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## Introduction

### The Nature of Religion

The world today has numerous religions, all of which claim to be true. Over the course of human history, every culture that we know of has held some sort of religious belief. This is true of the most technologically advanced cultures in the modern world, and it is also true of those cultures that have never seen electricity, cars, or even the printed word. Anywhere there are humans, you will find religion. [See the Relational Concepts' study book *Science, Religion, and the Creation-Evolution Controversy*.] It seems that religion, or the tendency to religious thought, is part of the makeup of man. The *American Heritage Dictionary* [Second College Edition, 1985] defines "religion" as,

1.a) Belief in and reverence for a supernatural power recognized as the creator and governor of the universe, b) a particular integrated system of this expression, e.g. *the Hindu Religion*. 2. The spiritual or emotional attitude of one who recognizes the existence of a supernatural power or powers. 3. An objective pursued with zeal or conscientious devotion.

As it is true that each man at his core is religious, it is also true that each religion at its core is exclusive. That is, every religion claims to be the only religion which is wholly true. This has been demonstrated throughout the centuries in the many wars fought in the name of religion. This is also evidenced by the fact that the adherents of every religion engage in both evangelism and defense of their faith (apologetics). Religious wars, evangelism, and apologetics have no logical basis, unless the person who undertakes these endeavors believes his religion is true and all other religions are, at least, partly false.

### The Five Major World Religions

Historically, people have recognized five major religions. Out of these five major religions have come hundreds of sects and cults. The five major religions are: Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.

There are two purposes of this study book. They are: (1) to summarize the history and beliefs of each of these five major religions and (2) to give an evaluation of each of these beliefs as to their truthfulness and consistency.

After completing this study, the student of this book should have a general knowledge of what each of these systems teaches on subjects like the nature of God, salvation, the nature of man, sin, and other basic religious thought.

# Hinduism

## Introduction

In its most simple definition, Hinduism may be understood as the religious beliefs and practices common to India.<sup>1</sup> Hinduism represents a broad category of religious beliefs, most of which are pantheistic. (For a study of pantheism, see the Relational Concepts' Studybook, *Why Christianity*.) Hinduism is not only one of the oldest of all religious systems, it is also one of the most complex. During its history, Hinduism has spawned a variety of sects holding diverse beliefs. Therefore, it is difficult to get an accurate picture of Hinduism without considering a vast array of history and commentary.<sup>2</sup>

It is not one religion, but rather a family of religions.... Hinduism is fluid and changing.... Hinduism is the whole complex of beliefs and institutions that have appeared from the time when their ancient (and most sacred) scriptures, the Vedas, were composed until now.... Hindus have an extraordinarily wide selection of beliefs and practices to choose from: they can (to use Western terms) be pantheists, polytheists, monotheists, agnostics and even atheists.<sup>3</sup>

Because Hinduism is so complex, we will be unable to focus on every detail of this belief system, but we will attempt to learn what the majority of the approximately 900 million Hindus believe.

## History

Hinduism in present-day India is traced back to three influences. From around 1500 B.C.—700 B.C., Indo-European people from Russia and Central Asia came to the Indian peninsula, bringing with them their religion known as **Vedism**. The second influence came from nearby Iran, whose native languages became mingled with the Sanskrit language of the Aryan peoples from Russia and Central Asia. The third influence came from the religious ideas already in the territory of India itself.

**Vedism** was a fire cult that embraced the notion that purity emerges from fire, an early idea that may have strongly influenced the practice of cremation of the dead and the later development of the doctrine of reincarnation.

Hindu history is generally divided into four periods:

1. The **Pre-Vedic** period from 3,000 B.C.—1500 B.C. During this period, Animism (the belief that all things, people, rocks, dogs, fish, plants, etc. are invested with a life force, soul, or mind) was practiced by the natives of the Indus Valley.
2. The **Vedic** period from 1500 B.C.—700 B.C. During this time, the majority of the Aryan invasions took place. These people brought with them much literature which influenced Hindu thought. This period is the one in which the polytheism of Hinduism had its greatest development. The caste system also emerged during the Vedic Period.
3. The **Upanishadic** period began around 700 B.C. and ended about 200 B.C. The word “Upanishad” literally means “to sit at the feet of.” It was during this period that Hinduism underwent its greatest transformation toward what it is today. The Hindu doctrines of asceticism and reincarnation were developed during this period. Also, during this period the guru/disciple relationship began to be seen. This period was a time of rebellion against the rituals of the Vedic era. Many forsook the authority of the Brahmins (the priests) to follow a guru who could show the way out of the birth/rebirth cycle known as Samsara. Gautama Buddha (see “Buddhism”) was a prime example of a nonorthodox ascetic who could instruct one in the path of enlightenment.
4. The fourth era began approximately in the 200s B.C. and went on through the 200s A.D. During this time, the Vedantic texts underwent a revival. The god Brahman rose to a place of prominence over lesser gods. Also coming to the forefront in the pantheon of Hindu gods was the manifestations of Brahman, namely Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva (Creator, Preserver, Destroyer).

After the 200s A.D., Hinduism developed further, but its development is very hard to categorize. During the few hundred years after Christ, a multiplicity of cults and sects, exalting hundreds of various deities, developed.

At about 1,000 A.D., Hinduism became antagonistic to Buddhism, and it began to be threatened by Muslim invasions. [See the discussion of Islam.] The Muslims were generally located in Northern India, with Hinduism growing strongly in the South.

The western world was first introduced to Hinduism starting in the late 1,800s. This influence was mainly through sects of Hinduism. Sikhism represented the most significant Hindu influence on the west in the 1800s and 1900s.

Throughout its history, Hinduism has been extremely difficult to systematize. As mentioned above, Hindu doctrine lends itself to animistic, pantheistic, polytheistic and/or theistic expressions. Because of these differing and even contradicting views, Hindus have often been seen as embracing all religions as true.

## Beliefs

Hinduism has undergone tremendous development over the course of its history, and although there are hundreds of Hindu sects possessing peculiarities that differentiate them from each other, certain key components remain constant among the majority of them.

## God

The fundamental conception of God is that of Brahman. Brahman is the all-encompassing principle of the ultimate. It is a life-principle or force that resides in all that exists. Hinduism adheres to **monism** (the belief that all reality is of one, or the same, essence), in that all of reality proceeds from this one essence, namely, Brahman. Yet it is also **polytheistic**, in that it advocates worshipping many lesser deities who are part of the one essence. This one essence is also expressed pluralistically in the entire material universe. For this reason, Hinduism also adheres to **pantheism** (the belief that all is god and god is all).<sup>4</sup> The Hindu conceives of Brahman not as a separate personal being but rather as a principle of life that comprises all that exists, through which and by which all reality is a part. Brahman is most often spoken of as a manifestation of three gods: **Brahma** (the creator), **Vishnu** (the preserver—who is worshipped as ten separate incarnations), and **Siva** (the destroyer). “This God is at once infinite in form, immortal, imperishable, impersonal, all-pervading, supreme, changeless, absolute and indivisibly one, and at the same time none of these. For God is beyond all thought and speech.”<sup>5</sup>

## Humanity

Most of Hinduism believes that humankind is God (Brahman). The individual self expression of Brahman in each being is called **Atman**. Humans are deceived by **Maya** (the illusory universe) into believing that each person is a particular being. But if the person would clear the senses and mind of Maya and meditate on the true Self (Atman), then the realization would come that “**Atman is Brahman.**” The purpose of every religion, according to Hinduism, is to identify Atman with Brahman (true God).

## The Caste System

The caste system originated when Brahma created **Manu**, the first man. From Manu came the four different types of people, as the creator Brahma determined. From Manu’s head came the **Brahmins**, the best and most holy people. From Manu’s hands came the **Kshatriyas** (the rulers and warriors). From his thighs came the **Vaisyas** (the craftsmen). From his feet came the **Sudras** (the lowest in rank of all the people). Therefore, the caste system is divinely inspired.

## The Law of Karma

“The word ‘karma’ literally means ‘action’ and has reference to a person’s actions and the consequences thereof.”<sup>6</sup> The Hindu believes that his present state of life is determined by his actions in past lifetimes. The law of karma is the law of moral consequence or a paying back. The more good acts a person performs, the closer he moves towards being freed from the cycle of successive births and deaths. (This cycle, which could be endless, is called **samsara**. Freedom from the cycle is called **moksha**.) On the other hand, each time a person does an evil deed, he moves further away from Moksha.

The goal of the Hindu is to achieve enough good karma to remove himself from the cycle of rebirths and achieve eternal bliss (**nirvana**).<sup>7</sup>

## Reincarnation

“Reincarnation” literally means “to come again in the flesh.” After death, the human soul attaches to another body and returns to live another life.<sup>8</sup> The status of the person’s next life is determined by his karma. If a person stores up good karma for himself, then in the next life he will be born into a more noble position than before and vice versa.

## Moksha

For the Hindu, the chief aim of his existence is to be freed from samsara. Moksha is that release. When one achieves this

liberation, he enters into a state of fullness. Moksha (which could be understood as “salvation”) can be attained by one of three ways:

1. The path of knowledge (Jnana Marga)—This is primarily focused on learning the fact that man is not a separate entity but part of Brahman. Selfhood is an illusion. As long as man gives in to this illusion, he will be captive to samsara. The path of knowledge is designed to bring man out of samsara.
2. The path of works (Karma Marga)—This focuses on carrying out prescribed ceremonies, duties, and religious rights.
3. The way of devotion (Bhakti Marga)—This is a devotion to a deity which may be reflected in acts of worship. This devotion, based upon love for a deity, will also be carried out in human relationships. The **Bhagavad Gita** is the work which has devoted special attention to this way of salvation.

Hindus believe that all will ultimately attain moksha and enter nirvana.

## Nirvana

This is the final stage of the life journey for a person. It is reached upon the freedom of the soul from the chain of re-births. At this stage, humankind will be united to Brahman. Hinduism knows no such thing as eternal damnation. All will eventually enter nirvana.

## Sacred Writings

The Hindu scriptures were written over a period of approximately 2,000 years (1500 B.C.—500 A.D.). They reflect the practices and beliefs which arose during the different long periods of Hindu history. These writings began with the collection of oral traditions around 1,500 B.C. known as the **Vedas** (meaning “wisdom or “knowledge”). They are a collection of magic formulas, and sacrificial and praise hymns, to various Hindu deities. The concluding portion of the Vedas are called the **Upanishads**, which are a synthesis of Vedic teachings. They were composed during the period of 800–600 B.C. The Upanishads reportedly had an influence upon Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, as can be observed in some basic similarities between the Upanishads and the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. The Upanishads teach a belief in pantheism, karmic law, and reincarnation. The most well-known piece of Hindu scripture is the Mahabharata. This work consists of about 100,000 verses (compared to 31,273 verses in the Bible) and was composed over an 800-year period, beginning in about 400 B.C. Contained within the Mahabharata is the most beloved of all Hindu texts, the **Bhagavad-Gita**. The Gita tells the story of the warrior-prince **Arjuna** and his charioteer, Krishna, who is actually the god Vishnu in disguise.

## Evaluation of Hinduism

Some internal inconsistencies of Hinduism can be seen by comparing the God of the Gita with the God of earlier Vedic literature. The nature of God described in the Bhagavad-Gita is personal and seems to be a monotheistic God (only one God who is personal and not part of creation). However, in the earlier Vedic texts, God is seen primarily as pantheistic (all of existence is God).

Since Hinduism is largely a pantheistic religion, it is subject to the same flaws and errors as the pantheistic world view. (For an in-depth discussion on pantheism and its errors, see the Relational Concepts’ Study book *Why Christianity*.) We will only summarize some of these errors here.

## Questions about the Nature of God and Man

Pantheism is contradictory by nature. The absolute pantheist claims: “I am God.” But God is the changeless absolute. Humanity, however, goes through a process of change called “enlightenment.” So how could man be God when man changes but God does not?<sup>9</sup>

The Hindu says the world is not real, it is maya (an illusion). But how does he know this? In fact, if the world is an illusion, how can we distinguish between reality and fantasy at all? If what we think is real is not, then what real standard could we possibly use to judge that the world is not real? According to pantheists, individual minds do not exist. They are themselves aspects of the illusion (maya) and, therefore, provide no basis for explaining the illusion. But if the mind is part of the illusion, it can provide no basis for explaining the illusion.<sup>10</sup>

## Questions of Origin

Like all pantheists, the Hindu cannot adequately answer the question of origin. The Hindu says that God is infinite, yet somehow shares His being with creation. (For the Hindu, creation is *ex deo*—out of God—contrary to the Christian idea of creation being *ex nihilo*—out of nothing). This raises a serious question because the pantheist says that God is equal to creation (all is God). But how can something that is finite (creation) be infinite (God)? This is logically impossible. If the Hindu tries to avoid this problem by saying that the finite world is less than real, though existing, he makes God finite and less than real, for all is God.

The Hindu also has a problem with the origin of man and the illusion of this world. For if God is eternal, unchanging, and absolute, where did the illusion of this world and individual man come from? The illusion seems unexplainable, for if every man is really God (Atman is Brahman), then how could God be deceived by an illusion?

In short, like all pantheists, the Hindu cannot adequately answer the question of the origin of man or the universe.

## Questions of Meaning

Ultimately, for the Hindu, life is meaningless. Since good and evil do not really exist (see “Questions of Morality” below), there is really no difference in choosing to live like Mother Theresa instead of Hitler. There is purpose in the Hindu’s life, namely, to attain moksha, but this, too, seems to have no objective meaning since, according to Hinduism, all will eventually attain it. Brahman is the impersonal ultimate, but the Hindu cannot look to him (it) to find meaning. For in Brahman there are no rights or wrongs, good or bad, for all is Brahman, and it is the illusion of our minds that teach the notion of good and evil. Hindus are ultimately left to look for meaning within the order of their caste system or by following one of the paths to salvation (enlightenment).

## Questions of Morality

If evil is not real, as the Hindu says, then what difference would it make to love or hate, murder or show compassion, praise or curse? If there is no absolute moral difference between those actions, then absolute moral responsibilities do not exist. Cruelty and non-cruelty are ultimately the same.

*This belief that evil is an illusion is not only philosophically unsound, it is also unlivable. For even the pantheist tries to avoid pain. Even the pantheist looks both ways before crossing a street. Even the pantheist realizes that to get hit by a bus is not the same thing as to not get hit by a bus.*

This point is well made by Francis Schaeffer:

One day I was talking to a group of people in the digs of a young South African in Cambridge. Among others, there was present a young Indian who was of Sikh background but a Hindu by religion. He started to speak strongly against Christianity, but did not really understand the problems of his own beliefs. So I said, “Am I not correct in saying that on the basis of your system, cruelty and non-cruelty are ultimately equal, that there is no intrinsic difference between them?” He agreed.... The student in whose room we met, who had clearly understood the implications of what the Hindu had admitted, picked up his kettle of boiling water with which he was about to make tea, and stood with it steaming over the Indian’s head. The man looked up and asked him what he was doing and he said, with a cold yet gentle finality, “There is no difference between cruelty and non-cruelty.” Thereupon the Hindu walked out into the night.<sup>11</sup>

It is undeniable that absolute morals do exist. Hinduism fails in its attempt to answer the question of morality.

