designed to be temporary. That was God’s plan from the beginning. He is the beginning and the end; Alpha and Omega.

The Sunday school lessons of our childhood say it well: He holds the whole world in His hands. Think of it this way: God defines the shape of our lives. Everyone here can (hopefully) agree to that. If that is so, then God is like a bowl that holds the stuff that makes up our lives. If you take that away, what remains? All the mush in the middle, formless, messy, and disgusting if you let it sit long enough.

How do you witness to an adherent of ‘free thought’? Simply, give them hope. Most of them on one level or another feel unfulfilled or have felt unfulfilled at some point in their lives. How could they not? They believe that life happens and then you die. That’s it. How unfulfilling is that? You are born, stuff happens and then you get a ticket out of here in a pine box. There is nothing beyond this world. That’s not just unfulfilling… that’s depressing. Contrast that with Christianity: You are born, you live life, and you still get a ticket out of here in a box… but then you live forever with Christ. They will scoff and laugh. They will deride your faith as childish. But what does it mean when a person resorts to name calling and invective? It means they can’t prove you wrong. That, my friends, is your inroad. For now they refuse to acknowledge God as God… don’t expect them to recognize the presence of God in you. Tell them your story. This is why we have a two minute testimony. Tell them how you have changed and why that is better. More than anything pray for them; you can present them with facts all day, but ultimately it is God that must change their hearts.

# Putting the Fiction in Science Fiction: Scientology

Quick note: Scientology is frequently confused with Christian Science, however the two are completely unrelated. Now then… let’s begin with a Scientology based experiment. Close your eyes. Picture a cat. Now tell me who is looking at the picture in your mind. The obvious answer is that you are. No one else can see inside your mind. We say ‘I am looking at the picture in my mind… but who am I? That is a key question Scientology seeks to answer: Who am I? Finding that answer is not the goal, however; it is but one step of many along a greater journey.

I’m not going to pull punches. Scientology is weird. Really weird. Like samurai cat with a gun riding a fire breathing demon unicorn to a rainbow castle weird. Because I can’t explain most of it better than the scientologists I’m going to quote their website a lot. In a nutshell, the goal of Scientologists is to escape this reality by escaping MEST: Matter, energy, space, and time. This is accomplished paying the church lots of money to get rid of ‘engrams’ – memories that have a negative effect on people’s lives. Until this happens the soul (thetan) will continue to inhabit numerous bodies over successive lifetimes, accruing additional engrams in the process. Sound familiar? Hooray for reincarnation! It’s back, ironically enough.

Unlike other religions, Scientology takes nothing on faith. It is all about experimentation, learning, and growth. The entire movement is based upon the teachings of a man named L. Ron Hubbard, and more specifically on his book Dianetics. The best way to describe it is to quote scientology.org directly:

“L. Ron Hubbard discovered the single source of nightmares, unreasonable fears, upsets, insecurities and psychosomatic illness—the reactive mind. In his book Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health he described the reactive mind in detail and laid out a simple, practical, easily taught technology to overcome it and reach the state of Clear. Dianetics is that technology.

Dianetics is further defined as ‘what the soul is doing to the body’. When the mind adversely affects the body, it is described as a psychosomatic condition. Psycho refers to ‘mind or soul’ and somatic refers to ‘body’. Thus, psychosomatic illnesses are physical illnesses caused by the soul.”

There are two key points I want to pull out of that definition. The first is the use of the word ‘technology’. This is not technology like computers and microwaves. Technology, in scientology terms, is a method of learning. Among their core believes is that learning is aided by seeing (i.e. it is easier to learn about trains when you can actually see a train). For visual learners that is certainly true. The second concept is a big fancy, slightly scary word: Psychosomatic. This is, in effect, the scientologists’ trinity: Mind, soul, and body. This is a concept they call the Parts of Man: The body (physical matter, whether living or dead), the mind (“Pictures;” Essentially your imagination and ability to visualize things), and the Thetan (basically your spirit; the ‘creator of things’).

