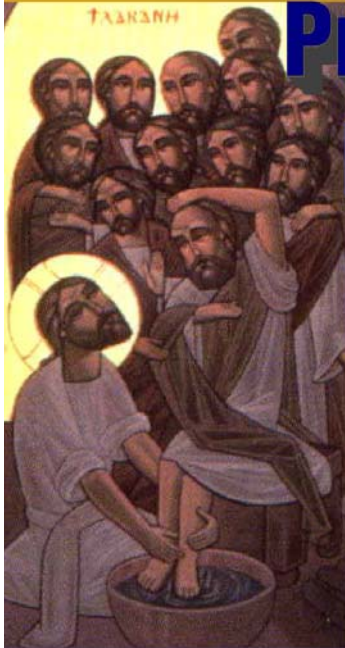




Servants' Preparation Program



Coptic Orthodox
Diocese of the
Southern
United States

*"For I have given you an example,
that you should do as I have done to you"
John 13:15*

Coptic Orthodox
Diocese of the Southern United States

COMP 101
WORLD RELIGIONS

Servants' Preparation Program

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Orthodox Christianity

As we look at other belief systems and compare them with ours, it is of utmost importance to know what our beliefs are. What follows is a very brief discussion of some of our beliefs.

Regarding the Bible:

We believe that all the scriptures in the Bible are inspired by God, the Holy Spirit and are useful on multifaceted level for the Christian believer. We believe that God's Word is always true, always applicable and always beneficial. We believe that the deuterocanonical books are also God inspired. We do not believe in "sola scriptura" meaning "relying only on the Bible", since we believe that the Church approved the Bible and not that the bible makes the church. Therefore we better understand the Bible through the teachings and traditions of the church. Additionally all the prayers of the Divine Liturgy are found in the Holy Bible.

Regarding the Nature of God:

We believe in One God Who is indefinable, invisible and incomprehensible. That He is Almighty, Omniscient, and Omnipresent. The Creator of the universe. He is a triune God of three equal yet inseparable hypostases, which are God the Father, God the Son Who is begotten of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from God the Father. We believe that He is all powerful and is able to do anything and everything and that He is to be feared and revered and yet He is also the beneficent lover of man kind, Who created man to commune with him in a relationship of true honest Love.

Regarding the Nature of Man:

We believe that God created man in His image and that man was in Paradise living freely with God in a state of beauty, freedom, purity and had control over all that God created for him. We believe that man was deceived by the serpent (the devil) due to his jealousy of God and the object of God's love and affection (man). Causing man to fall in sin by disobeying God's commandment and to be kicked out of Paradise lest he eat from the tree of life and live forever in a state of sin.

Regarding Sin:

We believe that sin is falling short of God's mark for us and that sin separates us from God but not from His love. We believe that sin leads to death. We believe that we the children of Adam and Eve are all born with a corrupt nature as a consequence of the original sin committed by Adam and Eve and that we must be baptized in water and spirit in order to washed from any previous sins and to kill and bury that old corrupt nature with Jesus Christ and to rise with a new clean nature with Jesus Christ. We do believe that we are born with the original sin and the corrupt nature.

Regarding the Person and Work of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

We believe that man (Adam & Eve) was deceived by the jealous deception of the serpent (the devil) and by disobeying God's command, man sinned and separated himself from God and instead of plucking for himself a fruit that is good to eat, man plucked for himself the thorn of death. But out of God's immense and infinite love - since He is the Father; the Good Shepherd; the Gentle Healer – He was incarnate as our Lord Jesus Christ the Logos and took the form of a servant (man) and gave up Himself unto death, even death on the cross and descended into Hades and freed the souls of all the righteous and restored mankind to God once again, so that

we may have the opportunity to choose Him again instead of sin and to be able to live with Him for all eternity. In a sentence, He took what is ours (death) and gave us what is His (life). Like a Father who gladly goes to the enemy's territory to ransom His lost child who has been kidnapped by the enemy. The only one who could accomplish this saving work needed to be human (with our nature) and divine (to redeem ALL sin past and present). We find this only in our Lord Jesus. Our Lord Jesus Christ is God Himself, the Incarnate Logos, who took to Himself a complete manhood. His Divine Nature is united with His Human Nature in a complete Hypostatic (personal) Union without mingling, confusion, alteration or separation. Furthermore, the unity between the two Natures occurred without transmutation. Thus neither the Divine Nature transmutes to the Human Nature, nor did the Human Nature transmute to the Divine.

Regarding the Holy Spirit:

We believe that since God's desire is to restore man to his original state before the fall, not only did He purchase man with His precious blood (as the Son), but He also sent Himself as the Holy Spirit to dwell within each one of us after the Chrismation with the Holy Oil, which occurs after baptism. The Holy Spirit is God within us to guide us, convict us, comfort us and to lead us back to His kingdom.

Regarding Salvation:

We believe that Salvation is a life long process and that it does not occur in a moment. We believe that one receives sanctification which occurs after the sacraments of baptism and chrismation. We believe that baptism gives us the opportunity for salvation. We believe that salvation is by grace from our Lord and not by works, but we believe that salvation without works is impossible, since faith without works is dead.

Regarding Angels:

We believe that God created the angels as servant spirits to serve Him and His creation. We believe that Satan was once a beautiful powerful angel and that he was able to have many of the original angels join him in his rebellion against God when he desired to sit on His throne. We believe that there are "good" holy angels that serve our Lord. We believe that God has created the angels with different ranks for different assignments / jobs. Some are archangels like Michael (the commander of the hosts of the Lord) and Gabriel (God's messenger to man); some are angels created to praise and to minister to our Lord forever without stopping (like the cherubim and the seraphim) and other ranks of angels (thrones, principalities, authorities, dominions and powers). We also believe that God in His great mercy and love for mankind has appointed a guardian angel for every human being who is born.

Regarding the Church:

We believe in one, only, holy, catholic (universal) apostolic church, who is the Bride and the Body of Christ, comprised of both the struggling church as well as victorious. We believe that the doctrines of the church were taught and delivered from our Lord Jesus Christ Himself to our fathers the apostles, who in turn handed the tradition as they received it to the early church fathers, who in turn hand it down as they received it without change (without adding or subtracting anything from it) to those who followed them and so on throughout all generations. We believe that our Church Tradition today is the exact same Tradition handed down from our Lord Jesus Christ (while some of the practices may have changed) and we believe that it is our utmost important duty to pass down to those after us the Tradition which we received without adding anything to it or subtracting anything from it. We believe that the Church is the pillar and

foundation for the faith and that salvation outside the church is – like survival outside Noah's ark- impossible.