## Questions of Destiny

As mentioned above, Hindus believe that a person must, through one of the paths of salvation, attain moksha (salvation), which will release them from samsara (the wheel of karma), and usher them into nirvana. At this point they will be reunited to Brahman, which is fullness and bliss. But when one thoughtfully considers the Hindu doctrine of destiny, it seems to create more questions than answers. First of all, how does one know what nirvana is like? For Brahman does not speak to tell the Hindu that nirvana is fullness and bliss.

***Brahman is the impersonal force that, according to Hindu scholars, cannot be known, and no positive statements about it can be made. What, then, makes an impersonal force happy and blissful? How does the Hindu know that nirvana is something that should be desired instead of shunned?***

Secondly, even if you grant that nirvana is a state of bliss that is to be desired, what keeps one secure in nirvana once he has attained it? For according to Hinduism, Atman is Brahman (man is God) and has always been so. What, then, caused individual man to suffer from the illusion of the universe and lose his identity with Brahman? And, more importantly, what is to keep the Hindu, once he has reunited with Brahman, from suffering the same illusion again and having to repeat the cycle?

## Summary

Hinduism does not adequately answer the four most important questions with which every human being struggles. Because it is a pantheistic religion, it falls prone to all the errors of pantheism. In short, Hinduism is untrue because it does not correspond to reality, and it also has many internal inconsistencies and, therefore, does not cohere as a system.

## Let's Review

Three answers are supplied for each of the first four questions. Circle the answer you think is correct. Review the author's answers in Appendix A to see which answer is correct and why the other answers are not correct.

**#1** The majority of Hindus believe the following with regard to the nature of God:

- A. God is the same thing as the universe.
- B. God is separate from the universe.
- C. There is no God.

**#2** According to Hinduism, good and evil are

- A. Absolute and opposites, which are based in the nature of God.
- B. Illusions—they don't exist.
- C. Real, but no one can know them.

**#3** According to Hinduism, the goal of life is to

- A. Submit to the will of God.
- B. Submit to the rules of your caste.
- C. Attain moksha—liberation from the cycle of reincarnation.

**#4** Which of the following is an internal inconsistency of Hinduism?

- A. Salvation is attained by completing one of four paths.
- B. The caste system.
- C. The law of karma as it relates to the nature of Brahman.

**#5** Draw a line from the Hindu term on the left to its definition on the right.

Atman	The law of moral consequence
Brahma	The individual soul or self
Moksha	The most beloved of Hindu writings
Samsara	The creator god of Hinduism
Karma	The preserver god
Bhagavad-Gita	The cycle of rebirth
Vishnu	Release from the cycle of rebirth
Monism	The destroyer god
Siva	The belief that all reality is one

# Judaism

## Introduction

Judaism is known as the religion of the Jews. There are approximately 14 million Jews in the world today. There should, however, be a distinction made between modern day Judaism and Old Testament Judaism. The Judaism of today is known as “Rabbinic Judaism,” which refers to the religion of the rabbis that developed from about 500 B.C. onward and became systematized after 70 A.D. Old Testament Judaism began with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12 and continued until the Babylonian captivity in the 500s B.C. It has many differences compared to Rabbinic Judaism.

It will be the purpose of this study to focus on the doctrines and practices of modern day (Rabbinic) Judaism. In this scheme, Christianity is not the daughter religion of Judaism but is more correctly described as a sister. Both Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity branched out from the religion of the Old Testament Jews.<sup>1</sup>

Traditional (orthodox) Judaism claims to be God’s one true religion and that the Jews alone are the chosen people of God. Judaism has undergone many changes throughout its history. It has evolved significantly to a religion of three main sects, each with quite varying beliefs. There is also a distinction between the Jewish people and the religion of Judaism. Not all Jewish people consider themselves to be religious. Many are atheists, agnostics, or secular. But when Jewish people choose to be religious, they generally choose Judaism rather than another religion. They consider Judaism “our” religion, available for those Jews who choose to adhere. Other religions are considered to be “their/Gentile” religions, which are not appropriate for Jewish people to follow.<sup>2</sup>

## History

From about 500 B.C. onward, new institutions and ways of life developed that distinguished **rabbinic Judaism** from the religion of Old Testament Israel.<sup>3</sup> Some of the new things which arose during this period include the **synagogue** (house of worship and study), the office of **rabbi** (a leader holding religious authority), and the **yeshivot** (religious academies for the training of rabbis). These institutions and titles simply did not exist in the Old Testament.

In 586 B.C., the Babylonian government destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, which was a major impetus in the development of Rabbinic Judaism. This one act resulted in the cessation of sacrifices, which, according to the religion of the Old Testament Jews, could only happen at the Temple. Also, without a Temple, the priesthood could not fulfill their sacrificial duties. Rather than being guided, as they were historically by priests, prophets, and kings, rabbis became the authorities who established various laws and practices that had normative authority.<sup>4</sup>

The Rabbis changed Judaism into a system of works rather than a sacrificial system. After the Roman government destroyed the second Temple in 70 A.D., the Jewish people no longer had a God-ordained place for sacrifice. Not accepting the fact that Christ died once and for all to atone for sin, the rabbis were forced to seek a man-made solution for the problem. Reasoning that God would not demand something that was impossible to fulfill (in this case, the Temple sacrifices), they developed a substitute for atonement. Their solution was a threefold path (or the “Great Three Concepts”) which replaced the Old Testament system. This path involves: **teshuvah** (repentance), **tsedakah** (righteous deeds), and **tefillah** (prayer). In **Orthodox Judaism** and **Conservative Judaism**, this system of works became the basis for righteousness.

As an alternative solution, it has become widely accepted that fasting on the Day of Atonement constitutes a kind of “blood sacrifice,” as the body fluids and energies are literally diminished through the denial of nourishment and water.

The years of 400 B.C. to 200 A.D. saw the development of oral law, called the **Mishna** (a Rabbinic commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures). During the period of 200 A.D. to 500 A.D., the **Gemara** was developed, which is mainly an explanation and application of the Mishnah. So, the Gemara is really a commentary on the commentary on the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup> The combination of the Mishnah and the Gemara is known as the **Talmud** (the Jewish library of oral law and tradition). Much emphasis was placed on the Talmud to clarify a code for Jewish daily life.

## Modern Day Judaism

Modern day Judaism has developed into three main branches. The following chart will help describe what Jews of today believe. In using this chart, it is important to understand that Judaism is a religion of deed, not creed. It is possible to

be an atheist and yet an Orthodox Jew because one happens to attend an Orthodox congregation. What an individual believes about God or the afterlife is not nearly as important as how one lives, as defined by the branch to which one belongs. Therefore, do not assume in advance that a Jew believes a certain way because he or she belongs to a particular branch.

	<b>Orthodox Judaism</b>	<b>Reform Judaism</b>	<b>Conservative Judaism</b>
History and Characteristics	Orthodox Judaism dates back to the days of the Babylonian Captivity (500s B.C.). It is characterized by an emphasis on tradition and strict observance of the Law of Moses as interpreted by the rabbis.	Reform Judaism emerged following Jewish emancipation from ghetto life in the late 1700s in Germany. It sought to modernize Judaism and thus stem the tide of assimilation threatening German Jewry. Reform Judaism emphasizes ethics and the precepts of the prophets.	Conservative Judaism is an American movement with roots in the 1800s in Germany. It arose as a middle-ground reaction to what some viewed as the extreme assimilationist tendencies of Reform Judaism.
Other Names	Traditional or Torah Judaism	Liberal or Progressive Judaism	Historical Judaism
View of Scripture	The Torah, meaning essentially the teaching of the five books of Moses, is truth. The Orthodox Jews assert that a true Jew believes in revelation and the divine origin of the oral and written Torah. "Oral Torah" refers to various interpretations of the written Torah believed to have been given to Moses along with the written Torah. The Torah is accorded a higher place than the rest of the Hebrew Bible.	Reform Jews hold that the Hebrew Bible is a human document preserving the history, culture, legends, and hopes of a people. It is valuable for deriving moral and ethical insights. Revelation is an ongoing process.	The Conservatives believe that the Hebrew Bible, both the Torah and the other books, are the word of God and man. It is not inspired in the traditional sense but is rather dynamically inspired. Revelation is an ongoing process.
View of God	Orthodox Jews believe that God is spirit rather than form. He is a personal God, who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and compassionate.	Reform Judaism allows a varied interpretation of the "God concept" with wide latitude for naturalists, mystics, supernaturalists, or religious humanists. It holds, "The truth is that we do not know the truth."	The concept of God is nondogmatic and flexible. There is less atheism in Conservative Judaism than in Reform, but most often God is considered impersonal, with some holding to a finite god.

	<b>Orthodox Judaism</b>	<b>Reform Judaism</b>	<b>Conservative Judaism</b>
View of Man	Humanity is morally neutral with a good and an evil inclination. A person can overcome his or her evil bent and be perfected by his or her own efforts in observance of the Law.	People are basically good. Through education, encouragement, and evolution a person can actualize the potential already existing within him or her.	People are basically good, though Conservatives are not as likely to espouse humanism. Perfectibility can come through enlightenment. Humanity is “in partnership” with God.
View of the Law	The Law is the basis of Judaism. It is authoritative and gives structure and meaning to life. The life of total dedication to Halakhah (body of Jewish law) leads to a nearness to God.	The Law is an evolving, ever-dynamic religious code that adapts to every age. It is maintained that if religious observances clash with the just demands of civilized society, they must be dropped.	Adaptation to contemporary situations is inevitable. The demands of morality are absolute; the specific laws are relative.
View of Sin	Orthodox Jews do not believe in “original sin.” Instead, one commits sin by breaking the commandments of the Law.	Reform Jews do not believe in “original sin.” Sin is interpreted as the ills of society. Humanity is sometimes held to have a “divine spark” within.	Conservative Jews do not believe in “original sin.” The individual can sin by committing immoral or antisocial acts.
View of Salvation	Repentance (belief in God’s mercy), prayer, and obedience to the Law are necessary for a proper relationship with God. “Salvation” is not a Jewish concept, since Jewish people presume a favored standing with God; that is, they do not need salvation.	“Salvation” is obtained through the betterment of self and society. It is social improvement.	Conservative Jews tend toward the Reform view of salvation, but include the necessity of maintaining Jewish identity.
View of the Messiah	The Messiah is a human being who is not divine. He will restore the Jewish kingdom and extend his righteous rule over the earth. He will execute judgment and right all wrongs.	Instead of belief in the Messiah as a person or divine being, Reform Jews favor the concept of a Utopian age toward which humankind is progressing, sometimes called the “Messianic Age.”	Conservative Jews hold much the same view as the Reform concerning the Messiah.

	<b>Orthodox Judaism</b>	<b>Reform Judaism</b>	<b>Conservative Judaism</b>
View of Life after Death	Orthodox Jews believe there will be a physical resurrection. The righteous will exist forever with God in the “World to Come.” The unrighteous will suffer, but disagreement exists over their ultimate destiny.	Reformed Jews have no concept of personal life after death. It is said that a person lives on in his or her accomplishments or in the minds of others. Some are influenced by varieties of Eastern mystical thought where souls merge into one great impersonal life force.	Conservative Jews tend toward the Reform view of life after death. But they are less influenced by nontraditional ideas such as Eastern mysticism.
Distinctives in Synagogue Worship	The synagogue is a house of prayer as well as study; social aspects are incidental. All prayers are recited in Hebrew. Men and women sit separately. The officiants face the same direction as the congregation.	The synagogue is known as a “Temple.” The service has been modernized and abbreviated. English, as well as Hebrew, is used. Men and women sit together. Reform temples use choirs and organs in their worship services.	The synagogue is viewed as the basic institution of Jewish life. Alterations listed under Reform Judaism are found in a lesser degree in Conservative worship.
U.S. Membership (Source: 1992 American Jewish Yearbook)	6% of all American Jews	38% of all American Jews	35% of all American Jews

Notice that there is no Jewish equivalent to evangelical Christianity, which emphasizes a personal relationship with God. Orthodox Judaism is sometimes mistaken for this, but it is more concerned with living according to the traditional understandings of the law of Moses than with a personal relationship with God.<sup>6</sup>

## Jewish Practices

### The Annual Holiday Cycle

Almost all Jewish people, regardless of the branch to which they belong, observe at least some of the Jewish holidays. The chief holidays are the following:

The *High Holy Days*, observed in September or October, are the most solemn days on the calendar, centering on atonement from sin. They consist of *Rosh ha-Shanah* (the Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement). *Rosh ha-Shanah* is marked by the blowing of a ram’s horn (the *shofar*). *Yom Kippur*, 10 days later, is characterized by fasting and praying to God for the forgiveness of sins. After five more days comes *Sukkot* (Tabernacles), a joyful holiday marked by the construction of a *sukkah* (booth) decorated with festive fruit and plants. *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkot* go back to the Old Testament, the latter as a reminder that the people lived in tents as they journeyed to the Promised Land.

In November or December the Jews celebrate *Hanukkah*, a holiday that commemorates the victory of the Maccabees over the pagan desecrators of the Temple on December 25, 165 B.C. The New Testament mentions this holiday in John 10:22. During the week of *Hanukkah*, the *menorah* (candelabrum) is lit each night and potato pancakes are eaten.

In February or March, a carnival-like holiday called *Purim* is observed, recounting the events of the Book of Esther.

*Passover*, the most popular of all the Jewish holidays, falls in March or April and commemorates the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt as narrated in the Book of Exodus. This holiday is characterized by the eating of *matzoh* (unleavened bread) during the entire week and the observance of the *Seder*, or Passover meal, at the beginning of the week. The Last Supper of Jesus and the disciples was a Passover meal.

Finally, the holiday of *Shavuot* (Weeks/Pentecost) falls in May or June, with themes of springtime and harvest. Traditionally, this holiday was the day when God gave the Law to Israel at Mount Sinai.

## The Life Cycle

Besides the annual holidays, there are various distinctive lifestyle events that characterize the lives of most Jewish people. Three of these are:

- *Circumcision* of sons on the eighth day after birth—This ceremony is called the *bris*.
- *Bar mitzvah* (for boys) and *bat mitzvah* (for girls—not traditional)—This is the coming of age ceremony at age 13, consisting of a synagogue service followed by a reception.
- Jewish weddings take place under a *chuppah* (canopy). One high point is the smashing of a glass wrapped in a cloth to symbolize the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

## Daily Lifestyle

Many Jewish people observe the *Sabbath*, the weekly day of rest from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Some affix to their doorposts a *mezuzah*, a small box containing various Scripture portions. Some also keep *kosher*, meaning that they observe the various dietary laws. Not as many Jewish people observe these practices as in previous generations, and some are choosing to observe them not for religious reasons but as a means of connecting with their heritage.<sup>7</sup>

## Evaluation of Judaism

### Questions of Origin

Orthodox Judaism holds to belief in a monotheistic god who created the universe at some point in the past. Its doctrine also contains the creation of all creatures directly by God (not evolution). This belief is to be commended. It is also consistent with the teachings of the Old Testament, to which Orthodox Jews grant divine authority. Conservative and Reform Judaism are less dogmatic about the origin of the universe, with many of the Reform group believing in some sort of pantheistic God. The problems with this view are treated above under “Evaluation of Hinduism.”

