

# "Is the LDS Church a Cult?" – A Scholarly Debunking

Academic Definitions, the BITE Model, and Why This Word Is Used by the Intellectually Lazy

## THE WORD "CULT" – THREE MEANINGS

- 1. Sociological/Academic:** High-demand group with coercive control mechanisms (Heaven's Gate, Peoples Temple)
- 2. Theological:** Group deviating from "orthodox" Christianity (used by evangelicals against Mormons, JWs)
- 3. Colloquial/Pejorative:** "Any religion I think is weird" (intellectually lazy)

**The Bait and Switch:** Critics use the *theological* definition (non-Trinitarian = cult) hoping you hear the *sociological* definition (dangerous mind-control group). This is dishonest.

## THE BITE MODEL – SCHOLARLY STANDARD

Developed by **Steven Hassan**, mental health counselor and former cult member. The standard academic framework for identifying coercive groups.

### B – Behavior Control

- Dictate where/with whom members live
- Financial exploitation
- Restrict leisure, require permission for decisions
- Punish disobedience with shunning/physical punishment

### I – Information Control

- Deliberately withhold or distort information
- Discourage access to outside sources
- Compartmentalize information (insider vs outsider doctrine)
- Encourage spying on members

### T – Thought Control

- Require internalizing doctrine without question
- Use loaded language to stop thought
- Discourage critical thinking
- Instill black-and-white thinking

### E – Emotional Control

- Manipulate emotions; guilt/shame cycles
- Problems always member's fault
- Fear of leaving (shunning, supernatural threats)
- Phobia indoctrination (outside world dangerous)

## APPLYING BITE MODEL TO LDS CHURCH

Criterion	LDS Church	Met?
Dictate where/with whom to live	No – members choose freely	<b>NO</b>
Financial exploitation	Tithing voluntary; members keep earnings	<b>NO</b>
Permission for major decisions	No – choose careers, spouses, etc.	<b>NO</b>
Shunning ex-members	Not required; families not separated	<b>NO</b>
Withhold information	Church publishes own critical history	<b>NO</b>
Discourage outside sources	Public education, unrestricted media	<b>NO</b>
Discourage questions	"Ask of God" (James 1:5) foundational	<b>NO</b>
Fear of leaving	No phobia indoctrination	<b>NO</b>

**Verdict:** The LDS Church does not meet BITE Model criteria. High expectations exist (tithing, service) but are voluntarily accepted, not enforced through coercion.

## WAS EARLY CHRISTIANITY A "CULT"?

### Roman View of Christians:

- Called a dangerous "superstitio" (superstition)
- Accused of "atheism" (refused state gods)
- Accused of cannibalism (Eucharist misunderstood)
- Accused of breaking up families
- Secret rituals, exclusive truth claims
- Loyalty to "king" other than Caesar

**Pliny the Younger (112 AD):** Called Christians a "depraved, excessive superstition." Investigated them for meeting before dawn, singing hymns, binding themselves by oath.

### Sound like any church you know?

**If "cult" = false/dangerous: Then Christianity itself started as a cult. If early Christianity was legitimate despite meeting these criteria, then meeting them proves nothing.**

## WHO USES "CULT" AGAINST LDS?

### 1. Counter-Cult Evangelicals

**Their definition:** Non-Trinitarian = cult

**Problem:** This is *theological*, not *sociological*. It only identifies groups that disagree with post-Nicene Protestant theology – useless for identifying danger.

### 2. Angry Ex-Members

**Problem:** Personal negative experiences don't define institutional character. Bad bishops exist in every religion.

### 3. The Ignorant

"I heard it's a cult" is not an argument. This is intellectual laziness.

## THE IRONY

### Historical Pattern:

- 1st c: Romans called Christians a cult
- 16th c: Catholics called Protestants schismatics
- 17th c: Anglicans called Baptists sectarians
- 18th c: Mainline Protestants called Methodists fanatics
- 19th c: Established churches called Adventists, Pentecostals cults

**Every new religious movement in Christian history has been called a "cult."**

Practice	LDS	Some Evangelicals
Tithing	10%	Some require more
Mission service	2 yrs, voluntary	Some: lifetime
Information control	None	Some discourage secular ed
Shunning	Not required	Some practice full shunning

## SUMMARY

Criterion	LDS	Early Christianity
Behavior control	<b>NO</b>	Some
Information control	<b>NO</b>	Limited literacy era
Thought control	<b>NO</b>	No
Emotional control	<b>NO</b>	Some urgency
Exclusive claims	Yes	Yes
Viewed as dangerous	By some	Persecuted

### Either:

1. LDS Church isn't a cult (academic definition) ✓
2. Early Christianity was also a cult
3. The word is meaningless ("groups I disagree with")

**When someone calls the LDS Church a "cult," they're telling you more about their intellectual laziness than about the Church.**