Regarding the Last Things:

We believe that the end of time, at a time that only God the Father knows, our Lord Jesus Christ will come again on a cloud and all mankind will be able to see Him and to have no doubt whatsoever that it is Him. We believe that the books will be open and that the deeds, whether good or bad, of each human being will be read and that our Lord Jesus Christ will judge each of us according to his or her deeds and according to his or her faith in Him and will either set them on His right hand to inherit the kingdom of God which was prepared for them before the foundation of the earth or He will cast them into eternal hell, which is separation from Him forever. We believe that it is not our place to predict this time but to always be ready for this time.

Buddhism

Introduction

Buddhism arose out of atheistic strands of Hinduism current in India in the sixth century B.C. and remains the dominant religion in the Far East. Siddhartha Gautama, called the Buddha ("Enlightened One"), is said to have discovered that both the life of luxury and the life of extreme asceticism were of no use in gaining spiritual freedom; thus he promoted the "Middle Way." This "Middle Way, consisted of the Eightfold path which was the way to salvation or nirvana. To describe the Middle Way, Buddha offered 4 main principles called the 4 Noble Truths. The problem as the Buddha saw it was not one of sin but of desire and its ensuing suffering and after he became enlightened, he taught that the way to eliminate suffering begins with understanding the true nature of the world which is not necessarily accomplished through knowledge but through meditation. His teaching, however, was to undergo many transformations.

Buddhism became a great missionary religion and eventually all but died in its native India. There are three main branches of Buddhism. The *Mahayana* school, which developed a grandiose cosmology and a pantheon of semi-deities, is to be found in China, Korea, and Japan. It teaches that Buddha believed that nirvana was available to all people and that he originally taught that the only one to save you is you (as he did with himself). Savior gods or Bodhisattvas have developed (those who have found nirvana) with Buddha being the supreme Bodhisattva. Followers of this branch can call on these savior gods. Zen is a form of Mahayana Buddhism popular in the West. Zen teachers emphasize the saying of the Buddha: "Look within, you are the Buddha." The *Theravada* school, which is more austere, flourishes in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Burma, and southeast Asia. It teaches that nirvana is essentially reserved for only a few monks (or those who have been reincarnated to be monks) who absolutely follow the way of Buddha. For them, Buddha is merely a teacher (as he, himself declared). The third form of Buddhism is Tantrism and is practiced officially in Tibet and extensively in Nepal. It is a blending of Mahayana Buddhism with the ancient occult practices of Tibet. It contains strong elements of animism (attributing conscious life to inanimate objects or objects in nature).

What Buddhism Says About:

God

There is no absolute God in Buddhism, although many have interpreted Buddhism as a search for God. The 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 themselves rather than relying on an outside support.

The Buddha did not claim divinity or even a divine source for his teachings. He saw himself as only 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 God.

Although belief in an ultimate God is opposed by nearly all Buddhists, the *Mahayana* school developed notions of the Buddha as still existing for the sake of men and promoted the existence of many semi-divine beings, which came to be represented in art and have been revered in ways very similar to worship of Hindu gods.

Man and the Universe

Both the beginning and the ultimate nature of the world are left unexplained by the Buddha--once again, those questions are not helpful to consider. The *Mahayana* school speculates unsystematically about a vast series of heavens, sort of half-way houses on the road to nirvana. But in the end even those heavens are illusory. Mahayanist teaching at least implies that the powers of the universe will see to it that all creatures will eventually find salvation.

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

The Buddha added the notion that all creatures, including man, are fictions: there is really no soul ("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.

Salvation and the Afterlife

Buddhism sees ignorance rather than sin as the roadblock to salvation. That is, the belief that the world and self truly exist, keeps the illusory wheel of existence rolling--only destruction of that belief will stop the mad course of the world.

Its doctrine is summed up in the Four Noble Truths:

(1) **Suffering is universal.** Buddha taught that the very act of living involves suffering from birth until death. Even death brings no relief, however, because of the cycle of reincarnation, suffering and death. Salvation (nirvana) is to be released from this unending cycle of suffering.

(2) **The cause of suffering is craving.** People remain in this endless cycle because they are too attached to their health, wealth, status and physical comfort. This is because they are ignorant of the nature of reality and they fall victim to what Buddha called *tanha* (attachment, desire).

(3) **The cure for suffering is to overcome ignorance and eliminate craving.** Since to live is to suffer and suffering is caused by craving, if a person could remove craving from his life, suffering would end.

(4) **The way to cease craving and so attain escape from continual rebirth is by following the Middle Way, known as the Noble Eightfold Path.** The eightfold path consists of eight ways of right living: right viewpoint, right aspiration, right speech, right behavior, right occupation, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation. *

Original Buddhist teaching and the *Therevada* place emphasis on the individual monk working through self-control and a series of meditative practices that progressively lead him to lose a sense of his grasping self.

The *Mahayana* school began with the insight that the ideal of the monk striving only for his own salvation was selfish and did little for the majority of men. Mahayanists eventually came to posit a vast number of Buddhas and *bodhisettvas*, "heroes of the faith" who reached the point of nirvana but refused to enter it until the rest of mankind was brought along with them. To varying degrees they can graciously grant aids to salvation to those who petition them.

Nirvana literally means "blowing out," as with the flame of a candle. That is, nothing can be said about it except that it is a transcendent, permanent state of. . .nothing (?).

Morals

The eightfold path defines moral living for the lay Buddhist:

1. **Right Viewpoint**- accepting the four noble truths and the eightfold path
2. **Right Aspiration**- renouncing the pleasures of the senses; harboring no ill will toward anyone and harming no living creature
3. **Right Speech**- not lying, slandering or abusing anyone. Not indulging in idle talk
4. **Right Behavior**-not destroying any living creature; taking only what is given to you; not committing any unlawful sexual act
5. **Right Occupation**-earning your livelihood in a way that will harm no one
6. **Right Effort**- resolving and striving heroically to prevent any evil qualities from arising in you and abandoning any evil qualities you may possess. Striving to acquire good qualities and encouraging those you do possess to grow, increase and be perfected
7. **Right Mindfulness**-being observant, strenuous, alert, contemplative, and free of desire and of sorrow
8. **Right Meditation**- Entering into the four degrees of meditation which are produced by concentration BUT only after abandoning all sensuous pleasures, all evil qualities, joy and sorrow **

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 *Therevada* 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.