### Questions of Meaning

For most Jews, meaning resides in their being part of Judaism. They place great emphasis on daily Jewish living, on observance of the customs of their particular synagogue, the Jewish holidays, and the annual cycle. As mentioned above, it is possible to be an atheist and still be an Orthodox Jew. This person simply identifies himself as “Orthodox” because he attends an Orthodox synagogue. What one believes about God, sin, or the afterlife is not as important as living a proper Jewish lifestyle. But this view of meaning is inconsistent and unlivable. Why perform religious customs if one's relationship with God is of secondary importance? To try to ascribe ultimate meaning to being Jewish is rather shallow, for one could also ascribe ultimate meaning to living a Buddhist life. But there has to be absolute meaning against which both of these lifestyles are judged. Ultimate meaning does not reside in being a member of Judaism but in one's relationship to the Creator. Many Orthodox Jews would say that the “Law” (written and oral) gives meaning to life. But this, too, seems arbitrary. One could point out that there is no basis for the oral law in the Old Testament, so why derive meaning from adherence to it? As for the “written law,” it calls for strict adherence to practices which are not possible to fulfill since the destruction of the Temple. So in what sense is one a member of Judaism when his religious practices are unlike the original intention of the religion?

### Questions of Morality

Morality for the Orthodox Jew lies in adherence to the Torah (the Law). But the Torah, at least the Hebrew Bible, called for certain practices which Jews no longer practice.

To stop practicing certain prescriptions and start new ones, simply because rabbis said to, seems contradictory. Rabbis claim that the Mosaic Law was divinely given, but the “three fold path for atonement” was created by rabbis when they could no longer adhere to the Law. Which should be followed? God’s Law or the Rabbis’ law?

For that matter, what is the basis for having rabbis at all, since they are not in the Hebrew Bible? The problem is worse for Reform Judaism. According to this view, sin is the evils in society, and morality lies in contributing to the betterment of society and self. One must then ask what is good for society and what constitutes evil? Without God as an absolute standard of morality, one must be subjective about good and evil. Invariably some will disagree about good and evil, and right will eventually be determined by majority opinion or custom.

## **Questions of Destiny**

Orthodox Jews state that there will be physical resurrection and eternal life for the righteous. The unrighteous will either suffer eternally or be annihilated. The orthodox position, in theory, is to be commended. It is logical that a just God would reward the righteous and punish the evil in the afterlife. Even the Hebrew Bible alludes to this fact when it questions why so many of the unrighteous prosper in this life. The complaint seems to be, “How can a just God allow the evil to prosper?” The obvious answer is, “God is just and eventually the evil will receive their just punishment.” Therefore, the presence of evil in this life demands the presence of justice in the afterlife. Although the Orthodox position on the afterlife seems to be true, it has little affect on their daily living. It would seem, if one believed in an almighty God who waits with rewards on the other side of the grave, that this would spur the individual to righteousness. The reality is that most Jews focus on the here and now and end up simply hoping that they will have enough good deeds (misvot) in their coffers when they meet God.

Reform Jews hold no concept of personal life after death. Many have migrated toward an eastern view that individuals join with an impersonal life force. This view suffers from the same critiques as the pantheistic view mentioned in Hinduism.

## **The Messiah**

It is not debated that the Hebrew Scriptures have hundreds of prophesies about the coming Messiah. It is, however, denied by Jews that these prophesies apply to Jesus Christ. The greatest problem with Rabbinic Jews is their failure to recognize that their Messiah has come. Jesus Christ specifically criticized the Jews of His day for this fault when He said, “ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these [the Scriptures] that testify about Me” (John 5:39; parenthetical explanation mine).

There are over 60 such Messianic prophesies in the Hebrew Scriptures, many of which were directly fulfilled by Jesus Christ during His first coming (for example, Micah 5:2 and Luke 2; Isaiah 53 and John 19; and Psalm 22 and John 19). The statistical probability for one person fulfilling all of these prophesies is almost incalculable. Yet Jesus Christ fulfilled them. Even in light of this vast evidence, Judaism refuses to accept the fact that their Messiah has indeed come.

# Let's Review

Three answers are supplied for each of the following questions. Circle the answer you think is correct. Review the author's answers in Appendix A to see which answer is correct and why the other answers are not correct.

- #1** The three most prominent branches of Rabbinic Judaism are:
- A. Hasidic, Zionist, and Reform
  - B. Conservative, Ultra-Orthodox, and Orthodox
  - C. Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform
- #2** A "rabbi" is
- A. Another word for "priest" in Old Testament Judaism
  - B. A position of religious leadership in Judaism which wasn't known under Old Testament Judaism
  - C. A religious leader of Rabbinic Judaism who offers sacrifices for the sins of the people
- #3** According to Reform Judaism, the Messiah is
- A. A real person who will lead the world to a "golden age"
  - B. A human being who is not divine, who will restore the Jewish kingdom and extend his righteous rule over the earth
  - C. The concept of a utopian age toward which mankind is progressing, sometimes called the "Messianic Age"
- #4** Because the sacrificial system of the Old Testament is no longer available, Rabbinic Judaism instituted a system of works to substitute for atonement. This system involves three main acts. They are:
- A. Observing the Jewish holidays, daily reading of the Talmud, and prayers
  - B. Synagogue attendance, observance of the Mosaic Law, and fasting
  - C. Repentance, righteous deeds, and prayer

**#5** Draw a line from the Judaism term on the left to its definition on the right.

Talmud	A holiday celebrating the Maccabean victory December 25, 165 B.C.
Purim	Oral law which is a rabbinic commentary on the Hebrew Scripture
Mezuzah	A holiday celebrating the events of the book of Esther
Rosh ha-Shanah	A combination of the Mishna and the Gemara
Hanukkah	Remembers Israel's deliverance from Egypt
Mishna	The Day of Atonement
Gemara	The Jewish New Year
Yom Kippur	An explanation and application of the Mishna
Passover	A small box containing Jewish Scripture affixed to a doorpost

# Buddhism

## Introduction

Buddhism encompasses both the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) as well as subsequent developments of these teachings throughout later centuries. Hundreds, if not thousands, of forms of Buddhism exist today. In Japan alone, there are over 200 sects. Buddhism is actually more of a philosophy as it is a religion, since it holds no specific belief in a supernatural deity (although later forms of Buddhism have developed polytheistic beliefs). Gautama did not deny the actual existence of deities, but he did dismiss them as being useless in everyday life.<sup>1</sup>

Buddhism did not begin as a quest for the truth about ultimate reality, namely, who God is and what His nature is. Instead, Buddhism began with the fact of human discontent and suffering and offered both a diagnosis and a cure. Siddhartha Gautama attempted to find a solution to the *symptoms* of man's problem instead of the basic or underlying problem itself. Like Hinduism, Buddhism holds to beliefs in karma (a person's actions and the consequences thereof), samsara (the cycle of successive births and deaths), and moksha (freedom from the cycle). But it has developed into a system that can be practiced alongside other faiths as well.

Buddhism developed two major movements known as Mahayana Buddhism (the larger of the two) and Theravada Buddhism (which is generally held to be "original" Buddhism). Mahayana Buddhism claims that "**enlightenment**" is available to all. Theravada Buddhism claims that, because of the rigors of attaining it, enlightenment is available to only a few of the committed. Theravada Buddhists are those who seek to reach enlightenment merely for their own personal welfare, whereas Mahayana Buddhists seek to help others attain enlightenment as well, even though this involves the obligation to reincarnate time and time again until all "sentient beings" (conscious beings) have attained enlightenment.

Geographically, Theravada is "Southern Buddhism" (the national religion of Thailand, Ceylon, Laos, Cambodia and Burma [now Myanmar]). Mahayana is "Northern Buddhism" (China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, and Nepal). In the United States, two typical Mahayanist schools are Zen and Nichiren Buddhism. Although Buddhism may be broadly classified into these two schools, the Theravada and Mahayana, many Buddhist scholars refer to three schools, adding the controversial Tibetan or Tantric Buddhism as a separate school.

There are approximately 360 Million Buddhists in the world today.

## History

Siddhartha Gautama (563 – 483 B.C.) was a member of one of the higher castes of Hinduism. Siddhartha, like many Hindus of his day, was disenchanted with the teaching of Hinduism, specifically, the caste system and the authority of the Vedas (see the previous discussion of Hinduism). He was also uneasy with the life of luxury he lived as the son of a local ruler. He left his wife and family in search for enlightenment, which he is said to have found while meditating for seven days under a Bo tree. After receiving the enlightenment, he took on the title "**Buddha**" or "Enlightened One." The remainder of Buddha's life was spent in travel, teaching the philosophy that would gain him multitudes of followers in the centuries to come.<sup>2</sup>

Buddha never claimed to be divine or anything other than human. He did not claim miraculous powers or superior moral character. He didn't even claim that his teachings were unique or an original source of wisdom. He told his followers to check his sayings to see if they made sense. If they didn't, then discard them. Despite this, after his death, many of his followers elevated Buddha to a level of divinity.

Buddhism has had a marked effect on the United States. The first Buddhist temple in America was built in 1898 in San Francisco. In 1942, the Buddhist Churches of America was incorporated, with 100,000 members.

## Basic Beliefs

Although Buddhism is an extremely diverse belief system, there are certain key teachings which nearly all Buddhists accept. They are: (1) the Four Noble Truths, (2) the Eight-Fold Path, (3) the impermanence of all things, and (4) the need for enlightenment (liberation through awareness).

## (1) The Four Noble Truths

The essence of Buddhism is contained in the “Four Noble Truths.” They are:

*The First Noble Truth*—Suffering (dukkha) is universal.

*The Second Noble Truth*—Suffering is caused by desire.

*The Third Noble Truth*—The way to liberate oneself is by eliminating all desire or craving.

*The Fourth Noble Truth*—Desire can be eliminated by following the “Eightfold Path.”

## (2) The Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path is the way to eliminate desire and, therefore, suffering. These are not steps to be taken in sequential order but attitudes and actions to be developed simultaneously.

*Right Belief*—You must accept the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

*Right Resolve*—You must renounce the pleasures of the senses. You must harbor no ill will.

*Right Speech*—Don’t lie, slander, or abuse anyone. Don’t engage in idle talk.

*Right Behavior*—Don’t destroy any living creature. Take only what is given to you. Don’t commit unlawful sexual acts.

*Right Occupation*—You must earn your living in a way that doesn’t harm anyone.

*Right Effort*—You must resolve to prevent any evil qualities from arising in you and to abandon any evil qualities that you possess in order to grow.

*Right Contemplation*—Be observant, strenuous, free of desire and sorrow.

*Right Meditation*—When you have abandoned all sensuous pleasures, evil qualities, both joy and sorrow, you must then enter the four degrees of meditation, which are produced by concentration.

## (3) The Impermanence of All Things

Existence itself causes suffering. Buddhism teaches that existence is made up of constantly changing parts. These parts are so short-lived that reality can in no way be called permanent. It just has the appearance of permanence. For example, the parts of my body change so rapidly that at any one point I do not have all the same body cells I had just a moment ago. This appearance of permanence causes ignorance of the true permanent state (**nirvana**). Such ignorance of reality brings more harmful desires—which results in suffering—which brings karmic rebirth. All of this imprisons one in individual existence.

In Buddhism, existence is believed to be made up of extremely temporary, ever changing parts. These are called *dhar-mas* or *skandhas*. Dharmas constitute experiential moments. Skandhas refer to the five parts making up the person: (1) the body, (2) feelings, (3) perceptions, (4) volition, impulses and emotions, and (5) consciousness. It is maintained that existence, by its very nature, is so fleeting that none of its components can, in any sense, be held to be permanent. Such phenomena (broken down to their constituent parts) exist for so short a time (nanoseconds) that they cannot be said to constitute anything even resembling permanence. However, reality must be something permanent if it is to be real. That which is nonpermanent cannot be real. Hence, one must transcend all impermanence and arrive at nirvana, the only permanent and real state of existence.

Naturally, if our personal existence is impermanent and “unreal,” the logical solution is to eradicate our personal existence and achieve permanence—that alone which is real. As noted, this is the Buddhist goal: to attain the state of nirvana.<sup>3</sup>

## (4) The Need for Enlightenment (liberation through awareness)

Nirvana is the final goal for Buddhists. The term literally means the “blowing out” of the flame of desire, the negation of suffering.<sup>4</sup> Buddhism tells us that since reality, as we perceive it, does not exist, one should arrive at this awareness and come to that state which alone is permanent, the state of nirvana.

In theory, this state lies somewhere “in-between” personal existence (which it isn’t) and complete annihilation (which it also, allegedly, isn’t). Recognition of this Buddhist truth is held to be an enlightened state of being, for one now understands what is real and what is not real.<sup>5</sup> It is described as non-being—the extinction of personal existence by absorption into pure being. Nirvana is passionless peace, detached serenity, cessation of desire, freedom from both pain and pleasure. Nirvana is “the extinction of ideas and concepts and suffering based on ideas and concepts; the ultimate dimension of reality.”<sup>6</sup> In order to attain nirvana, a person must overcome the “three unwholesome roots—desire, hatred and delusion.”<sup>7</sup>

# Other Beliefs

## God

There is no absolute God in Buddhism, although many have interpreted Buddhism as a search for God. Buddha did not deny the existence of God outright but said that the question of His existence “tends not to edification.” That is, those seeking enlightenment need to concentrate on their own spiritual paths rather than relying on an outside support.

Buddha did not claim divinity or even a divine source for his teachings. He saw himself only as an example to fellow monks and compared his teachings to a raft that should be left behind once the other side of the river has been reached.

Many Buddhists believe the existence of suffering and evil in the world is evidence against belief in an ultimate God. Although belief in an ultimate God is opposed by nearly all Buddhists, the Mahayana school developed notions of the Buddha who came to be represented in art and have been revered in ways very similar to the worship of Hindu gods.

## Reincarnation

The Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation teaches that people who die without reaching enlightenment will be reborn into this world. The goal of the Buddhist is to reach enlightenment (nirvana), which will free one from the cycle of rebirth. In the Theravadin school of Buddhism, enlightenment is reached by only a few and they stop being reincarnated after reaching it. The Mahayanist school believes that one may reach enlightenment in this life and may then continue in samsara to come back to help others reach nirvana. Such a person is known as a **Bodhisattva**.

## Morality

Buddhist laity are urged to follow the Five Precepts, which prohibit: (1) killing (including animals), (2) stealing, (3) illicit sexual relations, (4) wrong speech (including gossip), and (5) drugs or alcohol. In addition, they are expected to support the community of monks.

Monks and nuns follow a path of moderate asceticism, including strict celibacy and the repudiation of all personal property. Buddhist religious leaders often are involved in education and charity and even take part in politics; other leaders separate themselves in their monasteries, contacting the public only to gain funds. Original and Theravada teaching indicate that a Buddhist can, for the most part, help his fellow man only by showing him an example of dedication to meditation and self-denial. Mahayana teaching emphasizes “compassion,” which involves aiding people in all areas of their lives, even though such aid does not lead directly toward nirvana.

## Man

According to Buddhism, man is an impermanent collection of five parts called skandhas, which include the physical body, emotions, perception, volition, and consciousness. Death causes these parts to be dismantled, and the individual ceases to be a cohesive unit when it is taken apart.