You see, we humans are not mortals to scientologists. We are already immortal, divine beings. We just haven’t realized that yet. It may sounds like Scientology encourages self-worship. This is not the case. They believe in God, or at least the concept of a god, which they call the ‘eighth dynamic’. The eighth dynamic is an urge we all feel toward existence in infinity. You and I would call it a longing to be reunited with God, as it was in Eden. Scientology, however, defines God as infinity, and thus our desire to exist with God is the pinnacle of human expression. This god, however is a vague concept not a person. It is much like the pantheism of eastern spirituality. God, when referred to in scientology, is described as the ‘allness of all’.

In our natural state all of us have ‘reactive minds’ according to scientology. This causes us to store engrams (memories) of past lives, prenatal experiences, and early childhood. It is these engrams that prevent us from realizing our true divinity. So they must be removed. Conveniently, the church stands ready to help. Auditing is a process of counselling using Hubbard’s principles of dianetcs. It is a long and expensive process involving a device called an ‘E-meter’ that supposedly reveals when a person has discovered an engram and helps the client expunge it from his or her unconscious reactive mind in order to achieve "Clear." A person who has attained Clear may need further auditing to remove engrams held over from previous lives. Auditing sessions may cost as much as $1,000 per hour.

Only a person who has attained ‘Clear’ can escape from MEST, attain total spiritual awareness and become one with infinity. Everyone else will experience many thetan reincarnations in many lives over thousands of years. (Thus, auditing often must include clearing the client of engrams from past lives.)

Now that we have all of that weird out of the way, we’ll add another layer of weird. Behold the emotional tone scale. The tone scale is a measure for improving life, basically, but also for helping others improve their lives. It describes emotional states in ascending order from body death (zero) through serenity of beingness (which I’m pretty sure isn’t really a word, but regardless its 40 on this scale). The basic concept is that you need to meet people where they are, and there is some logic to that. If you are talking to a person stuck in grief (.5) in an enthusiastic (4.0) manner you probably won’t get very good results. In fact, they might punch you. Again, from their website: “One can find himself or any individual on this Tone Scale and thus know how, using Scientology, he may best be moved up to the higher tones where increased beingness, competence, self-esteem, honesty, well-being, happiness and other desirable attributes are manifested.” Got that? Me neither.

So, in summation, Scientology is human behavioral science and eastern religion packaged as a single church. How do you witness to scientologists? Start with a lot of prayer for them. They have an unenviable maze of mumbo jumbo to slice through on their way out of the maze called scientology. A few other ideas:

1. Find out how deeply involved they are in scientology. Many members do not fully understand what their organization teaches and it is far easier to reach such a person.
2. Seek to establish a friendly, personal relationship.
3. Establish the sole authority of the Bible. You may need to give the Scientologist a marked Bible to highlight basic Christian doctrines.
4. Clearly define all terms of Scientology and historic Christianity.
5. Show the Scientologist how Christian doctrines are incompatible with Scientology. Focus especially on contrasting ideas about God, sin, salvation, and life after death.
6. Share your personal testimony of faith in Jesus Christ and the benefits you derive from knowing Him as Savior and Lord.
7. Share the plan of salvation and sensitively seek to lead the person to faith in Jesus.

Scientology Glossary:

*Analytical mind*: The conscious, rational, and problem solving part of one's mind.

*Auditing:* Scientology's personal counseling using dianetic techniques and utilizing an E-meter for reading engrams.

*Auditor*: Counselor who conducts auditing session.

*Clear*: State of person who has completed auditing. Person is supposedly liberated from all engrams and their ill effects on the mind and body.

*Dianetics*: Method developed by L. Ron Hubbard for removing engrams and their negative effects from the mind.

*E-Meter (Electropsychometer):* Instrument invented by L. Ron Hubbard for utilization in auditing process.

*Engram*: Unconscious mental image recorded in the reactive mind that has negative effects on a person's life.

*MEST*: Acronym coined from the initial letters of matter, energy, space, and time which compose the physical universe and hold the thetan captive.

*Preclear*: A person undergoing Dianetics auditing progressing toward Clear.

*Reactive mind*: The part of the mind not under a person's rational, conscious control or awareness.  
*Thetan*: The immortal human soul or spiritual being. It is the true, timeless identity of the individual.