Worship

In most cases what looks like worship before a statue or image is really a sort of paying respects. The Buddha is revered as an example of a faithful life and as the one who brought the teachings of Buddhism; Buddhists are taught that they must themselves overcome the obstacle of ignorance.

Meditation in Buddhism can focus on one's breathing (important because it is halfway between voluntary and involuntary action), one's own attitudes (as in Mindfulness meditation, in which one tries to be clear at all times as to one's true motives for every action), a neutral object, or a *bodhisattva*. In each case the purpose is to divest oneself of craving and sense of self.

In some sects it is believed that a *bodhisattva* can transfer his merit to a supplicant and so aid him to nirvana. In those cases the Buddhist becomes very much like a worshiper petitioning God for grace and mercy.

Conclusion

Buddhism does not address the point of our existence for that would necessitate a metaphysical contemplation and involve a supreme being which it denies. Because there is no God, there is no sin which is against such God which eliminates the need for forgiveness. Buddha promised no power to live according to the eightfold path which turns out to be a very lonely path at best. On this path, Buddha points out that everything relies on the individual's effort. Our Lord, on the other hand, offers forgiveness through His sacrifice and teaches us to turn our burdens over to Him and He will give us power to live successfully and in communion with Him.

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Buddhism
Supreme Being	One personal/supreme God who is Creator & Lord of everything that exists. He eternally exists as Triune God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Gen. 1; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19.	irrelevant.
Key Figures in History	Jesus, the Christ, eternally one with the Father and incarnated supernaturally through the Virgin Mary. John 1:1-12; Matt 1:18-25	Siddhartha Gautama (who became Buddha, the Enlightened One) 563-483 B.C.

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Buddhism
Person of Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ is perfect in His divinity and perfect in His humanity, yet His divinity parted not from His humanity for a single moment nor a twinkle of an eye. Supreme example of God's character & His love for humanity. Full and final revelation of God and His love. John 1:1-13	A teacher who may possess Buddhahood or Enlightenment. One among many, not unique.
Work of Jesus Christ	Jesus was born, lived, & died in a given time & place as a unique historical event. He lived a sinless life & willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. He is Messiah (Christ), Lord and Savior. John 1:14-18; 3:16	Jesus was a great religious teacher whose teachings can be valuable today.
Sources of Authority	Bible (Old & New Testaments). Unique, revealed, factual, accurate, & inspired Word of God.. 2 Tim. 3:16-17.	Sutras; Tripitaka (the Three Baskets).
Doctrine of Humanity	Humanity is part of creation, but distinct from the rest of creation & from God. Human beings are created in God's image. Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity & worth. Gen. 1:26-28.	One lifetime for each person, composed of skanda (parts), but many lives for the parts. Concept of anatta (no self) denies existence of a self beyond mental & physical attributes.
The Basic Human Problem	Sin: By their free will, human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature, & pursuing a course of life that is opposed to His essential character & revealed law. Gen.3; Rom. 3:23.	The human condition is suffering, caused by attachment to things & the craving (desire) accompanying this attachment.
Solution to the Basic Human Problem	Salvation- restoring man back in communion with God. Process rather than event. Freedom from the guilt & power of sin - is God's gift of grace through Christ's atonement, new nature received through baptism Eph. 2:8-9	Goal of life is nirvana to eliminate all desire of attachment, particularly by following the Eight-fold Path.

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Buddhism
Ethics (Value System)	Ultimate values for humanity are based on God's character and His Ten Commandments. Human beings are potentially good, but not inevitably good. They always need God's grace to renew their characters.	The Eight-fold Path stresses moral virtue, including right action & right vocation. Right conduct includes loving-kindness, selfless giving to others, & efforts to alleviate human hurts.
Life After Death	Eternal communion with God (heaven) or eternal separation from God (hell). Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20-22	Possible attainment of nirvana (negation of suffering), a state of being that is realized through eliminating desire.

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Hinduism

Introduction

During the fourth century B.C. Aryans--the same people that developed Greek culture--conquered much of present-day India. Their pantheon of gods, similar to that of the Greeks, combined with indigenous Indian traditions of meditation to form a loose combination of beliefs and practices that came to be known as Hinduism. Hinduism is not really one religion, but many different religions that interact and blend with one another. There is no known founder and no creedal statements of faith. In fact, there is no agreed upon authority save the voluminous sacred body of texts, *Vedas*, which were written over 1400 year period. The contents of the Vedas are practically unknown to most Hindus and the texts are seldom drawn upon for information or advice. Interestingly, one can be a good Hindu and believe in one god, many gods, or no god at all! For Hindus, contradictory ideas are not a problem as all reality is seen as “one”. *

There are, however, two foundational concepts that almost all Hindus believe: reincarnation and karma. Reincarnation is the process that the *atman*, the eternal, uncreated soul, must endure while on the great wheel of *samsara* (where a soul must go through thousands or even millions of lives all full of suffering) before reaching *moksha*. *Moksha* is the goal as it is liberation from suffering and uniting with the infinite (the end of the soul cycling). For the Hindu, *karma* is the cumulative value of one’s life actions, good minus bad, which determines one’s reincarnation level after death. Positive *karma* would seemingly raise one’s station and negative *karma* would lower it.

Hinduism had never been a missionary religion until the twentieth century and is largely limited to India and groups of emigrant Indians mainly because of its infusion with the caste system. This is not to say, however, that Hindu thought has not had an effect on American culture. The clearest depiction of this in the unquestioned Vedantic motto: The world's religions offer varying approaches to God, each one true and valid, each religion offering the world a unique and irreplaceable path to God-realization. Vedanta is Hinduism practiced by non Indians here in the States.**

What Hinduism Says About:

God

Brahman is the supreme reality for the Hindu. It is the “thing” to which the also divine *atman* is trying to unite. While the Brahman is impersonal, many gods or incarnations of gods who are worshiped by Hindus have personal attributes. Chief among them are *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*. In the Hindu “trinity”, Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva is the destroyer. Avatars or incarnations of Vishnu have been sent to earth to bring the message of salvation to man. Vishnu's incarnations include *Rama*, a benevolent king, and *Krishna*, an impetuous, violent, and erotic figure. The gods are sometimes amoral; their freedom from the usual restraints necessary to humans is often celebrated, and they are often represented with sexual imagery. In addition to these main three gods, there are thousands, perhaps millions of gods/demigods to choose from.