Buddhism does begin with an analysis of the world of appearances, especially of man. As with Hinduism, Buddhism sees the cycle of reincarnation as shot through with pain, largely because life is characterized by impermanence.

Buddha added the notion that all creatures, including man, are fictions: there is really no “self,” only a series of occurrences that appear to be individual persons and things. Once the so-called person is broken down into his component parts and his different actions and attitudes analyzed during the course of time, it is seen that there is really nothing holding it all together. (The question of how there can be both reincarnation and striving for salvation without a self has occupied Buddhist philosophy from the start.) The notion of no self is difficult, and much effort is spent trying to grasp it fully.

## Scriptures

In Theravada, there are three groups of writings considered to be holy. They are called “The Three Baskets” (Tripitaka or Pali Canon). The Vinaya Pitaka (discipline basket) contains rules for the higher class of Buddhists (monks). The Sutta Pitaka (teaching basket) contains the teachings of the Buddha on the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold Path. The Abhidhamma Pitaka (metaphysical basket) contains Buddhist philosophy. The total volume of these three groups of writings is about 11 times larger than the Bible.

The Mahayana scriptures are much larger, containing more than 5,000 volumes. Additional writings are still being added to this collection. Many Mahayana sects have chosen certain favorite texts to which they refer exclusively, which explains the vast differences between the beliefs of these differing sects.

Some general differences between the Theravada and Mahayana schools include:

THERAVADA BUDDHISM	MAHAYANA BUDDHISM
Buddha is a human teacher	Buddha is an enlightened, eternal being
Complete self-effort for enlightenment	Self-effort is necessary, but additional help from Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhist gods is accepted
Gods are rejected	Gods are accepted
Prayer equals meditations	Prayer may be petitionary
Anti-supernatural	Supernatural accepted
Attains the state of the Buddha (nirvana apart from the world, one can only help oneself)	Attains the state of Bodhisattva (nirvana in the world, e.g. Bodhisattva postpones nirvana to help others find it)
Atheistic/ agnostic	Atheistic/ agnostic/ polytheistic
Nirvana replaces samsara (existence)	Nirvana is samsara (existence)

## Buddhism Today

Most people in the West know of Buddhism through two sects: (1) Zen Buddhism and (2) Tibetan (tantric) Buddhism (also known as Lamaism, after the Dalai Lama). This is due mainly to the many celebrities who have espoused these belief systems. The doctrines of each are outlined below.

### Zen Buddhism

One of the most popular forms of Buddhism among non-Asian North Americans is Zen Buddhism. As one of the many schools of Mahayana Buddhism, the primary goal of Zen is to achieve personal enlightenment by meditating upon specific illogical phrases. Zen's emphasis on self-effort, contemplative experience, and detachment from one's desires appeals to many Westerners who have abandoned rational philosophies and religious dogmas for a religion that stresses "nonthinking."<sup>8</sup>

Zen's origins are found in the man Tao-sheng (360—434 A.D.), a Mahayana Buddhist, and in the person Bodhi-dharma (died 534 A.D.). Tao-sheng migrated from China to Japan, where his form of Buddhism combined with Taoism's emphasis on oneness with nature. This blend is known as Zen ("meditation").

According to Zen Buddhists, Zen itself cannot be defined because it has no definition. Its philosophy cannot be delineated because it has no theory or system of principles. "Zen is not something that can be explained in words, ... but is a practice which is carried out for one's own self-development and leads to a state of liberation called satori."<sup>9</sup> Zen is not a set of teachings. It has no doctrines which are imposed on its followers. As such, it has no sacred writings. "Zen teaches nothing. It is we who teach ourselves. Zen merely points the way."<sup>10</sup> Zen is not a religion, since it has no God to worship. There is no object (God) in Zen upon which to fix the thought of the disciple. Zen just "feels." "The feeling is all in all."<sup>11</sup>

**God**—Zen Buddhism is a religion of pantheism, although most of its adherents would not label themselves as pantheists. God is man and man is God. D.T. Suzuki, a famous Zen Buddhist, says, "Simple people conceive that we are to see God as if He stood on that side and we on this side. It is not so. God and I are one in the act of my perceiving Him. Everything and everyone are God. Buddhas (enlightened ones) and sentient beings (those still ignorant) both grow out of one mind, and there is no other reality than this mind."<sup>12</sup>

This "Mind/ Reality" is not well defined by Zen Buddhists. Generally, it is said of reality/ mind/ God that "It is neither existence nor nonexistence, it is neither unity nor plurality. This is God and God is All, and All is Mind, and Mind is Buddha, and Buddha is the Way, and the Way is Zen."<sup>13</sup>

**Man**—Individual humans are a manifestation of the All. People only appear to be individuals. The goal of Zen is to help people get beyond this illusion and realize their oneness and so become immortal.

**Enlightenment**—Personal experience plays a large part in the life of a Zen Buddhist. “Personal experience,” says D. T. Suzuki, “is everything in Zen.”<sup>14</sup> For Suzuki, the experience of Zen cuts through rational authority and objective revelation and unveils spiritual truth. He then argues that Zazen is “the most practical method of attaining spiritual enlightenment.”<sup>15</sup> *Za* means “sitting” and *Zen* means “meditation.” According to Zen Buddhists, *Zazen*, like Zen, cannot be explained. The heart of *Zazen* is non-thinking. Since non-thinking excludes rational thought, to explain non-thinking would automatically put it in a category of thinking and thus miss its essence. Therefore, *Zazen* must be something that can only be experienced for oneself.<sup>16</sup> Zen Buddhists seek truth through meditation, and *Zazen* can only be performed through self-effort. Zen teaches that every man has a Buddha nature which can only be discovered by man’s self-effort.

Unlike other forms of Buddhism, Zen Buddhists place no faith in Siddharta Guatama. In fact, they see such faith as an obstacle. Zen Buddhists must not look to the Buddha but know that they are Buddhas themselves. “For Buddha’s sake, Buddha is to be given up. This is the only way to come to the realization of the truth of Zen.”<sup>17</sup>

The ultimate goal of the Zen Buddhist is the same as for all Buddhists: the attainment of nirvana, which is the extinction of all desires and passions and the extinction of one’s individual identity. The road to nirvana involves ridding oneself of dualistic thinking. And the root of dualistic thinking is logic. Such logical thinking keeps us blinded to the truth. In order to help the disciple of Zen rid himself of a logical perception of reality, the Zen master developed the *koan*. The *koan* involves illogical sayings and questions as well as responses to them. For example, if you have heard the sound of one hand clapping, can you make me hear it, too?

To attain nirvana, one must transcend all things that keep one from seeing life in its fullness. This immediate goal of the Zen Buddhist, however, is uniquely Zen. It is called *satori* and involves an experiential realization that duality is the illusion of the mind. *Satori* is an inner perception of all reality as one. It is the heart of Zen. *Satori* is achieved through the *koan*. It is this process from the *koan* to *satori* and then to nirvana that is the road to spiritual happiness.

## Tibetan Buddhism

Many people in the West had their first introduction to Buddhism through the person of the Dalai Lama. The Lama is the most well-known figure in Tibetan or Tantric Buddhism, which arose in the country of Tibet. Like the other branches of Buddhism, Tibetan or Tantric Buddhism traces its roots to the teachings and life of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. Meanwhile, having adopted elements of Bon (the indigenous religion of Tibet) and Tantrism (an Indian metaphysical system, described in the next section), Tibetan Buddhism has developed into an exceptionally distinctive form of Buddhism.<sup>18</sup>

Only after Buddhism in Tibet had absorbed some of the occultic features of Bon did the Tibetans accept the religion as their own. One day, tradition maintains, a casket fell from the heavens and landed at Lhato Thori’s (a Tibetan ruler’s) feet while he stood on the roof of his palace. Buddhist books and a model of a golden pagoda (a Buddhist temple in the form of a tower) were in the casket, and within the books were written six syllables: Om Mani Padme Hum (which became a sacred prayer of the Tibetans). The translation of the syllables is “Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus,” or simply, “Hail to the Buddha in our Hearts.” Tibetan Buddhists believe that the continuous chanting of these syllables will deliver a person from the cycle of rebirth and send that person to nirvana at death.

In the 1400s, the death of Gedun Truppa, a Tibetan ruler, instituted the distinctive Tibetan Buddhist system of incarnations from Lama (“superior one”) to Lama. The Tibetans believed that since Gedun Truppa had attained Buddhahood and therefore was liberated from rebirth, he had chosen to transmigrate (reincarnate) to another human body to reassume leadership over the Gelukpa (a sect within Tibetan Buddhism). In the 1600s, Sonam Gyatso, head of the Gelukpa and supposed incarnation of Gedun Truppa, was given the title of Dalai Lama by Altan Khan, ruler of Mongolia. Dalai is a Mongolian word that means “ocean.” Thus, the rendering of Dalai Lama is “ocean of wisdom.”

In 1959, because of political and religious pressures within Tibet, the Dalai Lama fled his country and sought exile in India. Since that time, he has experienced a level of fame and is sought after for speaking engagements and personal consultations. “The Dalai Lama has become one of the most visible religious leaders in the world,” says John Powers in *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*. “Since receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, he has been in great demand as a public speaker, and he is widely recognized as a leading figure in international efforts to promote human rights.”<sup>19</sup>

**Philosophy**—Tibetan Buddhism has borrowed from Indian Tantrism as well as Bon. Tantrism believes in the interwovenness, interdependence, and oneness of all things. Tantrism is a mystical belief system that incorporates magical procedures in the attainment of paranormal powers. In Tantric Buddhism, these powers are employed in the quest for enlightenment. Practitioners of Tantrism use the mind, speech, and body in their meditation. Tantric Buddhists attribute considerable importance to the mantra as the audio technique of meditation. They believe that the sacred syllables of a mantra have the power to penetrate the Absolute and communicate with divine spirits, or rather the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas.<sup>20</sup> Their most sacred mantra is *Om Mani Padme Hum*.

The total dedication to the quest for enlightenment through the use of Tantrism is known as the Short Path. The Short Path employs techniques to reach enlightenment much more quickly through far fewer lifetimes than would be otherwise accomplished through Mahayana practices. Since spiritual aids in Tantrism are so powerful and dangerous, Tibetan Buddhists urge that they be used only under the instruction and guidance of a trained lama or yogin. In short, Tibetan Buddhists enlist special Tantric techniques such as mantras (verbal repetition of phrases during meditation), yantras, (the visual technique of meditation), and mudras (symbolic hand gestures) to attain enlightenment.

Another significant doctrine that Tibetan Buddhism absorbed from Hinduism is shaktism, a belief system that worships the divine power of the female partner of a particular god. Translated into the Vajrayana (another name for Tibetan Buddhism) doctrine, shaktism attributed each Buddha and Bodhisattva with female counterparts. The union of these male and female counterparts became a spiritual symbol and means to nirvana. Soon many Tibetan Buddhists began to live out their shaktism, and sexual immorality became common. Many other Tibetan Buddhists regard this important doctrine as a symbolic expression of the oneness of body and spirit and the union between supreme bliss and wisdom. They disdain any reference to Tibetan Buddhism as being a form of shaktism. For them, the male and female representations must unite in order for a person to attain Buddhahood, but that person must not abuse this principle by engaging in sexual promiscuity. “To illustrate this point,” says the Dalai Lama, “when the Buddha taught the various higher tantras, he did so while appearing as the principal deity of the respective mandala (deity) in union with female counterpart. Therefore, practitioners must also, in their imaginations, visualize themselves in the divine aspect of a deity in union with female counterpart.”<sup>21</sup>

## Evaluation of Buddhism

Although early Buddhism held no specific belief in God, most modern day forms of Buddhism are pantheistic in nature. Because of this, Buddhism is subject to many of the same critiques as Hinduism. (See the section on the Evaluation of Hinduism.)

### Questions of Origin

Buddhist doctrine claims that “The world exists because of causal actions, all things are produced by causal actions and all beings are governed and bound by causal actions. They are fixed like the rolling wheel of a cart, fixed by the pin of its axle shaft” (*Sutta-Nipata* 654). The universe was not “created,” neither is it permanent. This statement seems flawed for many reasons. If the world exists because of causation, then who, or what, is the cause? Certainly not a personal God, for He, according to Buddhism, does not exist. But why or how would the non-personal “All” cause a universe? The impersonal causing the personal is contrary to all observation and logic. It also assumes the less complex causes the more complex. Further, if the world is just an illusion, then someone is deceiving us. If we’re not being deceived, then what we see is real.

### Questions of Meaning

Buddhism teaches that the meaning of life is to attain nirvana. One reaches this goal by self-effort through the Eight-Fold Path, or similar duties. But Buddhism fails to give a sufficient explanation as to why the elimination of desire through this path will eliminate suffering. How does the Buddhist know that suffering is caused by desire? After all, the Buddhist himself desires to eliminate suffering. Doesn’t the Buddhist desire to attain nirvana? Buddhism does not answer why the desire for nirvana, or the desire to eliminate desires, does not bring on more suffering. Further,

*Why should the ultimate meaning in life lie in the attainment of nirvana? Nirvana itself seems undesirable. It seems to be without real definition, it is neither existence nor annihilation. It is described as non-being—the extinction of personal existence by absorption into pure being. Nirvana is passionless peace, detached serenity, cessation of desire, freedom from both pain and pleasure. Who would want that? Better to be reincarnated!*

Why should one desire to attain a state of existence which is free from pleasure? Doesn't the entire system of Buddhism start with the fact that suffering is real and it should be eradicated? But why would one want to eradicate suffering unless its opposite, pleasure, is more desirable?

## **Questions of Morality**

Buddhist morality is based upon adherence to the Eightfold Path and the Five Precepts. These practices are relative in nature because they are not based in an absolute moral being. They are, therefore, arbitrary and capricious.

Morality for the Buddhist seems to be a secondary issue. This is because they are not dealing with the issue of sin, for in their view it doesn't exist. What focuses the attention of the Buddhist is the illusion of suffering. It is, therefore, the Buddhist goal to eliminate suffering through self-effort rather than adherence to a moral law.

Lastly, morality for the Buddhist seems to be totally unnecessary. According to Buddhism, all people have the Buddha nature within themselves and all will eventually realize this Buddha nature and attain nirvana. So what, then, is the point of even naming a moral code if there is no ultimate benefit in following it?

## **Questions of Destiny**

The goal of the Buddhist is to attain enlightenment and reach nirvana. Depending on the brand of Buddhism, once one reaches enlightenment, he will either merge with ultimate reality or be reincarnated to help others find enlightenment.

Even if you grant that nirvana is a state of bliss that is to be desired, what keeps one secure in nirvana once he has attained it? According to the Buddhist, the only thing that is real is nirvana. What, then, caused individual man to suffer from the illusion of the individual self and lose his oneness with nirvana? And, more importantly, what is to keep the Buddhist, once he has attained enlightenment, from suffering from the same illusion again and having to repeat the cycle all over? The doctrine of nirvana is internally inconsistent.

## **Summary**

Buddhism does not adequately answer the four most important questions with which every human being struggles. Because, in practice, Buddhism as a pantheistic religion falls prone to all the errors of pantheism. In short, Buddhism is untrue because it does not correspond to reality, and it also has many internal inconsistencies and, therefore, does not cohere as a system.

