

# Is Chi Alpha a Cult?

Hypocrisy is NOT Confined to Religion  
AND is Almost Never a Majority

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If you are in the crowd that has decided Chi Alpha (XA) is a cult there is no point in reading this article. If you are in the crowd willing to listen to a measured and balanced examination of the issues, PLEASE keep reading this article. [At the end of this article is a table with timestamps and my comments in direct response to various video segments.]

My name is Al Baker. I came into XA in 1982. I am 66 yrs old and have been a Christian for almost 50 years. You can find a bullet list bio of my life at [<https://www.churchhistory101.com/rabaker.php>].

Here is a quick bio of my life from XA to present:

- 14 yrs as a XA pastor - 11 yrs at the Univ. of Alabama (1986-1997)
- XA Rep for the Assemblies of God in Alabama for 7 years
- PhD in Church History (*St Andrews Univ, Scotland*) - finished in 2001

- 12 yrs as a pastor of two small churches (Scotland and Alabama)
- 8 yrs as mostly an adjunct at three small universities
- currently teaching at Continental Theological Seminary (Belgium)

I watched the video by **UnReligiously** and my heart was filled with sadness. I decided to respond for several reasons, but the first thing I want to say is:

"I am sorry for any trauma suffered by anyone while in XA."

Sadly, I saw signs of some of the abuse described in the video. I was near ground zero of one aberrant XA group, but was unaware of the details until the situation blew up. I will come back to this personal story further down. [Again, at the end of this article I have timestamps and my comments in direct response to various video segments.]

My XA years were 1982-1997. I was **the first full-time XA pastor** for the southeast region that included North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi. I witnessed several struggling XA groups over my 14 years. These groups were typically led by a youth pastor who stepped into university ministry without going through the structured internship training in XA.

Some of these complaints and stories are very real, however, some of these complaints (and the manner/tone of expression) lead me to believe that there is also some "group think" and a knee-jerk reaction happening. I want to address both sides, so take notes if you like, but keep an open mind.

### **Hypocrisy is Everywhere**

It always amazes me how people who have *an axe to grind* struggle to be objective. Everything is seen through a bias as if there is NO gray area. Complaints are structured with no nuance. There is little or no acknowledgement that life is filled with gray areas and tension.

How many **college football coaches** (before the portal and NIL) were caught paying players, or providing alcohol/sex driven recruiting parties, or having sex with a secretary (or a cheerleader)? Yet, most people continue watching college football.

How many **politicians** have been caught doing stupid things like insider trading or taking PAC money from corporations (basically bribes to buy votes on legislation)? Most of the time, if such a politician is in the party a person votes for, they will NOT stop voting for that party. That is hypocrisy on the part of the politician AND the voter.

There are **medical doctors** who have breached the public trust by pushing certain drugs because the drug companies give them some kind of kickback. Very few people will stop going to see a doctor because SOME of them have been stupid.

There are **lawyers** who have bribed judges or witnesses, or withheld discovery evidence to win a court case. Many lawyers every year are disbarred for breaking the law. Lawyers are oftentimes hated for this kind of hypocrisy, yet when you need legal help you will likely still try to find a *good* lawyer.

How many junior high and high school **teachers** have abused their position by engaging in sexual activity with a student? Yet many people still send their children to a public school in spite of this kind of hypocrisy.

I could go on endlessly pointing out hypocrisy. There is hypocrisy in every single vocation...in every single organization...in every single religious group.

Yet not every football coach is guilty. Not every politician, not every lawyer or doctor, and not every school teacher is guilty.

## **The Majority is Almost NEVER Guilty**

Most football coaches are NOT doing stupid things. Most doctors and lawyers are NOT lying or breaking the law. Most school teachers ARE NOT sexual predators.

It is far too easy to label everyone in a group for the failures, "sins" and hypocrisy of the few. It is easy to get caught up in the frenzy of wanting "justice" while failing to be objective. Think of how many people have been *wrongly* accused and how it ruins their lives...even after being acquitted.