Man and the Universe

The material universe is not the creation of a personal God but is rather a sort of unconscious emanation from the divine. As such it is (1) beginning less, and some would say endless, and (2) unreal, an illusion because the only true reality is Brahman. Hindus believe that the universe "pulsates," recurrently being destroyed and recreated over periods lasting about 4 billion years. The world is seen as a huge series of repeated cycles, each cycle being nearly a copy of the last. Man is compelled to play a part in this gigantic, illusory, and wearisome universe. Each human soul is also beginning less and has gone through a series of reincarnations. Hinduism "solves" the problem of the existence of suffering and evil in a fairly neat manner: all present suffering, it says, is exactly deserved, being the paying back of one's *karma*, the accumulation of deeds done in past lives--and all present evil will be exactly repaid in the form of suffering in future lives. As a result traditional Hinduism often has not paid much attention to relieving the suffering of people, although social reform movements have arisen in the last century. What is not addressed, is how the cycle began for the uncreated *atman* and why it is separated from Brahman to begin with.

Life is seen as basically painful, full of distress that is only temporarily masked by earthly pleasures. But underlying the unreality and misery, the human soul is identical with supreme Brahman, who has no part of this sorry universe.

Salvation and the Afterlife

The final goal of salvation or *moksha* in Hinduism is escape from the endless round of birth, death, and rebirth. That can mean an eternal resting place for the individual personality in the arms of a loving, personal God, but it usually means the dissolving of all personality into the unimaginable abyss of Brahman.

There are basically three paths from which to choose for *moksha*. They are the path of works (*karma*), the path of knowledge (*jnana*) and the path of passionate devotion (*bhakti*). When following the path of works, the person strives toward salvation by performing works without regard for personal gain. He must follow the occupation of his caste, marry within his caste, eat or not eat certain foods. By following these obligations, the person using his path may hope for a better position in the upcoming reincarnation. A more difficult and exclusive path is the path of knowledge. This path is available only to men and then only of the highest castes. It includes self renunciation and exploring the Sacred Scriptures, usually with the help of a guru. It usually has three steps: Hearing (or reading), thinking, and meditation through yoga. Hindus believe the greatest obstacles to *moksha* are your own body, mind and personality. Through yoga, the body is controlled by the use of body postures, solitude and breathing exercises. The mind is restrained through meditation techniques using mantras. The personality or self is suppressed by gurus or masters who humiliate as well as teach. By far the most common path chosen is that of passionate devotion. Devotees of this path may choose any one of the thousands of gods, goddesses or demigods in the Hindu arena and passionately worship that god. It satisfies the longing for a more emotional and personal approach to religion. In the way of devotion, the

focus is one obtaining the mercy and help of a god in finding release from the cycle of reincarnation. Some Hindus conceive of ultimate salvation as absorption into the one divine reality, with all loss of individual existence. Others conceive of it as heavenly existence in adoration of the personal God. For a Hindu, to also follow Christ along this path would be legitimate.

Most Hindus consider that they have many (as in thousands) reincarnations ahead of them before they can find final salvation, although some sects believe that a gracious divinity will carry them along the way more quickly.

Morals

Because of the vast number of reincarnations of any given individual, Hinduism recognizes that most people's lack of spiritual development means they must lead normal lives. However, it is thought that as a person matures he can grow closer to the ideal of full renunciation of the personality. Thus, pursuit of wealth and love of the opposite sex are considered proper to certain stages of the great wheel of *samsara* when people grow old (in terms of reincarnations) they often leave behind their worldly possessions to pursue the life of a wandering monk.

Yet no matter what stage of life one is in, "renouncing the fruits of your labors" is the supreme law of morality. Hindus seek to remain conscious of the illusory nature of this world and so progressively deny themselves, at least in thought, all forms of material, emotional, and even spiritual rewards and property.

For centuries the notions of reincarnation and *karma* have been used to support the cruelties of the Indian caste system, which relegates the majority of people to poverty and subservience. Probably as a result of Western influence the caste system has been substantially dismantled, although the idea that all human suffering is deserved is still responsible for a great deal of injustice.

Worship

Hindus have a magical and legalistic notion that one can acquire spiritual "points" through contact with all manner of holy objects and persons; that is by and large the Hindu notion of grace. At least among the uneducated an image of a family god is kept in the house, and villages generally have their local icon as well. Animals such as cows, monkeys, and snakes are revered. Certain rivers--the Ganges in particular--are thought holy, and bathing in them is thought to improve one's *karma*.

For the most progressed on the path of knowledge, certain portions of scriptures are memorized and chanted, sacred stories are acted out in plays and songs, and gods are prayed to in an ecstatic manner. Holy men are highly revered, and in serving them Hindus hope that some of their holiness will rub off and aid them to *moksha*.

Conclusion

Hinduism is really the smorgasbord of religions—there is a little something for everyone, unless of course you happen to be born an Untouchable (those so low in India, they are not even part of the caste system and therefore not eligible for salvation—they are continually reincarnated as Untouchable) in which case, your uncreated, eternal *atman* will never be united with *Brahman*. What there is not is absolute truth. Our personal, loving God became incarnate only once in human history and teaches that He is “the way, the truth and the life” not one of many ways as Hinduism proposes. Our God created our souls for the purpose of communing with Him we are not divine within ourselves. While our soul is eternal, it is appointed for men to die once and after this the judgment (Heb 9:27). There is no need for constant recycling because we serve a God of grace who gives us all we need on our path to Him—first and foremost the conquering of our greatest enemy death through His crucifixion and resurrection.