# Let's Review

Circle the correct answer. Review the answers in Appendix A to see which answer is correct and why the other answers are incorrect.

- #1** Buddhism strives to
- A. Teach people to live sinless lives to attain salvation.
  - B. Teach people that all religions are true.
  - C. Eliminate suffering by eliminating desire for illusory things.
- #2** According to Buddhism, man is
- A. Created morally neutral and must learn to do good.
  - B. An impermanent collection of 5 parts which separate at death.
  - C. Eternally doomed to repeat the cycle of reincarnation without hope of release.
- #3** A Bodhisattva is:
- A. One of the creators of Zen Buddhism.
  - B. An illogical saying (in Zen) designed to help one attain enlightenment.
  - C. One who delays entering nirvana to help others attain it.
- #4** According to Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), God is
- A. To be feared because of the cycle of samsara.
  - B. To be worshipped through meditation and chants.
  - C. A concept which is not useful for everyday life.

- #5** Draw a line from the Buddhist terms on the left to its definition on the right.

Siddhartha Gautama	Chanting Om Mani Padme Hum (Hail to the Buddha in our hearts) can achieve nirvana
Theravada Buddhism	The state of enlightenment
Mahayanist Buddhism	One who has reached enlightenment and returned to help others
Buddha	The scripture of Theravada Buddhism— 11 times larger than the Bible
Nirvana	The belief that Buddha was an eternal being
Bodhisattva	Buddha
Desire	The belief that Buddha was a human teacher, not an eternal being
The Three Baskets	The reincarnation of Gedun Truppa, a Tibetan ruler who attained Buddhahood in the 1400s
Zen Buddhism	The cause of all suffering (essentially the root of all evil)
Tibetan Buddhism	A Buddhism emphasizing personal experience and self-teaching
The Dalai Lama	The “Enlightened One”

# Christianity

## Introduction

Christianity is currently the world's largest religion. There are about 2 billion people in the world who claim to be Christian ([www.adherents.com](http://www.adherents.com)). The term "Christian," as used in the modern world, includes a wide variety of sects, denominations, and groups, which often have conflicting doctrines. We will attempt to describe the beliefs of the major groups which make up Christianity.

Historic Christianity is an exclusive belief system. In other words, Christianity claims to be the only true faith, disclosed in the person of Jesus Christ, outside of whom there is no salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Christianity is a monotheistic religion which holds to the belief in one eternal, all powerful, all knowing God. This God brought everything that exists into being by the power of His word, and creation continues to depend upon God for its existence (Revelation 4:11).

## History

Christianity dates its beginning to approximately 30 A.D. During this time period, Jesus of Nazareth preached His **Gospel** in the land of Palestine (modern day Israel). He was crucified on a Roman cross, died, and was resurrected on the third day. Soon after this, His disciples began spreading the teachings of Jesus Christ (meaning, Jesus the Messiah) across the known world, making more disciples. Most of the early disciples were Jews who saw Christianity not as a new religion but as the fulfillment of Judaism in the coming of the promised Messiah of the Old Testament.

Christianity has grown into a religion of three main divisions. They are Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. These three groups are referred to as "Traditional" or "Orthodox" Christianity. The meaning of this is simply that these groups adhere to the doctrine of (1) the Trinity (one God, three persons), (2) the complete deity and humanity of Christ, (3) the necessity of Christ's death to pay for sin, and (4) the authority of the New Testament. There are many groups that call themselves "Christian" yet deny some of these basic affirmations. These nontraditional groups will be treated as "cults" and, as such, will not be studied here. Within Protestantism, there are further subdivisions or **denominations**. (For a detailed look at the history of Christianity, see the Relational Concepts' studybook *The History of Christianity*.)

## Beliefs

### God

The God of Christianity is a monotheistic God. He possesses many attributes, some of which are: eternity (Psalm 90:2), omnipresence (Jeremiah 23:23), omniscience (1 John 3:20), omnipotence (Psalm 115:3), and sovereignty (Zechariah 9:14). God exists as three distinct persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) with one essence or nature. All three persons of the **Trinity** (2 Corinthians 13:14) are fully God and are involved in every act of the Triune God. God is a person. He has intellect, emotion, and will, in distinction to the non-personal god of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Christian God has chosen to reveal Himself to man through nature (Romans 1:20), conscience (Romans 2:14-15), Jesus Christ (John 1:14), and the Bible (2 Peter 1:20-21).

### Man

Man was created by God in His image (Genesis 1-3). God created man good. One of the good attributes God gave man was free will. Man, through his free will, chose to sin by disobeying God (Genesis 3). Because of the sin of Adam, mankind is born sinful (**original sin**) and is eternally lost if left in his or her sinful state (Romans 6:23). Man's chief problem is that sin has alienated him from fellowship with God. Humans will live forever. Those justified before God will live forever with God, and those not justified will be eternally separated from God and His goodness.

### Morality

The basis of Christian morality is the nature of God. God's nature is one of absolute goodness and moral perfection, and God's laws flow from His nature. Since God is unchanging, He provides an absolute standard of good to which every hu-

man in history is subject. Contrary to pantheistic religions, the morality of Christianity is absolute and unchanging, and good and evil do exist in the real world. What is evil for one is evil for all. Contrary to Islam, good flows from the nature of God, not from His will or laws. Therefore, for the Christian, morality is based in the nature of God.

## Origin and Destiny

God brought everything in the universe into existence out of nothing. He spoke and it was (Genesis 1). Everything that God created was good. God created differing categories of plants and animals, all of which reproduce “after their own kind.” Creation is not eternal but began at a certain point in the past. God sustains all of creation by His power (Hebrews 1:3). Because of the sin of man, creation is also affected in a negative manner (Romans 8). At some point in the future, God will bring an end to the current universe through judgment. God will then form a “new heaven and new earth” which will last forever (Revelation 21).

## Salvation

According to the Bible, salvation is found in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). God’s justice demanded that the sin of man be paid for. Because man had no means to pay this infinite price, God paid for it Himself. Christ, through His death on the cross, purchased redemption for the sinful. Man must respond to this gracious free gift by faith in the work of Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). Man is justified on the basis of Christ’s death. Those who reject the gift of God in Christ Jesus will be eternally separated from God in the Lake of Fire.

## Sacred Writings

Christianity has historically held that the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament are the inspired Word of God.<sup>1</sup> As such, they are normative for believers and are thus referred to as the **Canon**, which is from the Greek, meaning “rule” or “measuring rod.”<sup>2</sup> These books are held to be direct revelation from the mind of God so that man may know all that is necessary for life (**salvation**) and godliness (**sanctification**). Some include the Apocrypha as deuterocanonical (i.e., below the Old and New Testaments).<sup>3</sup>

## Modern Day Christianity

As mentioned, Christianity has developed into three major branches, with varying beliefs. These three groups are Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. We will summarize their beliefs below.

## Historical Development of the Three Branches

Each of the three main branches of Christianity claim ties to the original apostles. Roman Catholicism dates itself back to the Apostle Peter, seeing the pope (the bishop of Rome) as Peter’s spiritual descendant. Protestantism claims originality by going back to the New Testament. Eastern Orthodoxy claims originality through the church they believe the apostles and apostolic fathers established in the first centuries of Christianity. Eastern Orthodoxy developed a Greek-speaking church from the Christianity centered in Alexandria in North Africa. Western Roman Catholicism developed a Latin-speaking church from the early Christianity in the city of Carthage in North Africa. The Carthage Christianity eventually settled in Rome and the Alexandrian Christianity in Constantinople. They gradually became more distinct after the 300s and officially split in 1054 over differences about the authority of the pope, the liturgy, the church calendar, and the “filioque” clause (see the next paragraph).<sup>4</sup>

Eastern Orthodoxy likes to identify itself as the church of the seven councils.<sup>5</sup> The councils it’s referring to are the first seven church councils, the last of which was held in the city of Nicea in 787. All three branches of Christianity agree with the decision of the seven councils with two exceptions. One, the Protestants don’t accept the last council’s decision to uphold the use of icons. And two, the Catholics add what is called the “filioque,” a clause that says the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father **and the Son**.<sup>6</sup> The Catholics also continue to have church councils, all of which the Orthodox and Protestants reject. In essence, the first seven councils establish the doctrine of the Trinity and the 100% humanity and 100% deity of Christ.

Today, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have spread to nearly every nation in the world. The Eastern Orthodox Church is mainly found in Russia, Romania, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Constantinople, Georgia, Antioch, Poland, Cyprus, Alexandria, Albania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Jerusalem ([www.bible.ca/Bible.htm](http://www.bible.ca/Bible.htm)).

## Beliefs of the Christians

The historical development of the Eastern and Western Church and the development of Protestantism are covered in our Relational Concepts' studybook *The History of Christianity*. Here we shall deal with the theological similarities and differences in the three branches. [There are, of course, liberals in each branch who would not hold to these beliefs.]

	<b>Eastern Orthodox</b>	<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>Protestant</b>
God	God is personal but unable to be known. He must be thought of mystically, not logically, but also not pantheistically, since God and man remain distinct. <sup>7</sup>	God is personal and able to be known, but only through the church. He has a mystical presence but is known through a logical understanding of Roman Catholic sacred traditions.	God is personal and knowable. The mysteries of God cannot be known, since He is infinite, but what He has revealed can be known logically.
Trinity	All 3 branches believe the same—one God, three eternal distinct persons.		
Christ	All 3 branches believe the same—Christ was 100% deity and 100% humanity.		
Resurrection	All 3 branches believe Jesus was bodily resurrected and believers will be bodily resurrected.		
Second Coming	All 3 branches believe Jesus will bodily return to earth.		
Heaven and Hell	All 3 branches believe in heaven for believers and hell for the lost.		
Icons	The Eastern Church, after a powerful internal struggle (in the 700s) determined icons to be valuable reminders which aid worship and a love for whoever they represent. Anyone destroying an icon is to be excommunicated.	The Western Church always accepted icons as an aid to (not an object of) worship. Their icons tend to include more statues than the Eastern Church, which focuses on pictures.	Protestants reject all icons as idolatry, agreeing with the Orthodox iconoclasts of the 700s. Protestants tend to focus on music and literature, since they are the only art forms used in the New Testament.
The Holy Spirit	The Eastern Church emphasizes the Holy Spirit as their source of all authority. His mystical presence governs the Bible, the seven church councils the clergy and every lay person. They believe the Catholics have replaced His authority with the pope and the Protestants replaced Him with the Bible ( <i>sola Scriptura</i> ). The Orthodox insist the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father, <u>not</u> the Son (i.e., they reject the Catholic filioque clause). <sup>8</sup>	The Roman Catholics believe in a distinct Holy Spirit but depend on the Vatican and church councils for their authority. There is also a charismatic element not present in the Eastern Church, and they hold to the “filioque” clause, that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father <b>and the Son</b> .	Protestants believe in a distinct Holy Spirit who regenerates, indwells, baptizes, and seals believers, while convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. They believe the Spirit inspired the Bible, from which all authority comes. There is also a Protestant charismatic movement. (Actually, the movement began in Protestantism, around the year 1900.)

	<b>Eastern Orthodox</b>	<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>Protestant</b>
<b>The Bible</b>	The Orthodox Church believes it is the Holy Spirit, not the Bible alone, which guides us into all the truth. They see the sufficiency of Scripture ( <i>sola Scriptura</i> ) as the sin of the Protestant Reformation. Their Bible uses the Greek (LXX) Old Testament and includes the Apocrypha as well as the New Testament.	Catholics believe the church interprets Scripture. The Bible is a product of the church, not vice versa. So the pope and church councils determine the meaning of the Scripture. Catholics use the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament as translated into the Latin Vulgate in the 400s. They also added the Apocrypha in 1546. <sup>9</sup>	Protestants believe in <i>sola Scriptura</i> —the sufficiency of the Bible alone. The Bible possesses judgment on the church, not vice versa. The Protestants do not include the Apocrypha books because Jesus never quoted from them, and the apostles never referred to them as authoritative Scripture.
<b>Man</b>	The Eastern Church is very different from the other 2 branches on this point. They believe man becomes god, not in the pantheistic sense but in gradually becoming divinized. Athenasius said, “God became man so that men might become gods.” The process is called “theosis.”	Catholics believe man is a distinct being from conception, who will be made sinless eventually. A few are already saints. The rest go through purgatory for cleansing, but none are or become anything that would be called a god.	Protestants believe man is a distinct being from conception (or birth or inbetween). Humans will remain distinct as resurrected beings somewhere forever. When they are saved, people become saints, destined for heaven. Unbelievers are lost, destined for the lake of fire. But humans never become anything that would be called gods.
<b>Salvation</b>	For the Eastern Orthodox, salvation is the process of theosis—man becoming god. It begins when one is baptized into the church. Usually one is born and baptized into one of the nationally autonomous Orthodox churches. Then the divinizing process continues to change man into god through the mystical work of the Holy Spirit. <sup>10</sup>	For Roman Catholics, salvation is by faith in Christ plus the work outlined in the 7 sacraments of the church. It is a process but not in the sense of becoming god. However, one never knows if a person is saved. A person will be saved if they accomplish enough work through the church. Of the 3 branches, only Catholics believe it is possible for non-Christians to be saved through good works. <sup>11</sup>	Protestants believe salvation is through faith alone ( <i>sola fidia</i> ), provided by the grace of God alone ( <i>sola gracia</i> ), as revealed in the Bible alone ( <i>sola Scriptura</i> ). This salvation comes as a decision to receive Christ.
<b>Liturgy</b>	The Orthodox are very sensitive to having the correct liturgy. Actually, they say the church is defined by right doctrine and right worship. And right worship is the right liturgy.	Catholics are very liturgical, but unlike the Orthodox, they may change it (such as doing mass in the native language instead of Latin) if decreed by a church council.	Protestants put no sacred value in liturgy. Most believe the apostles did not prescribe one for the church.

	<b>Eastern Orthodox</b>	<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>Protestant</b>
<b>Sin</b>	The Orthodox do not believe in original sin. They deny that man has any sort of inherited sin nature. Man is born good and chooses to sin. All sin is personal. Basil the Great said, “Do not then go beyond yourself to seek the evil and imagine that there is an original nature of wickedness” [Cyril of Jerusalem, Catech 13.2].	The Catholics follow Augustine’s concept of original sin—man was born with a guilt inherited from Adam’s sin. That sin must be abolished before man can stand before God. Adam was able not to sin. Man today is not able not to sin.	Most Protestants agree with Augustine’s concept of original sin but elaborate on it, saying there are three kinds of sin: (1) imputed sin—guilt inherited from Adam as part of the human race, (2) natural sin—the tendency to do non-God acts, and (3) personal sin—doing those acts.
<b>Tradition</b>	Although tradition is beneath Scripture, it is extremely important to the Eastern Church. Tradition (especially the first seven church councils) and Scripture are a product of the mystical work of the Holy Spirit, but the general feeling is the older the source, the better it is.	Tradition is a major part of Roman Catholicism. Actually, the voice of the Vatican and all the church councils through the years are considered “sacred tradition.” This tradition governs everything from Scripture to the sacraments.	The only traditions Protestants find acceptable are the teachings of the apostles in the New Testament. They generally agree with the first six church councils, but do not consider them sacred. Because the Protestants go back to the first century New Testament, all other tradition is manmade and optional.
<b>Mary and the Saints</b>	Mary and the saints, especially the apostles, are held in high regard by the Orthodox. Prayer to them, especially in the presence of their icons, helps one unite with the Holy Spirit and develop into God ( <i>theosis</i> ). Orthodox believe Mary was a perpetual virgin but not immaculately conceived.	Prayer to the saints is practiced by the Roman Catholics, but Mary is placed at a much higher level. She is believed by many to be a co-mediator with Christ to get one to God. You come to the Son through His Mother Mary. They believe Mary was both a perpetual virgin and immaculately conceived. <sup>12</sup>	Protestants don’t pray to Mary or saints because it was never done by Christ or the apostles. They reject the perpetual virginity of Mary because the New Testament says she had other children. They reject her immaculate conception because the Bible says only Jesus was immaculately conceived.