## **ALL of us are Hypocrites!**

Since this issue is about Christian hypocrisy, please allow me to use a few important Jesus principles.

(I am not going to quote these or cite chapter/verse.)

- before you cast judgment, remove the log from your own eye
- if you are without sin go ahead and throw the first stone
- make sure before you judge that you openly proclaim "God have mercy on ME for I am also a sinner"
- think twice before you grab your fellow servant by the throat and have him/her thrown into prison because they owe you a debt

I have been a Christian for almost 50 years now - and I am a hypocrite. I have served as a pastor and missionary...many people see me as a role model - yet I have sins, flaws and struggles.

I do things I know I should not do.

I say things when I should keep my mouth shut.

I think thoughts that I KNOW are not honoring to God.

**I KNOW that I AM a hypocrite.**

Here is a paraphrase of a Jonathan Edwards statement in his book *Religious Affections* (this is not an exact quote, from memory)

*There is a big difference between a true believer and a hypocrite. The true believer is ten times more aware of the darkness in his soul than is a hypocrite. A hypocrite is unaware of his sinfulness and proclaims himself righteous.*

I heard very little humility in the **UnReligiously** video. I heard very little nuance, almost no admission that "not everyone is guilty." I do not recall that anyone stated their own flaws or failures.

I heard condemnation of ALL XA people for the failures of a minority. The complaints I am hearing about XA being a cult point at intolerance and a judgmental attitude - I believe some of these things have happened, yet the entire video and most of the comments are made with an intolerant and judgmental tone.

**Congratulations!** Many of those who spoke up have qualified themselves as candidates of the very thing they condemn. Join the club. You are also a hypocrite.

I am not accusing anyone of lying nor have I made excuses for bad, sinful and unacceptable practices. I know that many of the accusations are real...and true. I know this because I have seen it myself. That brings me to my personal experience.

### **Cult-like Behavior I Know About**

In my travels leading a church, being a guest speaker for XA groups, and speaking in other churches from time to time I have had XA students come to me, expressing some of the same kinds of issues that I am hearing about in this video. These were young men and women in different XA groups.

Then XA began to experience openly negative feedback, similar to and worse than what is covered on the video. This led to investigations of a few XA groups in different states. Some campus groups were shut down, with young men and women having their license or ordination credentials revoked. It has been a very difficult time for anyone involved in XA and for those like me who love XA and have served, but also have moved on into new opportunities.

Problems like what is addressed on the video and more were brought into the open. I have now read accounts and watched two more videos with complaints from students against XA leaders and groups. The complaints have common themes. I was able to contact a few of the students who had tried to tell me their story.

This article I am writing is not meant to diminish the stories of young men and women who have been hurt, intimidated or shamed. But those who are hearing or reading these accounts need to know that things are not always as clear as what you see, or think you see. Like this video, we are only hearing one side of the story. I do not want to cause more hurt to anyone: not to those who are insisting that XA is a cult, nor to the good men and women who are working to reach university students and ARE NOT LIKE those who are being held accountable.

### **The Possible Cause of Cultic Behavior**

Many of the complaints in the video and those I have read **ARE** cult-like. These controlling activities are now being addressed by good XA leadership.

Around the year 2000 XA began experiencing tremendous growth. In addition to XA groups growing into the hundreds of students, XA pastors and graduating seniors started going on the mission field.

Hundreds of XA graduates have gone to the nations of unreached people groups. This growth led to an intense felt need for more workers on US campuses. In my opinion (this whole article is only MY OPINION) this explosive growth led to lowering the standards for our internship training programs.

When you take zealous young men in their mid-20's and send them out without solid training you can easily get arrogant XA pastors who use control-based techniques to grow their ministry. In the corporate world it is commonly called "young man's disease." Young men who are driven to succeed and use their students as a means to an end. Many of these young men (and women) see these students as workers rather than the sons and daughters of parents.