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Hinduism
Supreme Being	One personal/supreme God who is Creator & Lord of everything that exists. He eternally exists as Triune God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Gen. 1; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19.	Impersonal Ultimate Reality; or "The absolute" Major Triad: Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu.
Key Figures in History	Jesus, the Christ, eternally one with the Father and incarnated supernaturally through the Virgin Mary. John 1:1-12; Matt 1:18-25	Avatars (deities in various form). Gurus are spiritual teachers.
Person of Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ is perfect in His divinity and perfect in His humanity, yet His divinity parted not from His humanity for a single moment nor a twinkle of an eye Supreme example of God's character & His love for humanity. Full and final revelation of God and His love. John 1:1-13	For some Hindus, Jesus was an Avatar or incarnation of God - one among many Avatars; a great spiritual teacher, a guru.
Work of Jesus Christ	Jesus was born, lived, & died in a given time & place as a unique historical event. He lived a sinless life & willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. He is Messiah (Christ), Lord and Savior. John 1:14-18; 3:16	Jesus was a great religious teacher whose teachings can be valuable today.
Sources of Authority	Bible (Old & New Testaments). Unique, revealed, factual, accurate, & inspired Word of God.. 2 Tim. 3:16-17.	Vedas, Upanishads, Epics, Puranas, and a host of other sacred writings.
Doctrine of Humanity	Humanity is part of creation, but distinct from the rest of creation & from God. Human beings are created in God's image. Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity & worth. Gen. 1:26-28.	Divine eternal soul part of God or Ultimate Reality. Physical body has little worth.

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Hinduism
The Basic Human Problem	Sin: By their free will, human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature, & pursuing a course of life that is opposed to His essential character & revealed law. Gen.3; Rom. 3:23.	The human condition is samsara (the flow of reality in which souls are continually dying & being reborn). The present existence is an illusion; people are unaware of their oneness with God.
Solution to the Basic Human Problem	Salvation- restoring man back in communion with God. Process rather than event. Freedom from the guilt & power of sin - is God's gift of grace through Christ's atonement, new nature received through baptism Eph. 2:8-9	goal of life is to gain release (liberation) from the cycle of reincarnation & to pass beyond illusion to become one with the divine (Ultimate Reality) by following the proper yoga (path or discipline).
Ethics (Value System)	Ultimate values for humanity are based on God's character and His Ten Commandments. Human beings are potentially good, but not inevitably good. They always need God's grace to renew their characters.	Deeds are right if they produce good conditions; deeds are wrong if they produce harm to one's self or to the world in general.
Life After Death	Eternal communion with God (heaven) or eternal separation from God (hell). Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20-22	Cycles of reincarnation until union with or reabsorption into Ultimate Reality. The desired ultimate state of existence is moksha ("final release").

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*Ridenour, Fritz So What's the Difference? p. 91

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Islam

Introduction

Islam is a monotheistic religion based on revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad from Archangel Gabriel in the 7th century A.D., which were later recorded in the Qur'an, Islam's sacred text. Much of Muhammad's zeal was in reaction to the polytheism and lawlessness of the existing Arab culture. Most scholars believe that, in his travels, Muhammad developed his concepts of monotheism from several sources, including Nestorian monks (who deny that the Incarnate Christ was both human and divine at birth. They contend that Jesus was born as a man who was later indwelt with divinity). In addition, it is believed he was exposed to a great deal of teaching from Jews who exposed him to the Talmud. The word *Islam* is the Arabic word for surrender and refers to the peace that comes from surrender to God. Within a century Islam had conquered an area greater than the Roman Empire at its height. Today Islam is almost the sole religion of all Arab countries and has major communities in Africa as well.

The *Qur'an*, for the most part a series of short teachings (three-quarters dictated by Muhammad, the other quarter by his disciples who remembered his oral teachings after he died), is intensely revered by Muslims as the final word of God, the culmination of what was only begun in the Bible. In addition to the Qur'an, Muhammad had sayings called *Sunnah* ("path"). The collection of these sayings are the *Hadith* and form the basis for traditions which were handed down orally for generations after Muhammad's death until finally transcribed.. The *Hadith* is to the Qur'an what the Talmud is to the Hebrew Bible. Another body of teaching in Islam comes from the *Shariah*; legal interpretations of the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. *Shariah*, meaning law, lays down the strict moral conduct expected from Muslims.

Also expected from Muslims is the practice of Five Pillars of Islam: faith, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and alms.

There are three main branches of Islam. Sunni Muslims are the [largest denomination](#). Shia Islam is the second largest denomination of the Islamic Faith,, making up 10-20% of Muslims worldwide. Shias adhere to the teachings of [Islamic prophet Muhammad](#) but differ from Sunni in following the religious guidance of his family, whom they consider to be [infallible](#). Unlike Sunnis, Shias believe [Ali ibn Abi Talib](#) (Muhammad's cousin and husband of [Fatimah](#)) was the true successor to Muhammad and reject the legitimacy of the first three [caliphs](#) of Islamic history. *Shi'ites* believe that religious leaders should also be political rulers, whereas the majority of Muslims, the *Sunnites*, believe in a separation of the two realms. *Sufis* form the mystical branch of Islam, teaching an arduous path of self-denial culminating in union with God.

What Islam Says About:

God

The single most important belief in Islam, and arguably the central theme of Islam, is that there is **one God**. *Allah* means "*the God*"--indicating the radical monotheism of Islam. "We shall not serve anyone but God, and we shall associate none with Him" (Qur'an 3.64). Any division of God is rejected, including the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. Muslims believe that God is the all-powerful Creator of a perfect, ordered universe. He is

transcendent and not a part of his creation, and is most often referred to in terms and with names that emphasize his majesty and superiority. Among the 99 Beautiful Names of God (*Asma al-Husna*) in the Qur'an are: the Creator, the Fashioner, the Life-Giver, the Provider, the Opener, the Bestower, the Prevailer, the Reckoner, the Recorder, the King of Kingship and the Lord of the Worlds. Conspicuously absent is the name Father. Muslims find it difficult to divorce the concept of father from the physical realm. To them, it is blasphemous to call Allah your father. To do so is the same as saying that your mother and Allah had sexual intercourse to produce you!

Although the God of Islam has revealed his will through the prophets, his actual nature remains ultimately unknowable. The majesty and might of Allah is often portrayed in the Qur'an, and it is emphasized that his purposes are always serious. Justice is Allah's most important feature for Muslims. Allah is also merciful and compassionate, but that mercy is shown mainly in his sending messengers who proclaim the truth of man's responsibility to live according to Allah's dictates. In essence, He acts impersonally and is deficient in such attributes as love and grace.