## An Evaluation

We will now give a brief evaluation of Christianity as a whole. We will then evaluate the three main branches of Christianity individually.

### Questions of Origin

Because it is a monotheistic religion, Christianity adequately answers the question of “where did it all come from?” Since both through reason and science we know that this universe is not eternal, there must have been a cause. This cause could only be an all-powerful, eternal, uncaused being—namely, God. Therefore, Christianity has a valid answer to the question of origin.

## Questions of Meaning

Christianity is the system which adequately answers the question of meaning. Meaning resides in our relationship to the one true, knowable God, which will ultimately be expressed in the afterlife. Meaning for the Christian is objective, since it is based on the unchangeable laws of a perfect God. Living a Christian life also has eternal meaning, since one will pay for his actions for all eternity.

## Questions of Morality

Morality, for the Christian, lies in the absolute nature of God. Good is what conforms to the absolute character of God. Because God does not change, good does not change. Evil is what is contrary to God's nature and because God is eternal and absolute, what is evil is evil for all men at all times. Contrary to the other religions, this system of morality is both rationally consistent and internally coherent. It is also experientially relevant; for all men, whatever their system of belief, live like they believe in absolute good and evil.

## Questions of Destiny

According to biblical Christianity, all humanity will face an afterlife. There will be rewards for the just and eternal punishment for the wicked. This doctrine of destiny is consistent within Christian theology. It is also rationally consistent with the natural inclinations of men. All men, whether they admit it or not, believe that one reaps what he sows. This is born out by Christianity's doctrine of eternal punishment for the unjustified and eternal rewards for those saved by the blood of Christ. Also, according to the biblical view, a Christian can be sure of his destiny. According to the New Testament, those who are "born of God" cannot lose their salvation; they are eternally secure. This is a great hope for the believer of the Bible, in contrast to the lack of assurance for the Jew, Muslim, Catholic, and others.

## The Three Main Branches of Christianity

**The Eastern Orthodox Church** is indeed to be credited for confirming the doctrine of the Trinity and the 100% deity, 100% humanity of Christ. They have maintained the devotion to their first 7 councils and the church fathers of that era. But how do we know those church fathers were right? Also, the Orthodox view of God seems contradictory to both Testaments, which exhort men to know God (Isaiah 1:10-18; 1 Corinthians 11:1). Their allegorical and spiritualized view of Scripture is consistent with their mysticism but leaves one with no objective way to determine truth. The *theosis* concept is not to be found in the Bible and is strictly denied by the rest of Christianity.

**The Roman Catholic Church** can be credited for their consistent view of morality and adherence to the basic doctrine of God, the Trinity, and the 100% deity, 100% humanity of Christ. They also have a high regard for Scripture and believe the death of Christ is necessary as a payment for sin. Roman Catholicism's problems come from their own "sacred tradition." This tradition is both inconsistent with the Bible and itself. It has led them into multiple popes, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and various power struggles. Also, the whole idea of an infallible tradition is inconsistent with continuing church councils which change those traditions. The Catholic view of sin is consistent and true to the Bible. So also is their view of the necessity of the death of Christ. But their belief that Christ's death was not sufficient and that salvation requires our good works through the sacraments of the church is based on their tradition, not the Scripture.

**The Protestants'** greatest claim is Luther's *sola Scriptura*. That is the foundational principle of Protestantism. It gives them an unchanging consistent standard by which to measure all things. Their view of God, the 100% deity, 100% humanity of Christ, sin, the Holy Spirit, and salvation all come from one inerrant unchanging source. This allows Protestants to explain as sinful all post-apostolic traditional blunders. The Protestants' biggest failure is their inability to remain true to their own foundation. They have divided themselves into various denominations over doctrinal disagreements and church practices. They claim *sola Scriptura*, but they don't live like that. The reality is, each denomination follows its own traditions. Although Protestants claim to believe in the necessity and sufficiency of faith in the death of Christ for salvation, they tend to add things like baptism, church affiliation, and lordship, at least by implication.

# Let's Review

Circle the correct answer. Review the answers in Appendix A to see which answer is correct and why the other answers are not correct.

- #1** All mainline Christians believe
- A. God can be personally known.
  - B. God knows us personally.
  - C. God is directly involved with us.
- #2** Not all Christians believe in
- A. The authority of the New Testament.
  - B. The necessity of Christ's death to pay for sin.
  - C. That everyone must receive Christ to be saved.
- #3** According to Christianity,
- A. Everything was created out of God.
  - B. Everything was created out of nothing.
  - C. Everything was created to ultimately be destroyed.
- #4** Of the three branches of Christianity, which has the oldest source of authority?
- A. Eastern Orthodoxy
  - B. Roman Catholicism
  - C. Protestantism
- #5** Which is the only item all Christians accept?
- A. Jesus was bodily resurrected from the dead.
  - B. All unbelievers go to hell.
  - C. The Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son.

# Islam

## Introduction

“Islam” means “submission.” A follower of Islam is known as a **Muslim**, “one who submits.” Muslims believe in submitting to the one and only one God named **Allah**. Islam is, therefore, a monotheistic religion. They further believe that the man Muhammad is Allah’s greatest and last prophet. It is through Muhammad that Allah revealed his will.

Islam is the world’s fastest growing religion. In 1983, there were approximately 450 million Muslims in the world. In 2003, there were about 1.3 billion Muslims in the world—about 20 percent of the earth’s population. In 1990, there were only 30 mosques in the United States. Now there are more than 3,000, with an average of one new mosque opening each week. Islam is presently the world’s second largest religion behind Christianity.

## History

Muhammad (known as “The Prophet” within Islam), the founder of Islam, was an Arabian trader from Mecca who was born around 570 and died in 632 A.D. At the age of 25, Muhammad married a wealthy widow named Khadija, who was 40 years old at the time. With wealth, Muhammad was less obligated to work, so he would often retreat to a cave outside of Mecca, where he would spend hours in deep meditation. In the year 610 A.D., Muhammad reported that he was visited by the angel Gabriel, who commanded him “to recite in the name of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> The message he later received became the essence of the **Qur’an (Koran)**. Because of visits from Gabriel, Muhammad came to believe that he was a prophet of God who would bring his people out of moral decadence, superstition, and polytheism. Muhammad began to teach of the one true God who was called Allah. Muhammad’s teaching was not popular in the polytheistic society in which he lived. Many thought Muhammad was possessed by a **Jinn** (a demonic spirit). Muhammad himself believed, for a period, that he was possessed.

Khadija died in 619, and soon after, Muhammad married a woman from Mecca named Sauda. He then married a woman named Ayesha, who was the daughter of **Abu Bakr**. Abu Bakr would one day succeed the prophet as the chief **Caliph** (a religious ruler). Muhammad would subsequently marry seven additional wives.<sup>2</sup>

During the latter part of his time in Mecca, Muhammad is said to have journeyed into heaven. According to Islamic tradition, one night the prophet was taken by the angel Gabriel from Mecca to Jerusalem (hence the importance of Jerusalem in Islam), and then through the seven heavens where he visited with all the previous prophets. Finally, he was taken into the presence of God, where he received the specific procedures for the Islamic worship of daily prayers (**Salat**).<sup>3</sup>

In 622, Muhammad, to flee from mounting persecutions against his cause, moved from Mecca to Medina. This flight is known as the **Hijra**. In Medina, he preached about Allah and monotheism and urged all people to return to the true faith of Abraham. His first sermon in Medina was on a Friday. Therefore, Islamic congregational worship occurs on Fridays. At that time in Medina, he would pray facing Jerusalem, as did the Jews in that city. Here Muhammad began organizing raids on caravans traveling to Mecca. Jews in Medina rejected Muhammad’s claims to be the true prophet. Disappointed by the rejection, Muhammad instructed his followers to face Mecca when praying rather than toward Jerusalem. It is during this time that Muhammad became very antagonistic toward Judaism. When living in Medina, Muhammad was attacked by Meccan invaders. During the attack, Muhammad suspected local Jews of conspiring with the Meccans for his downfall. He won the battle against the Meccans and soon, because of his suspicions, he had all of the Jewish men executed and sold the women and children into slavery.

During his eight years in Medina, Muhammad gained considerable power. In 630, Muhammad and 10,000 of his men marched into Mecca and took the city. In 632, he died and Abu Bakr succeeded him as Caliph. By the year 750 A.D., Islam had spread to China, the Indian Ocean, and as far west as Morocco and into the Iberian Peninsula.

# Doctrines

## Five Basic Muslim Doctrines

1. There is one and only one God.
2. There have been many prophets, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.
3. God created angels, some are evil and some are good.
4. The Qur'an is God's full and final revelation.
5. A final day of judgment is coming, followed by heaven for the faithful and hell for the lost.

Besides these five central beliefs, there are five basic pillars of Islamic practice:

## Five Pillars

1. All that is necessary to become a Muslim is to confess the shahadah: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet."
2. One must pray the salat, usually five times a day.
3. One keeps an annual fast (sawn) through the month of Ramadan.
4. One gives alms (sakat), one-fortieth of one's income, to the needy.
5. During his lifetime, every able Muslim must make one pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj).

## God

Islam is a religion of strict monotheism. Muslims attack the Christian doctrine of the Trinity with a fierce intensity, accusing Christendom of worshiping three gods. The Qur'an states, "So believe in Allah and His apostles and do not say, Three. Forbear and it shall be better for you. Allah is but one God" (*Sura* 4:171). The fundamental attribute describing God in Islam is his absolute unity. "Say: He is God, The One and Only; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him" (*Sura* 112). Islam teaches that God has no partner or companion. God is a unity and singularity. Because of this emphasis on God's unity, the greatest of all sins in Islam is the sin of **Shirk**, assigning partners to God. Allah is also absolute justice, and according to Islam, He is a God of love.

One interesting attribute of Islam is that they see Allah as absolute will. What gives unity to all God's actions is that He wills them all. As "Willer," He may be recognized by the descriptions given Him, but He does not conform to any of them. The action of His will may be identified from its effects, but His will is, of itself, inscrutable. This accounts for the antithesis in certain of God's names. For example, God is "the One who leads astray," and also "the One who guides."<sup>4</sup>

In their doctrine of God, Muslims say that both good and evil come from God. This is necessary because of the stress on the divine will. Whatever Allah chooses becomes right (good). Good is, therefore, based on Allah's will not in His nature.

Allah is also absolutely unknowable. Since everything is based in Allah's will and since His effects are sometimes contradictory and do not reflect any absolute essence, Allah's nature is utterly unknowable.<sup>5</sup> The divine will is an ultimate beyond which neither reason nor revelation can go. Allah is so far above man in every way that He is not personally knowable.

## Humanity

The Qur'an teaches that the human race was created by Allah. The chief purpose of human kind is to obey and submit to Allah. At creation, Allah breathed His spirit into man, but this is not to be confused with the "image of God" concept in Christianity. For Islam, the divine qualities that were entrusted to man as a result of Allah's breath were the faculties of knowledge, will, and power of action.<sup>6</sup>

Humans were created innocent and free but chose to sin against Allah (the Fall). Islam, however, does not hold to the doctrine of original sin. According to the Muslim perspective, the Fall was only a single slip on Adam and Eve's part that was completely forgiven after their repentance. It had no further effect on the nature of man and the rest of creation.<sup>7</sup> Man is not born a sinner, and the doctrine of the sinfulness of man has no basis in Islam. Even though human beings are not sinful and have no fallen nature, they are intrinsically weak, frail, imperfect, and constantly forgetful of Allah.

## Morality

According to orthodox Islam, the purpose of man is not to know God and become more conformed to his character but to understand His will and become more obedient to His commands.

## Salvation

In the Islamic view, human beings are no more “fallen” than they are “saved.” Because they are not fallen, they have no need of a savior. But because they are not “saved,” they have to do good works (the 5 pillars), and do them ethically, which combined with belief (in the 5 articles of faith) will earn them salvation. Indeed, salvation is an improper term, since, to need salvation, one must be in a predicament from which there is no hope of escape. But men and women are not in this situation because, by their good works, the Muslim can earn his or her way into heaven.

According to the Qur’an (*Sura* 10:109), a Muslim who hopes to escape the wrath of Allah and the tormenting fires of hell must diligently strive to fulfill the requirement set for him in the five pillars. “In the day of judgment, they whose balances shall be heavy with good works, shall be happy; but they, whose balances shall be light, are those who shall lose their souls, and shall remain in hell forever” (*Sura* 23:104-5). This passage from the Qur’an depicts the Islamic view that heaven is attained by the good works of the individual. There is no assurance of heaven in Islam.

By the above definition and those found in the Qur’an, it is clear that Islam, like Christianity and Orthodox Judaism, is an exclusive religion. (It alone is true, and anything opposed to it is false.) In other words, if you are not Muslim (which is defined as believing in the five Muslim doctrines and five pillars—one of which is that Muhammad is the greatest prophet), then you will be punished in hell for eternity.

## Sacred Writings

Islam recognizes many sacred scriptures that have been given by Allah throughout history. However, Muslims claim that only the Qur’an is trustworthy and that the other scriptures have been compromised because we do not possess their original manuscripts. They assert that the accounts of the Bible were written down hundreds of years later and cannot be considered inerrant, and they were written in ancient languages which have been lost. Therefore, exact translations are not possible. Nevertheless, the scriptures recognized in Islam are:

**A. The Qur’an**—The Qur’an (Koran) is the inspired word of Allah given to people through the Prophet Muhammad and it supersedes all other scriptures before it, including the Bible. It alone is inerrant and trustworthy as a revelation for today. It is unchanged from the beginning. It is the Holy Book of Islam and the religion’s most sacred writing. Muslims consider it to be the actual word of Allah and not the word of Muhammad, to whom it was given. Muslim tradition states that the angel Gabriel visited Muhammad and gave him the words directly from Allah. Muhammad did not write down his revelations but gave them orally. Many of these revelations were written down during the life of Muhammad but were not collected as a whole. After the death of Muhammad, his devoted followers collected and compiled the words spoken by the prophet. These writings were assembled and became the Qur’an. These words were Allah’s words of wisdom, truth, and commandments to His creation. Muslims see the Qur’an as much more than a book. They believe that the Qur’an has existed in heaven for all eternity with Allah, yet it is separate from Him. It is the expression of the divine. “If you want to compare it with something in Christianity, you must compare it with Christ Himself. Christ was the expression of the Divine among men, and that is what the Qur’an is.”<sup>8</sup>

The Qur’an (which means recitation) was revealed in the Arabic language.<sup>9</sup> It is composed of 114 chapters (suras). The Qur’an deals mainly with what and how Allah wants mankind to believe and do in man’s moral struggle. Its primary theme is that of complete submission to the will of Allah. However, it also teaches: (1) that there is only one sovereign God (3:191; 5:73; 112:1-4); (2) that there will be an end of the world and judgment day (3:30; 35:33-37); (3) that those who are not Muslims will go to hell (3:13; 19:49); (4) that those whose good deeds exceed their bad will obtain paradise (3:135; 7:8-9; 21:47); (5) social and ethical behavior for Islamic society; (6) anti-Jewish and anti-Christian attitudes (5:51, 9:29); and (7) that Muslims should kill resisting unbelievers (47:4).