Wow, Dr. Baker. How do you know these things? Because I was that young man during my first 2-3 years in XA service. I never used the techniques I heard in this video, but I was too aggressive. It took a few years and having my first child, then my outlook began to change. I realized that the ministry was NOT MINE (it was God's) and these young men and women belonged to parents. They were somebody's child. It was a powerful change in my life.

### **Chi Alpha is NOT a Cult**

For every single person you produce with a testimony of cult-like behavior and/or techniques, I can produce 100 XA students and alumni who will tell you they NEVER saw junk like this. Some would give you powerful testimonies of being saved from a self-destructive lifestyle. Some would tell you about finding a solid gathering of students who truly DID become like family. They became lifetime friends. You would hear testimonies of TRUE miracles, not fake ones where you are urged to believe without evidence. I personally witnessed two miracles while in the Univ of Alabama XA that included evidence seen by a medical doctor. If you do not believe in miracles - Fine. Have it your way. As an

expert in early Christian history I can tell you Christianity has always believed in the miraculous. Miracles do not happen often - which is why they are called "miracles."

I have friends serving in XA and as missionaries all over the world. NONE of my XA friends used the techniques I have heard and read about in these complaints. Most of my XA friends are older now, like me. But I have former students and friends serving all over the place: Japan, Belgium, Eastern Europe, in the Middle East, all around the USA, and some serving in "closed" nations that I will not name. NONE of my XA colleagues do the stupid stuff reported in these complaints.

### **Conclusion - The END**

So, please stop calling XA a cult. IF you want to say that SOME XA groups have used (or are using) cult-like techniques - be specific. Call them out by name and by their campus. ALL of my XA colleagues want these people held accountable.

I welcome ANYONE to send me an email. I respond to every single serious message I receive. IF you troll me I will simply ignore you. I will give you my phone number so you call me or text me. I am NOT afraid to discuss ANYTHING with you.

Just STOP calling XA a cult.

When you do this YOU are failing to be objective. You are arguing solely with your emotion and presuppositions. You are slandering all of the XA workers and students out there who do NOT do the stupid stuff you are complaining about, but in fact they condemn it.

AND you become the very thing you hate...a hypocrite.



Below you will find My Direct Comments on specific parts of the video

## Inside Chi Alpha:

### The Cult Tactics Hiding Behind Campus Ministry

Timestamp	Comments:
1:01-1:08	This young man appears to have an axe to grind...and a limited vocabulary. Not many spiritual ministries would be attractive to him.
1:27-1:49	IF a XA group was this aggressive...well, this segment is cult like. It does, however, also seem to be hyperbolic.
2:00-2:30	As the above article discusses, ALL XA groups are NOT like the overall description in the video. Consistent global comments exhibits a lack of integrity...just like what this video is attempting to critique.
2:40-2:50	Again, broadbrush as if ALL XA groups are like this.
2:48-ff	This guy continues in making universal statements...with a very strange video that appears to run the "walking" background over and over...very strange. Not sure who this is, but he does not appear to be a reputable source. It's comical how a video attacking a group as a cult uses these odd videos of students presenting their case without any specific details.
4:00-ff	The young lady narrator does not like using "creepy" language like "family." Well, that is what the New Testament "church" is meant to be, even if we never succeed 100%. This young lady makes claims about the Bible - what kind of training does she have?
4:29-ff	"These people aren't even smiling." WATCH the testimonials...they are not smiling like "The Joker" on Batman, but they certainly appear to be more authentic than the personnel in this video IMO.
6:23ff	The hostess is commenting on the doctrinal views and is surprised by a statement on "the sinfulness of mankind," which is pretty much a universal Christian belief. Again, does she have ANY biblical training?
7:20-ff	She makes it sound like ALL XA groups will urge a person to stop taking their meds...or reject medical care. This is certainly NOT the norm with XA or most churches. Yes, this is an area where abuse happens, but as with the entire criticism, the ideas presented here are NOT universal in XA or in the AG Church.
7:27-ff	There is a real XA student testimony of a physical healing. Then the video narrator "explains" how prayer for healing happens. She is not far off on her description, and yes, I have seen Christians go overboard. But that is NOT the norm. The exception stands out and usually gets more attention,