Man and the Universe

Muslims see the universe as created by the deliberate act of a personal, omnipresent God. The universe is not considered an illusion in any way and is basically good, being given for the benefit of man. Muhammad did not produce miracles but simply proclaimed the message of Allah. Thus the presence of God in the world is seen not through supernatural signs but through the wonderful order of nature and the one great miracle, the Qur'an. Muslims generally do not expect miraculous deliverance from suffering in this life but believe that good deeds will be rewarded in the next life.

According to the Qur'an, Allah "created man from a clot of blood" at the same time he created the *jinn* (demons) from fire. Humans are the greatest of all creatures, created with free will for the purpose of obeying and serving God. The Qur'an includes a version of the biblical story of the fall of Adam (Qur'an 7), but it does not conclude from it the doctrine of sin leading to death and a corrupted nature as is understood in Christianity. In the Qur'anic version of the story, Adam and Eve begged God's forgiveness (7:23) and he punished them with a mortal life on earth but added, "from it [earth] you will be taken out at last" (7:25). Since Allah forgave the sins of the first pair, Muslims believe, all are born in *Al-Fitra*, a natural state of submission to Allah. True repentance from sin returns a person to this original sinless state. According to Muslim theology, mankind's chief failing is pride and rebellion. In their pride, humans attempt to partner themselves with God and thereby damage the unity of God. Thus pride is Islam's cardinal sin. The cardinal virtue, then, is surrender, or *islam*.

Man is endowed with *taqwa*, a sort of divine spark manifested in his conscience that enables him to perceive the truth and to act on it. Conscience is thus of the greatest value in Islam, much as love is the greatest value to Christians.

But Islam is in no way pantheism. Man may cultivate his *taqwa* and so live according to the way of Allah, or he may suppress it. Man thus deserves or is undeserving of God's guidance.

Salvation and the Afterlife

The Qur'an rejects the notion of redemption; salvation depends on a man's actions (good works) and belief (that God is one and Muhammad is his prophet). However, *tauba* ("repentance") can quickly turn an evil man toward the virtue that will save him. So Islam does not hold out the possibility of salvation through the work of God but invites man to accept God's guidance.

Like Christianity, Islam teaches the continued existence of the soul and a transformed physical existence after death. Muslims believe there will be a day of judgment when all humans will be divided between the eternal destinations of Paradise and Hell. The final day of reckoning is described in awesome terms. On that last day every man will account for what he has done, and his eternal existence will be determined on that basis: "Every man's actions have we hung around his neck, and on the last day shall be laid before him a wide-open book" (17.13).

Muslims recognize that different individuals have been given different abilities and various degrees of insight into the truth. Each man will be judged according to his situation, and every man who lives according to the truth to the best of his abilities will achieve heaven. However, infidels who are presented with the truth of Islam and reject it will be given no mercy.

The Qur'an has vivid descriptions of both heaven and hell. Heaven is depicted in terms of worldly delights, with lofty mansions, delicious food and drink and virgin companions called *houris*. There are seven heavens. Hell is mentioned frequently in the [Qur'an](#) and the [Sunnah](#) using a variety of imagery. It has seven doors leading to a fiery crater of various levels, the lowest of which contains the tree Zaqquq and a cauldron of boiling pitch. The level of hell depends on the degree of offenses. Suffering is both physical and spiritual. Being a Muslim does not keep one out of Hell, but it is not clear whether Muslims remain in Hell forever. Non-Muslims (*kafir*), however, will be punished eternally.

Morals

Islam presents itself as a "straight path" of clear-cut duties and commands. Islam's moral code prohibits drinking, gambling, adultery, fornication, and the taking of interest at an individual level. The prohibitions are designed to have a social application because those who indulge in any of these prohibited acts would not only be harming themselves, but would harm society also. Similarly, the moral virtues that Islam enjoins on the believer are not just for individual moral piety, but for the collective social good also.

Muslims depict Muhammad in the Qur'an as a loving person, helping the poor and slow to take revenge. Nevertheless the belief that only Muslims possess the truth and all else are infidels has led to much violence and evil on the behalf of Allah through the ages.

Although it is said the Qur'an actually worked to elevate the horribly degraded position of women in Arab society, women continue to be regarded more as possible temptations to sin for men than as human beings with their own responsibilities before God.

Worship

Muhammad is not worshiped: only God is. Because of strict rules against depictions of human forms in art there is a strong impetus against idolatry or saint-worshiping in Islam. Allah is extolled in hymns that depict his power and majesty. But even Allah cannot be ultimately leaned

on for salvation, because salvation is man's responsibility. Thus his guidance, in the form of words rather than persons, is emphasized. For that reason the Qur'an is revered as perhaps no other book. It is probably the most memorized book in the world.

Acts of worship in Islam are embodied in the "five pillars": A Muslim must (1) recite the basic creed, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet"; (2) recite prayers in praise of Allah five times daily while facing Mecca; (3) give money to the poor; (4) fast for one month a year (Ramadan); and (5) make a pilgrimage at least once during his lifetime to Mecca, the city where Allah revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel.

The purpose of worship in Islam is to be God conscious. Thus the worship, whether it is prayer, fasting, or charity, is a means to achieve God consciousness so that when one becomes aware of God, in thought and in action, he is in a better position to receive His bounties both in this world and the hereafter.***

Conclusion

There are many beliefs in Islam that leave one scratching one's head; most of which relate to our Lord Jesus Christ. Muslims believe that Jesus was born of a virgin and was a prophet of God albeit of lower rank than Muhammad. They acknowledge that Jesus performed many miracles including raising people from the dead (believing that Muhammad did none of these things). While they do not deny that he was put on a cross, they do not believe that he actually died, rather he ascended alive into heaven. Yet they also believe that Jesus will return to judge the world. All the while refusing Christ's divinity because Allah is one and this unity precludes a Trinitarian understanding (remember the Nestorian influence). Because of the stringent belief that Allah is one, it is inconceivable for a Muslim to consider that God would desire to commune—become united with and be known by man. Grace has no import in Islamic salvation—it is purely the work of man and in addition to adhering to the 5 pillars of faith, it would behoove one intent on heaven to have his good works outweigh his bad.