It is stated by Islam that the Qur’an itself is a miracle. In fact, it was the only miracle that Muhammad offered his hearers. Islam says that the Qur’an is miraculous in its literary style, perfect preservation, unity, scientific accuracy, and the fact that Muhammad, while illiterate, produced it. Islam claims that only the Arabic version of the Qur’an is inspired, so unless one can read Arabic, he cannot perceive the miracle.

**B. Hadith**—The Hadith is a collection of the sayings and conduct of Muhammad and his companions. This, in effect, is the written traditions of Islam. Most of Islam gives the Hadith a very high status, but less than the Qur'an.

The Hadith ranks only second to the Holy Qur'an. The Hadith is complementary to the Qur'an. It helps to explain and clarify the Holy Qur'an and to present the Qur'an in a more practical form.... As Muslims, our knowledge of Islam would be incomplete and shaky if we did not study and follow the Hadith. Similarly an outsider cannot understand Islam if he ignores the Hadith.<sup>10</sup>

**C. Other Holy Books**—Besides the Qur'an and the Hadith, Muslims believe that three other books contain divine revelation. According to Islam, Allah gave the four greatest prophets revelation which they wrote down. Moses was given the Tawrat (Torah), David was given the Zabur (Psalms) and Jesus was given the Injil (Gospel). Lastly, Muhammad was given the Qur'an. Islam contends that the Qur'an is the only one of these writings which has been preserved in its original, uncorrupted state. All of the others have been corrupted through centuries of mistranslation, copy errors, loss of manuscripts, and intentional changes. Therefore, the Qur'an is the only holy book which can be trusted.

## Muhammad

Muhammad is the final prophet of Allah, who supersedes all other prophets, and who alone delivered the final and perfect word of God. Muhammad has such a central place in Islamic culture that Muslims will tolerate no disparagement of him, even though they will allow such attacks on Allah. The reports of Muhammad's sayings (Hadith) and actions (Sunnah) are given a high place in Muslim literature. They are seen as the uninspired records of an inspired life. Most Muslims believe that their knowledge of Islam would be incomplete and shaky if they did not study and follow the Hadith.<sup>11</sup> Orthodox Islam does not view Muhammad as divine. He is, however, called the most favored of mankind, most honored of all apostles, and best of the prophets. It is said that the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible contain prophecies about Muhammad, his miracle(s) is (are) a seal set by God Most High on his claims, his life proves that he is the greatest of the prophets. One tradition claims that Muhammad is able to intercede with Allah on behalf of men, although all other prophets are unworthy for this task.

## Jesus Christ

Islam claims that Jesus was a mere human being, a prophet of God, superceded by Muhammad. The Qur'an also states that Christ was virgin born, called Messiah, did miracles, was sinless, was called the Word of God. Islam denies that Christ was the son of God or that He rose from the dead. Nor does Islam affirm that Christ was crucified. Islam teaches that Judas Iscariot was crucified in Christ's place.

## Modern Day Islam

After the death of Muhammad, Islam divided into two basic sects, the Sunnis and the Shi'ites. The Sunnis outnumber the Shi'ites by a substantial margin, with the Sunnis comprising about 80 percent of all Muslims. These sects arose because of political dispute over who should lead Islam after Muhammad's death. Having failed to appoint a ruler (a Caliph) before he died, the Sunnis contended that Muhammad's successor should be elected by the people. The Shi'ites (the party of Ali) were determined that the next Caliph should be a relative of Muhammad. This would have meant that Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali, would be his successor. "Therefore, the Shi'ites reject the legitimacy of the first three Caliphs of Islam and view them as people who deliberately deprived Ali of his divine rights."<sup>12</sup>

**Shi'ites**—The Shi'ites believe that, even with the writings of the prophets to guide them, man is confused. Therefore, Allah has divinely appointed spiritual leaders (Imams—analogue to the Catholic Pope) to help them interpret the Qur'an. To the Shi'ites, the Imam is an infallible guide in religious matters. True Imams are in the direct line of Ali. Shi'ites believe that the 12<sup>th</sup> of the line of Imams did not die but was taken by Allah from human sight. He will return to earth as the Mahdi, the awaited messianic figure, who will bring the triumph of religion and herald the last judgment.<sup>13</sup>

Imams wield extreme spiritual authority over the people, seeking to uphold a fundamentalist and authoritarian interpretation of the Qur'an. A recent example of this leadership was Ayatollah Khomeini, who ruled Iran in the 1980s. He was typical of Imams in his teaching that the Qur'an rules in all matters of life. There is, therefore, no separation of religion and politics. The Imam is supreme in both.

**Sunnis**—The Sunnis emphasize the authority of the written traditions, which include not only the Qur'an, but also the Sunna ("custom," from which the Sunnis derive their name). The Sunna is found mainly in the Hadith. The Sunna fill

in many areas where the Qur'an is silent. The Sunnis are led by the consensus of the elders, who are a group of scholars called the Ulama. The Ulama deliver their decisions based on the Qur'an, Sunna, and previous religious rulings.

Sunnis are considered to be the mainstream traditionalists. Sunnis, unlike Shi'ites who believe religion should pervade politics and social structures, do not try to make all areas of life conform to the Qur'an. They believe that their religion can be lived out in any culture of government. Generally, Sunnis are more tolerant of diversity and are therefore more able to adapt in other cultures.

## **Evaluation of Islam**

### **The Qur'an Competes with Allah**

Islam teaches that Allah is the only eternal God, hence they claim Christian Trinitarianism is polytheism. But the Muslim view of the Qur'an seems to contradict their view of Allah. Muslims do not see the Qur'an as Christians see the Bible. The Bible claims to be God's revelation to certain authors, who wrote it down, using their own style of composition and personality, to produce an inerrant Word of God. The Qur'an is different. It is seen as having existed eternally in heaven and then dictated to Muhammad. Muhammad did not copy it. ("Qur'an" means "recitings.") But if Allah alone is eternal, how can the Qur'an also be eternal? If Allah did not create the Qur'an, then where did it come from? If someone else created Allah and the Qur'an, even if it were in eternity past, then that someone else would be the real God. If both Allah and the Qur'an are coequally eternal (as the Muslims claim), then Allah is not God over the Qur'an but is co-eternal with it.

### **Submission Disconnects Obedience from Truth**

Islam means "submission," and Muslims are those who submit. But there is no virtue in submission, per se. Ghengis Kahn, Hitler, Stalin, and Saddam Hussein believed in submission. Submission is only valuable when connected to truth or virtue, but it cannot, by itself, determine either. Submission is like commitment, excitement, motivation, and enthusiasm. It is itself neutral. It can make good men better and bad men worse. Muslim submission is like being committed to commitment. This leaves value and virtue to be dictated by an arbitrary source. It may be the values of a good leader, but it could also be those of an evil one. So Muslim terrorists felt virtuous submitting themselves to Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein. The moral mistake of making submission a virtue allows immorality to be considered virtuous. Many non-Muslims ask something like, "How can these people think it's good to murder innocent civilians?" The answer—in part—is that they aren't focusing on the value of life as a virtue. They are focusing on submission as a virtue. The true value or virtue of these leaders, or their ideology, is simply not to be questioned. Questions violate the very nature of submission.

### **The Determinative "Will of Allah" Eliminates Human Morality**

There is no place for real free will choice in Islam. Everything is predetermined by the will of Allah. Muslims are believers because Allah willed for them to be believers. Unbelievers are unbelievers for the same reason. The Qur'an says, "Had it been our [Allah's] will, we [he] could have sent a warner [a prophet like Muhammad] to every center of population" (Sura 25:51, brackets mine). Referring to all unbelievers, the Qur'an tells us that Allah has "set a barrier in front of them and a barrier behind them ... Thus it is alike to them whether thou warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe" (Sura 36:6-10). So belief and unbelief, as well as every good act and every evil act, have one thing in common—they are all the will of Allah. But if I cannot make a real independent decision which affects my future, then I do not reap what I sow. If my moral decisions don't make any real difference, then I am not making any real moral decision. I am morally no better than an animal or a tree stump. If all my will is determined by the will of Allah, then I am a robot or a toy soldier, morally speaking.

The Bible teaches a sovereign God (Romans 8 and 9; Ephesians 1), but it also tells us we are free to decide (Deuteronomy 30:19), that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7-8), and whosoever will may come (John 3:16; Revelation 22:17). Various Christians put these together differently, but the bottom line is, man does make real moral decisions. The sovereign predestination of the God of the Bible is not the determinism of Allah. Muslim determinism leaves no room for moral decisions.

### **Submitting to the Law of God while Disregarding the Character of God Is Legalism**

Muslims believe the laws of Allah are arbitrary. For example, Sura 6:12 says that Allah is merciful only because he has imposed a law of mercy upon himself, but had he chosen to be otherwise, he would not be merciful. Islam discourages

any pursuit of the knowledge of God's character because, they say, it is unknowable. But it is also irrelevant. Unlike the God of the Bible, the morality of Allah is not connected to his character. Also, unlike the God of the Bible, Allah is not necessarily consistent or unchanging. With the God of the Bible, His laws change because conditions change, but He remains the same (like a thermometer). So true morality can be consistently determined by observing the character of God, which remains the same in any age or either Testament. In Islam, there is no consistent character of God behind His laws.

In both Testaments of the Bible, God consistently condemns people who keep His laws without seeking His character (Isaiah 10:10-18; Matthew 24; 1 Corinthians 11:1). Keeping laws without reference to the character of the Lawmaker takes all the morality out of obedience. Your dog can keep your commands, and he has no morality or spirituality. Animals, which are not spiritual beings, can keep laws with no thoughts of good or evil. People are acting like animals when they do that. For example, I can keep the speed limit, not steal or murder or commit adultery and still lust, covet, hate, envy, and act selfishly. I can keep keepable laws with no real morality at all. Keeping keepable laws is the basis of legalism. If we are living in chaos, laws can be valuable, but they will never bring us to God (1 Timothy 1:8-10). Laws allow us to measure and control the masses, but they can never deal with the intention of the heart—where all real morality lies. That's why legalism never deals with morality, and Islam is intentionally focused on legalism.

## **Summary**

In summary, Islam fails the tests for truth because of its internal inconstancies, the chief of which are the unknowable nature of God, his total determination of evil as well as good acts of humans, and the qualifications of Muhammad as a prophet.

# Let's Review

Circle the answer you think is correct. Review the answers in Appendix A to see which answer is correct and why the other answers are not correct.

- #1** According to Islam, God is  
A. A single person whose nature is knowable.  
B. A trinity whose nature is unknowable.  
C. A single person whose nature is unknowable.
- #2** Islam teaches that Christ  
A. Did not do miracles.  
B. Did not live a sinless life.  
C. Did not rise from the dead.
- #3** The modern day leader of the Shi'ite sect is known as an  
A. Imam  
B. Ulama  
C. Ali
- #4** The Qur'an is/was  
A. Produced by Muhammad in a cave outside of Mecca.  
B. Written by the Angel Gabriel on golden tablets and given to Abu Bakr.  
C. The eternal word of Allah which has always existed with Allah in heaven.
- #5** The belief that all of life (politics, religion, and culture) should be ruled by the Qur'an is held by which sect?  
A. Sunni  
B. Shi'ite  
C. Sunna

- #6** Draw a line from the Islamic terms on the left to its definition on the right.

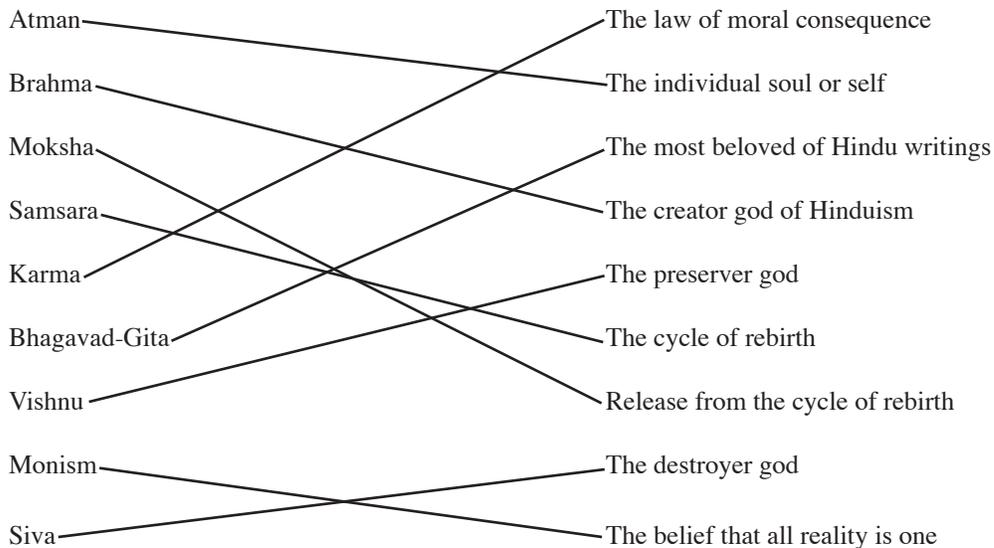
Islam	A father-in-law of Mohammad, the second leader of Islam
Muslim	The death of Mohammad
Qur'an	A ruler in Islam
Abu Bakr	Ones who submit
632 A.D.	"Recitings" from Allah
The Hajj	The sayings and conduct of Mohammad
The Hadith	Submission
Sunni	The Mahdi will return to earth to bring triumph and judgment
Shi'ite	A trip to Mecca
Caliph	80% of Islam

# Appendix A

The author's answers to the "Let's Review" questions.