	but it is NOT the norm. She is correct that some are too pushy with "Faith" and put pressure on others. The narrator goes on to say that the girl CANNOT truly be healed. You do not have to believe in the miraculous. I have prayed for around 1,500 people to be healed in my 50 years of following Jesus. I have seen 10-12 dramatic miracles. That is not a great "success" rate, but I have vivid memories of the few miracles I have seen and I am grateful for each one.
11:00-ff	The narrator gives her perspective on HOW "healings" are treated and she seems to make it clear that she does not believe in the miraculous. That is fine.
12:10-ff	The narrator goes on to analyze HOW young men and women get "drawn into XA." Is she a therapist or a professional counselor? As I listen to her I wonder, "How old is this young lady?" Yes, XA wants to draw students into a <i>community of believers</i> . Those who use social pressure are wrong. This narrator gives examples of pressure, but that is NOT what the majority of XA groups do.
14:13-ff	Now she goes into the outreach of international students. She paints it as some kind of terrible manipulation methodology. Yes, XA sees it as a strategic way to reach the world AND international students are vulnerable. Those who worked with international students in the XA group I led were the nicest, sweetest people who truly cared about these international students. AND our folks did NOT pressure them. There are dozens of our former XA international students who would say nothing but good things about how XA reached out to them...took them to the grocery store, invited them to spend the weekend with their families or asked them to share their culture by cooking a meal for a small group. Christians are called to be a part of the Great Commission and we should not apologize for that. We do not want to pressure, but we do want to share the "good news" with these students. This narrator labels this as "cult-like." One could argue that in a balanced presentation this narrator would have included <i>positive</i> testimonials from XA students as well. Could I refer to her presentation as <i>deceptive</i> ? Perhaps, but it is certainly not objective.
18:35-ff	She reads testimonies off Reddit...all negative. Reddit is a proper source? I could produce 100 positive XA student testimonies for every single negative one.
19:30-ff	One of the Reddit comments points to a specific comment made by a XA leader that reflects a fundamentalist position that I hated to hear. Yes, this is something that happens, especially from younger XA leaders. There are some more fundamentalist views in pockets around the USA, but

	again, those are in the minority when you take ALL XA leaders into account around the USA.
19:53-ff	The narrator begins to discuss what "discipleship" is about and she states that this is where things begin to take a "nose dive." She lays out XA discipleship as an "authority" structure where the person responsible for mentoring becomes authoritative. IF this happens, it is indeed wrong-headed and is a minority occurrence nationwide. Yes, there is accountability, but it is not supposed to be like a drill sergeant. If a student is getting drunk every weekend, someone needs to urge them, encourage them to stay away from the parties. It is all HOW one goes about this that counts.
20:40-ff	Controlling IF and WHO you date. This is also more nuanced than what you hear on this video. If someone in your small group starts dating a non-Christian and you find out they are having sex you urge them to move away from this activity. I wonder what this narrator thinks about this kind of situation.
20:50-ff	The student testimony here has some red flags, but one assumes that this former student may not be telling the WHOLE story. Having said this, I have witnessed too much pressure being brought to bear on students with respect to dating in XA. This is a difficult issue, but using too much leverage is something I have seen and heard. On the other hand, I was accused of using too much leverage from time to time. At the same time, I was also accused of being too lenient in some situations. This can be tricky.
21:45-ff	Confession is something the narrator thinks is abused. This is another tricky one. There is a command in the NT: "confess your sins and flaws to one another, and pray for one another..." This is not a comfortable verse and how you apply it can vary all over the map. I have heard of confession being abused in XA and the stories I heard were difficult to hear. However, there is a right and wrong way to use "confession." As the leader, I led by being confessional in front of my students. I NEVER forced a student to confess. They usually did it on their own and they were ALWAYS met with grace and kindness. Unfortunately, I have heard credible examples where this was abusive. This is not good.
22:00-ff	The narrator begins a segment where students MUST submit to authority and pressure is used to make this happen. This is also something I have heard from credible past XA students. This is sad... this is wrong...and the leaders I heard that did this have been removed from XA.