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Islam
Supreme Being	One personal/supreme God who is Creator & Lord of everything that exists. He eternally exists as Triune God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Gen. 1; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19.	God (Allah) is one. Strict monotheism – "There is no God but Allah."
Key Figures in History	Jesus, the Christ, eternally one with the Father and incarnated supernaturally through the Virgin Mary. John 1:1-12; Matt 1:18-25	The Prophet Muhammad (or Mohammed) (A.D. 570-632)
Person of Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ is perfect in His divinity and perfect in His humanity, yet His divinity parted not from His humanity for a single moment nor a twinkle of an eye Supreme example of God's character & His love for humanity. Full and final revelation of God and His love. John 1:1-13	A major prophet, spirit of Allah (or God), without sin, but not divine; His miracles are signs that He came from God.

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Islam
Work of Jesus Christ	Jesus was born, lived, & died in a given time & place as a unique historical event. He lived a sinless life & willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. He is Messiah (Christ), Lord and Savior. John 1:14-18; 3:16	Jesus was sent to the children of Israel & faithfully showed the signs of Allah, taught prayer, & brought the gospel (Injil). He did not die on a cross, but Allah took Him into heaven.
Sources of Authority	Bible (Old & New Testaments). Unique, revealed, factual, accurate, & inspired Word of God.. 2 Tim. 3:16-17.	Qur'an (koran).
Doctrine of Humanity	Humanity is part of creation, but distinct from the rest of creation & from God. Human beings are created in God's image. Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity & worth. Gen. 1:26-28.	Humans are basically pure, but fallible and need guidance. Created by Allah with ability to follow his will, human beings must give account of their conduct on the day of judgment.
The Basic Human Problem	Sin: By their free will, human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature, & pursuing a course of life that is opposed to His essential character & revealed law. Gen.3; Rom. 3:23.	Sin: disobedience of responsible human beings to the law of Allah. Sin is caused by human weakness, forgetfulness, & a spirit of rebellion.
Solution to the Basic Human Problem	Salvation- restoring man back in communion with God. Process rather than event. Freedom from the guilt & power of sin - is God's gift of grace through Christ's atonement, new nature received through baptism Eph. 2:8-9	Allah acts in mercy by sending the prophets. A person's salvation depends largely upon personal observance of the Pillars of the Faith & submission to Allah.
Ethics (Value System)	Ultimate values for humanity are based on God's character and His Ten Commandments. Human beings are potentially good, but not inevitably good. They always need God's grace to renew their characters.	Allah judges human beings for their actions in submitting to Allah, obeying the Shari'ah (holy law), & advancing the Ummah (people of Islam).
Life After Death	Eternal communion with God (heaven) or eternal separation from God (hell). Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20-22	Paradise (heaven) for faithful believers & hell (punishment) for nonbelievers & those who commit shirk (apostasy).

References:

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Ridenour, Fritz So What's the Difference? p. pp. 73-87

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Jehovah Witnesses

Introduction

Officially, Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) are called The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTBTS) as "The Watchtower" is their prime publication espousing their teachings and Bible interpretations. Jehovah's Witnesses, claiming to have restored teachings lost through the apostasy in Christendom, believe they are the only true Christian organization—though they reject central teachings of historic Christianity (e.g., Trinity, deity of Christ, physical resurrection of Christ, person of the Holy Spirit). The Watchtower headquarters has the believers in this cult totally convinced that all who disagree with them (specifically orthodox Christians) are not only wrong, but are enemies who will be destroyed by Jehovah in the great battle of Armageddon which is to come. One of the major tools in JW evangelism (which they perform zealously going door to door or standing in public places sharing literature) is their own version of the Scriptures called *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT)*. This version is filled with mistranslations to prove JW doctrine. Interestingly, this group which claims to be "the remnant" did not come on the religious scene until the 1880s when it was officially founded by Charles Taze Russell. By the time he was a teenager, Russell had rejected many of the doctrines taught in his Congregationalist church; particularly those of the Trinity and heaven and hell all of which he found unreasonable. After a period of skepticism in all belief, he was taken in by Adventist teaching which proposed that there was no eternal punishment, because the wicked would be annihilated. His interest in end time prophecy was piqued here. In 1879, Russell left the Adventists to launch "The Watchtower". By 1896, Russell had established the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society with its headquarters in Brooklyn, New York. Russell never had any formal theological training yet he promoted himself as a Greek scholar and wrote a 7 volume series entitled Studies in the Scriptures. In 1912 he was exposed as a perjurer in court when he could not read letters from the Greek alphabet. Regardless, he kept on going and kept on adding to the number of followers. He prophesied the end of the world beginning in 1914 but died with his prophecy unfulfilled in 1916. Without missing a beat, his shoes were filled by the charismatic and powerful personality of Joseph Rutherford, a lawyer who served as legal advisor to the WTBTS. He set 1925 as the new date for Armageddon. When this did not come to fruition, he cast aspersions on the believers stating they had misunderstood what he had said and that that was not what the Lord had stated at all. The name Jehovah's Witnesses came from Isaiah 43:10 and was employed to distinguish Rutherford's group from certain splinter groups of WTBTS. In order to increase membership, Rutherford instituted the now infamous and wildly successful door to door visitation program. He incorporated "scare tactics" by telling would be converts that only 144,000 would go to Heaven. This method was so successful that Rutherford found himself in a conundrum. By the 1930s Armageddon still hadn't happened and there would soon be more than 144,000 on the rosters. No problem, he revealed that all JWs prior to 1935 would go to Heaven; these were referred to as "the little flock". All other converts would constitute the "great crowd" who would not go to heaven but could look forward to spending a Millennium on earth with Jesus after Armageddon. In 1942, Rutherford died and was succeeded by Nathan Knorr. While Knorr was not a dominating personality like Russell or Rutherford, he fancied himself a prophet and predicted that decidedly, 1975 was the true date for Armageddon. He also published a book explaining away the previous erroneous predictions. Surprisingly, by 1977 JWs still had over 2 million active members around the world- despite the unfulfilled predictions and over 200 changes to their doctrines. Today, JW boast a worldwide membership in excess of 6 million. Historically, the Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) are best known for their practices of refusing (1) to serve in the military; (2) to salute the flag; (3) to celebrate Christmas,

birthdays, or other holidays; and (4) to give or to accept blood transfusions. Rejecting the medical practices of vaccinations, organ transplants, and blood transfusions, the Watchtower has caused the deaths of many of its members throughout its history. Now, however, vaccinations and organ transplants have been acknowledged by the Watchtower as acceptable practices, contradicting their previous doctrinal position.