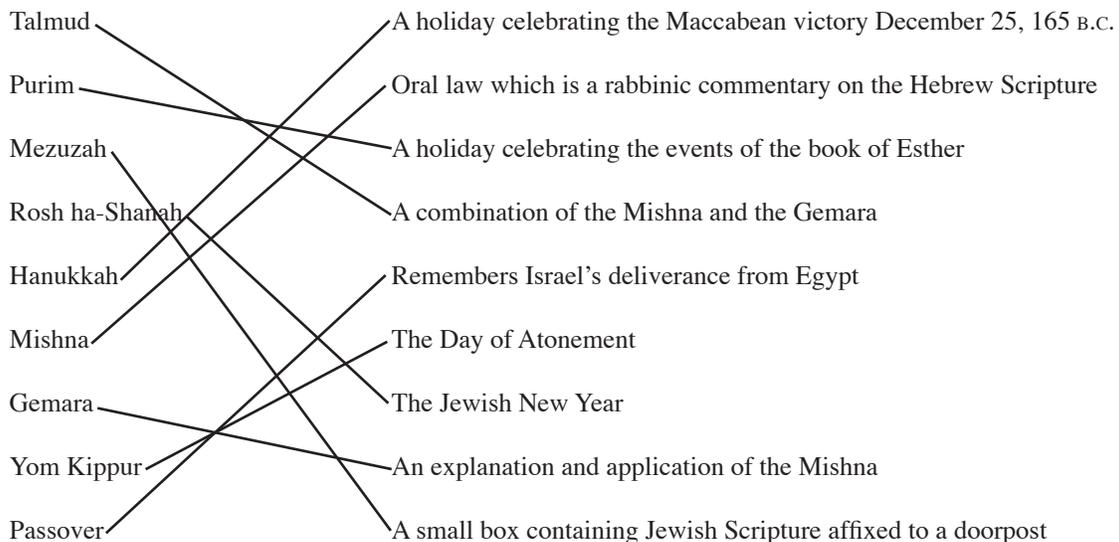
## Hinduism

- #1** A is correct. Hindu pantheism teaches that God is equal to the universe and everything in it. Everything that is, is God. B is incorrect because this is the view of theism, which says God is separate from the universe and it is a creation of His. C is incorrect because it is the view of atheism, which believes there is no God at all.
- #2** B is correct. Hinduism teaches that God is all. Since good and evil are opposites, and it impossible for God to be both good and evil at the same time, good and evil are illusions, they don't exist. A is incorrect. This is the position of Christianity, which says that good is based in the absolute nature of God. Evil is anything opposed to this nature. C is incorrect. This is an agnostic position, which states that good and evil are real but we can't know them (for sure).
- #3** C is correct. According to Hinduism, one must earn salvation through one of four paths. After the Hindu has completed this path, he will enter nirvana. A is incorrect. This is the position of Islam. The duty of the follower of Islam is simply to submit to the will of Allah. B is incorrect. It is true that Hindus believe you should submit to the rules of your caste, but it is not the goal of the religion.
- #4** C is correct. The law of karma states that, if a person has more good works than bad, he will be reincarnated to higher states of life. If he continues with more good than bad, then he will eventually be freed from samsara and attain nirvana. But, at the same time, Hinduism teaches that good and evil are illusions. How can the law of karma be based on good and evil when they don't exist? How can a person be reincarnated to a lower state of being for having evil karma if there is no such thing as evil? If good and evil, right and wrong, are not applicable to what is, then to be right is as meaningless as to be wrong (Schaeffer, *He is There and He is Not Silent*). B might be unjust, but it is not internally inconsistent in and of itself. A might be untrue, but it is not internally inconsistent in and of itself.
- #5** Draw a line from the Hindu term on the left to its definition on the right:



# Judaism

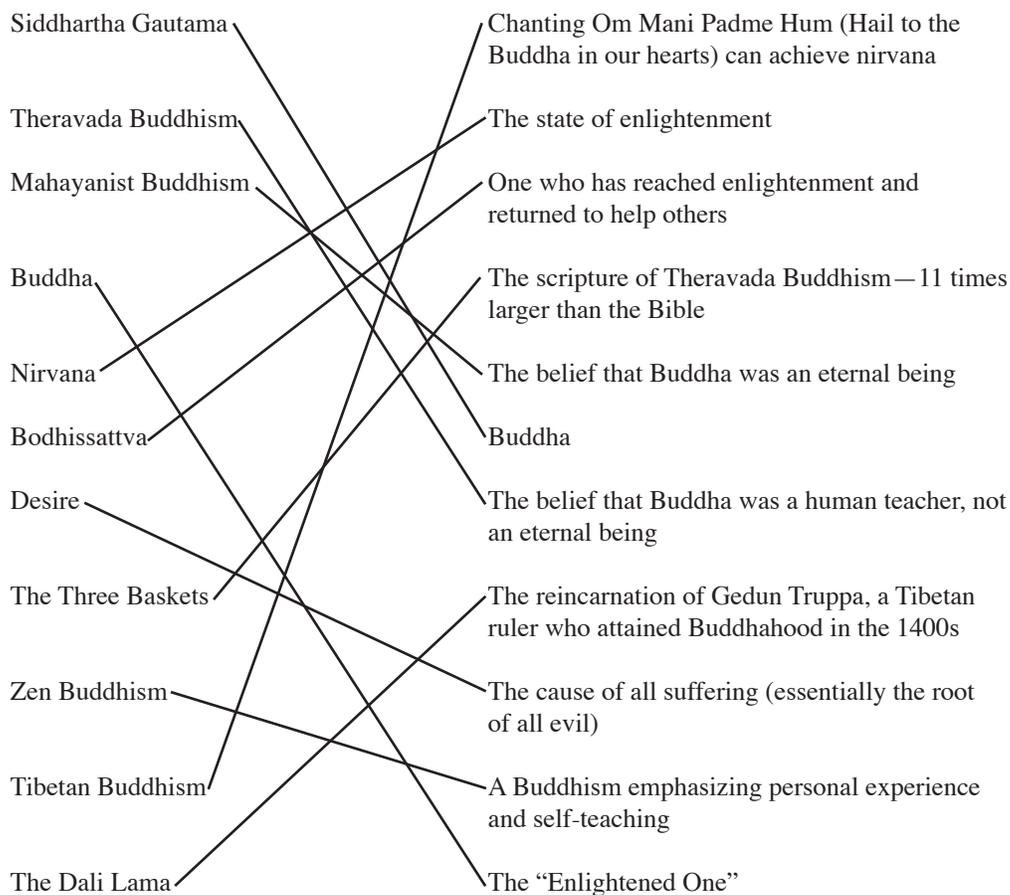
- #1** C is correct. A & B are incorrect because the Hasidic, the Zionist, and the ultra-conservative branches of Judaism are quite small in comparison to the prominent Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform branches.
- #2** B is the correct answer. The position of rabbi was not instituted until long after the return from the Babylonian Captivity, most likely around 200 B.C. A is incorrect. The word “rabbi” was never used in the Old Testament. C is incorrect. The rabbi today, although considered a religious leader, does not offer sacrifices because Judaism is a sacrifice-free religion.
- #3** C is the correct answer. A is incorrect because Reform Judaism does not believe the Messiah is a real person. B is incorrect because this is the Orthodox, not the Reformed, belief about the Messiah.
- #4** C is the correct answer. Rabbinic Judaism instituted this three-fold path as a substitute for the sacrificial system. A and B are incorrect because these things were not the rabbinic institutions which replaced the sacrifices.
- #5** Draw a line from the Judaism term on the left to its definition on the right:



# Buddhism

- #1** C is the correct answer. Buddhism teaches that all of life contains suffering. To get rid of suffering, one must free himself of desires. A is false because salvation for the Buddhist is found through the elimination of desires. B is false because, while most Buddhists believe that all religions are true, it is not the stress of Buddhism to teach this.
- #2** B is the correct answer. According to Buddhism, man is a combination of 5 parts called skandhas which disassociate at death. A is incorrect because the Buddhists seek to eliminate suffering through self-effort rather than adhering to a moral law. C is incorrect because the Buddhist goal is to attain enlightenment and reach nirvana, which would be a release from the cycle of reincarnation.
- #3** C is the correct answer. The Mahayanist school believes that one may reach enlightenment in this life and may then continue in samsara to come back to help others reach nirvana. Such a person is known as a Bodhissattva. A is incorrect because the two men who created Zen were Tao Scheng and Bodhi-Dharma. B is incorrect because this describes a koan.
- #4** The correct answer is C. Buddha did not dismiss deities as non-existent, but they were of no help in everyday life. A and B are incorrect because the concept of fearing or worshipping God involves a personal deity, which is absent in Buddhism.

**#5** Draw a line from the Buddhism term on the left to its definition on the right:

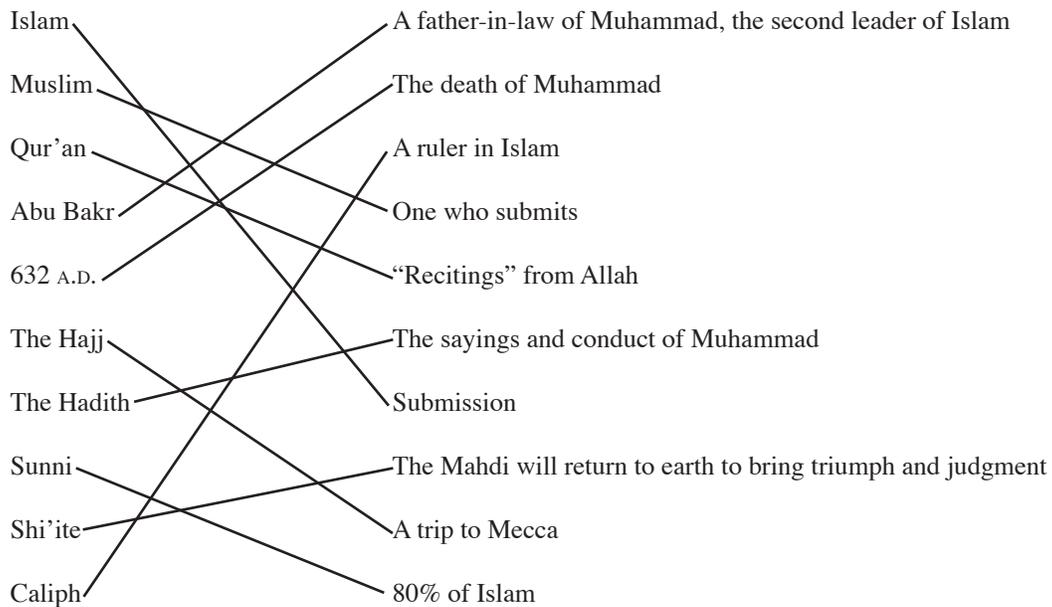


## Christianity

- #1** The correct answer is B. All regular forms of Christianity believe in the omniscience of God. Therefore, He knows us personally. A is incorrect because the Eastern Orthodox would say God cannot personally be known. C is incorrect because both the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholics would say God’s involvement with us comes through the church (their church).
- #2** The correct answer is C. The Roman Catholics believe some non-Christians will be saved, and the Orthodox believe salvation is a process of becoming god. A is incorrect because all Christians believe in the authority (although not necessarily the sufficiency) of the New Testament. B is incorrect because all Christians believe in the necessity (although not necessarily the sufficiency) of Christ’s death to pay for sin.
- #3** The correct answer is B. Christianity believes the Bible teaches that all things were created out of nothing. A is incorrect because it is the view of pantheism (Hinduism and Buddhism). C is incorrect because destruction comes with the fall, not with creation.
- #4** The correct answer is C. Protestantism goes back to the New Testament for its authority. A and B are incorrect because Catholicism and Orthodoxy both use church councils as authoritative sources which occur after the New Testament.
- #5** The correct answer is A. All Christians believe Jesus bodily rose from the dead. B is incorrect because the Catholics do believe some good unbelievers will be in heaven. C is incorrect. “And the Son” is the filioque clause which the Eastern Orthodox claim the Roman Catholics added to the procession of the Holy Spirit, thus changing a church council decision.

# Islam

- #1** C is correct. Islam affirms that Allah is absolutely One. One of the most important attributes of Allah is his undivided unity. Also, according to Islam, Allah's nature cannot be known, only his will can be known.
- #2** C is correct. According to Islam, Christ was sinless, did miracles, and was virgin born, but since He wasn't crucified (Judas was crucified in His place), He couldn't have risen from the dead.
- #3** The correct answer is A. B is incorrect because it is one of the leaders of the Sunni sect. C is incorrect because Ali was the person whom the Shi'ites named as the successor to Muhammad but is not the title given to the leader.
- #4** C is correct. According to Islam, the Qur'an is the eternal word of Allah which, although not identical to him, has always existed with Allah in heaven.
- #5** The correct answer is B. The Shi'ites believe that the Qur'an should rule all areas of life. There should be no separation between religion, culture and government. A is false because the Sunni sect sees the Qur'an as a religious book, not necessarily to be imposed in other areas. C is incorrect because it is the word for "tradition" and not a sect of Islam.
- #6** Draw a line from the Muslim terms on the left to its definition on the right.



# Appendix B

## End Notes

### Hinduism

- <sup>1</sup> John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 216-17.
- <sup>2</sup> Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions* (San Bernardino: Here's life Publishers, Inc., 1983), 283.
- <sup>3</sup> John B. Noss, *Man's Religions* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1969), 88.
- <sup>4</sup> George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and Religions and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 119.
- <sup>5</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999), 317.
- <sup>6</sup> McDowell and Stewart, *Handbook*, 289.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> Geisler, *Encyclopedia*, 639.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 581.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 582.
- <sup>11</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 101.

### Judaism

- <sup>1</sup> Dean C. Halverson, Editor, *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 122.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Louis Goldberg, *Our Jewish Friends* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 15.
- <sup>6</sup> Taken from the Christian Research Institute Website. <http://www.equip.org/free/DJ602.htm>.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

### Buddhism

- <sup>1</sup> Mather and Nichols, *Dictionary*, 45.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>3</sup> John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *America Smiles on Buddha – Part 2* (Ankerberg Theological Research Institute. Available from [www.ankerberg.com](http://www.ankerberg.com)).
- <sup>4</sup> McDowell and Stewart, 309.
- <sup>5</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon.
- <sup>6</sup> John B. Noss, *Man's Religions* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1969), 88.
- <sup>7</sup> Mather and Nichols, *Dictionary*, 47.
- <sup>8</sup> J. Isamu Yamamoto, *Zest for Zen* (North Americans Embrace a Contemplative School of Buddhism Christian Research Institute Website, Winter 1995).
- <sup>9</sup> Toichi Yoshioka, *Zen* (Osaka: Hoikusha Publishers, 1978), 4.
- <sup>10</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 33.

- <sup>11</sup> Yamamoto.
- <sup>12</sup> Suzuki, 112.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Yamamoto.
- <sup>17</sup> Suzuki, 54-55.
- <sup>18</sup> Yamamoto.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

### Christianity

- <sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell, Editor, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 142.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.
- <sup>4</sup> Frank S. Mead, Revised by Samuel S. Hill, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 226.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> Elwell, 806.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 805.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 958.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 806.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 958.
- <sup>12</sup> Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 300.

### Islam

- <sup>1</sup> Mather and Nichols, 139.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>3</sup> Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 73.
- <sup>4</sup> Geisler, *Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 370.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.
- <sup>6</sup> Geisler and Saleeb, 39.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>8</sup> Charis Waddy, *The Muslim Mind* (New York: Longman, 1976), 14.
- <sup>9</sup> Christian Apologetics and Research Ministries website, <http://www.carm.org/islam/koran.htm>
- <sup>10</sup> Badru and Kateregga, *Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and A Christian in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), 157.
- <sup>11</sup> Geisler and Saleeb, 81.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.
- <sup>13</sup> John Alden Williams, *Islam* (New York: George Brzailler, 1962), 224.