22:35-ff	<p>Now the narrator goes into a segment using the BITE model to help determine whether a group is acting like a cult. Almost EVERY SINGLE thing this young woman says in this segment has been reported in a handful of XA groups/leaders. THIS is sad and many of these young leaders have been removed.</p> <p>Having said this, there are also some very real issues this narrator skips over that should be addressed. The university campus is like one big cult. Professors are overwhelmingly liberal and for the last 5 decades have dominated the academy, doing their best to keep conservative voices out. So listening ONLY to mainstream media IS propaganda. I have no issue with warning students about the mainstream media. Actually, the CULT of the academy is another video this narrator should produce - THAT would require her to use more objectivity than she musters in this video.</p>
24:37-ff	<p>Thought control. Again, this is where the university has lost it's way. Almost everything this narrator accuses XA of doing (and some of what she says is correct in a minority XA groups) can be laid at the feet of MANY professors. One of our biggest problems in the academy is brainwashing our students rather than pushing them to think critically. Many liberal professors do not tolerate opinions that go against what they teach. <b>UnReligiously</b> needs to do a video on <b>UnAcademicly</b>.</p>
25:19-ff	<p>She says that XA includes a section in their belief statement that students are supposed to serve the leadership. I have NEVER heard this, nor have I ever read this. None of the XA leaders I currently know would put this in print NOR practice it. Do we teach being a servant? Yes. Do we ever ask XA students to help us with a project at home? Yes. We serve them and from time to time we might ask for them to help us <i>as a friend</i>. But the normal XA pastor would NEVER put pressure on students to <i>serve them</i>.</p>
25:51-ff	<p>Leaving XA is very difficult to do. There is a lot of nuance in this topic and the narrator does <b>not</b> do a good job with nuance here.</p> <p>Yes, it is not easy to leave XA. It should not be easy to leave a local church, or any social group IF you have invested in it. She paints a dreadful picture of what happens when a student leaves XA, but most students who choose to leave on their own do so because they WANT to leave. Many times it is because they prefer to engage in behavior that is destructive (drinking, drugs, sexual urges) and they just walk away. In our XA we always tried to let them know they were loved, but we did not chase them, preach at them or harass them...they just walked away. Most students who left XA in this condition took on a "victim" mentality - of the few students who speak negatively about our XA group, almost all of them had an addictive problem. Blaming others is fairly common trait</p>

	<p>in this subgroup. We have also had 1-2 former students who suffer from some kind of emotional/mental disorder. I have been accused of things that have no connection with reality. How does one respond to this? So many accusations without the accused having a chance to be interviewed and respond. There are always two sides to every story.</p>
26:30-ff	<p>In this segment the narrator speaks of XA as a Multi-Level Marketing plan. THIS is really sad to me. The abuse I have seen/heard about indeed use these techniques...and this is just flat out WRONG. Pressuring students with contact quotas like sales quotas is just ridiculous...and I have heard it from credible XA students. The narrator constructs this in a very negative light. And I have heard of it close to what she presents, but again, there is nuance. Discipleship (multiplication), like many other topics this video paints in a bad light actually has plenty of evidence in the New Testament. It is a matter of HOW the leaders go about it.</p> <p>She uses phrases/words like "keep them in line," and "hierarchy of the group." The narrator says that she was in a XA group. I would like to know where and for how long...AND was she betrayed.</p> <p>She says something like you start giving all your time, money and efforts to the group.</p> <p>Well, almost ALL of our student leaders were good students and made excellent grades. Yes, they did live a "busy" life with many time commitments. This can become a burden IF/When it is done with high pressure, but with gracious teammates in the majority of XA groups, you always know that you can back away when you need it. When I was an undergrad I studied 4-6 hours every single day and played video games 4 hours per day. I was not in XA. Did I really need to study up to 6hrs per day? No. Was it a good thing to spend 4 hrs each day playing video games? No. Time management was a concept that our students had to develop. It would have been good if I had been involved in XA - I would have spent my daily time more productively.</p>
	<p>This issue she brings up several times is the idea that a XA student cannot question the leadership. This is probably true in the XA groups where there is a problem, but this is not the case in the majority of good XA groups. Good leaders do NOT demand submission...they earn respect and leadership. The immature XA leaders either need help or they need to be removed for abuse.</p> <p>The picture she paints of a student who does not "fall in line" simply does not happen (or is rare) in a solid XA group.</p>
32:35-ff	<p>Now the narrator speaks to the idea of leaving the XA group. Yes, the poorly-led XA groups do use shunning when a student decides to leave.</p>

	<p>This is wrong...and sad. But leaving ANY organization you have invested in should be painful. MOST good orgs are built on a common mission and on good relationships. It is always difficult to leave such an organization. Leaving a job has similar feelings, especially when you initiate the separation for a "better" job paying more money or working less hours, etc. It still feels a bit bad to leave friends you have made. THAT is life unless you live as an island unto yourself.</p> <p>Again, she speaks of XA as if she has been involved in dozens of groups all around the USA. She was probably only in one single XA group...and maybe attended 1-2 SALTs where she interacted with other groups. This narrator is making blanket statements without nuance.</p>
34:17-ff	<p>The narrator commented early on in the video that she had scoured the internet and was surprised that she did not find more videos exposing XA for their many flaws and errors. Well, she repeats it again here..."its shocking that there's not more out there about this...across the country from the University of Texas, to Missouri State, to UVA there are the exact same reports...from all of these groups across the nation." I would suggest to her that she cannot find more videos like hers...because she is reporting on a minority of groups. She says (as does the others who gave their testimonials) that THIS aberrant behavior IS the norm. It just isn't. Again, for every single complaint I can find 100 XA students and XA alumni who would give a very good testimony of their time in XA.</p>
36:00-ff	<p>In this segment the narrator begins to explain that XA takes biblical texts out of context. Yes, the aberrant leaders/groups do not handle the biblical text properly, but this young woman is not a biblical scholar. Yet she makes definitive statements about biblical texts without any admission that she has not been properly trained in this field.</p>
36:50-ff	<p>She uses actual XA students speaking from the heart (with smiles and a peace) about their faith and God's direction in their lives. These are solid statements, yet this narrator is using them as illustrations of cult members who have been duped into personal slavery or something. This narrator has obviously not read very much Christian writings down through the history of our faith. What these XA students say can be found in many Christian writers...she clearly is not as familiar with the biblical text as she portrays. It is highly likely that every statement made by these XA students can be found in <i>My Utmost for His Highest</i>, by Oswald Chambers (which has sold more than <b>13 million</b> copies since 1924). I plan to contact this young lady and see if I can do a Zoom interview with her discussing all of these issues. Let's see if she is up to that task. Throughout the history of Christianity young men and women have given</p>

	<p>up their dreams of an easy life follow the call of God.</p> <p>I wonder how this young woman will respond when she hears that many XA alum are living in "closed" nations, in the face of danger with their families as they attempt to reach people for the kingdom of God. From what I have heard her say, my guess is that she would scoff at this notion and claim they were brainwashed in a cult.</p>
38:10-ff	<p>She then concludes by saying that if you have left XA it will not send you to Hell, "this is something they do time and time again."</p> <p>I have NEVER heard anyone say this or imply this in XA. IF this happens - it is terribly wrong and is likely being dealt with around the country right now. I certainly hope it is.</p> <p>This young woman is making YouTube videos using footage from XA videos without getting permission. Has she done any interviews with XA pastors to get their response? Does she present any contrary evidence at all? No. These videos are one-sided.</p>