What Jehovah Witnesses Say About:

God

The only proper name for God is “Jehovah (although Jesus does not even address Him with this name).” Jehovah’s Witnesses reject the doctrine of the Trinity as “false doctrine.” They claim that it is “nowhere mentioned in the Bible, makes God into three gods, is of pagan origin, and ultimately is derived from Satan.” God is the Almighty God who is one and Jesus, His creation, is a mighty god. So in essence, JWs believe in 2 gods, not one.

While the JW understanding of Jesus’ existence is just a rehashing of the Arian heresy (which taught that the Person of Christ did not eternally pre-exist as God the Son, being equally God with the Eternal Father, but that He was a created spirit-being made by God and used as a created instrument in the work of producing other spirit creatures), their understanding of who Jesus is is rather unique. According to JW, Jesus existed in three separate states or phases. Jesus Christ, before becoming man, was Archangel Michael, “the first of God’s creations.” Jesus ceased to exist as Michael when the life force of Michael was transferred to the man Jesus conceived by Mary and he became a perfect man (there is no incarnation, as Christians teach). When this Jesus died, he ceased to exist (He was not bodily resurrected.). In his resurrection (as a “spirit person”), “Jesus” again became Michael the Archangel newly created or restored. Jesus is not God, but a god—“the equal of the perfect man Adam” (who, by the way is not eligible for the forgiveness from his own sin). Jesus was resurrected as “a spirit person,” not in the body that died. Jesus returned invisibly in a spiritual existence in 1914 to begin setting up his kingdom (revised from an earlier 1874 prediction).

The Holy Spirit is also countered in JW doctrine. The Holy Spirit is not a personal being, but Jehovah’s “impersonal active force” “by which he accomplishes his purpose and executes his will.”

Man and the Universe

Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that all persons are born sinners. Adam’s sin and its punishment, death, passed to all humanity. But man does not have an immortal soul. Only the first 144,000 believers will have immortality in heaven with Jehovah. The remaining believers will be on earth ruled by Jesus and the “little flock” for eternity. When others die, he or she ceases to exist. For all the talk of Armageddon, JW also teach that the earth will never be destroyed or depopulated but will become a peaceful paradise.

Salvation and the Afterlife

First of all, JW teach that only those in their organization can be saved. But their idea of salvation is markedly different from ours. Jesus paid only for the sin of Adam (not for all human

sin), to make salvation possible by means of one's works. To be saved Jehovah's Witnesses must meet the following requirements: "1) Take in knowledge by studying the Bible with the aid of *Watchtower* publications; 2) obey the laws of God and the laws of the Watchtower Society; 3) be baptized into the Watchtower organization; and 4) promote the good news of the Watchtower Society from door to door (by collecting donations for subscriptions to the magazine) (*The Watchtower*, February 15, 1983, p.12)." Only a special "elect" class of 144,000 individuals (the "little flock" or the "anointed") will actually enter heaven to be with Jehovah. Because of their works they will share in Jesus' nature and in fact become gods in a spiritual existence (not physical). A second "earthly class" of people, called "the great crowd" (other Jehovah's Witnesses), will inherit a "Paradise" on earth during a millennium, after unbelievers are destroyed in the Great Tribulation or Battle of Armageddon. Unbelievers in the rest of mankind will be annihilated. There is no eternal punishment or hell, which are "fiendish concepts" originating with "the chief slanderer of God" (the Devil)."

Morals

Blood transfusions are forbidden by Jehovah. Birthdays and holidays such as Christmas and Easter (which are regarded as pagan in origin), Mother's and Father's days, etc. are not biblical and must not be celebrated. Participation in the armed forces, voting, and saluting the flag are wrong, demonstrating allegiance to men rather than to Jehovah.

In contrast, Jehovah's Witnesses do teach and endeavor to live by the moral standards of God's Word. They are guided by principles such as the following:

"You must love your neighbor as yourself."—[Matthew 22:39](#).

"Do not defraud."—[Mark 10:19](#).

"Let the stealer steal no more, but rather let him do hard work, doing with his hands what is good work, that he may have something to distribute to someone in need."—[Ephesians 4:28](#).

"We wish to conduct ourselves honestly in all things."—[Hebrews 13:18](#).

Though the Witnesses are not smug or self-righteous, they believe that if everyone applied these principles, the world would be a much better place in which to live. They also believe in God's promise that one day it will be.—[2 Peter 3:13](#).

Worship

The Jehovah Witnesses are headed by a "governing body" consisting of 18 men (chosen from living members of the 144,000 elect) having supreme and final authority, especially in the interpretation of the Bible. Locally congregations meet in the "Kingdom Hall," usually on three days a week (a required 5 hours) and chiefly to learn from *Watchtower* materials taught by elders (there are no priests or pastors) in preparation for door-to-door witnessing. Jehovah's Witnesses do not use religious symbols, such as the cross, in their worship. For them, the cross is a pagan symbol; Christ was crucified on a stake, not a cross.

Jehovah's Witnesses usually hold services three times a week, and most of the programs involve audience participation similar to a classroom discussion. Worship starts and ends with prayer, and most services include singing. All services focus on reading and discussing the Bible and seeing how to apply it in one's life. Those in attendance—even the very young—are encouraged

to read the verses being discussed in their own copy of the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses have no clergy-laity division. All baptized members are ordained ministers, and all who attend services, including children, have an opportunity to participate. Most services are led by elders, who are spiritually mature members of the faith, or by qualified assistants, who are known as ministerial servants.

The *Public Meeting* and *Watchtower Study* are often held on Sundays. The first is a 45-minute Bible-based lecture that is designed to be of interest both to members of the congregation and to visitors. The second is a one-hour question-and-answer coverage of a recent article on a Bible topic published in their main religious journal, *The Watchtower*.

For the *Congregation Book Study*, Witnesses meet in small groups of about 10 to 15, usually in the private homes of members, to discuss a single Bible topic in depth. One of the books or brochures published by Jehovah's Witnesses is used to direct the question-and-answer Bible discussion. Recent study subjects have included family life, the reliability of the Bible, the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and a verse-by-verse review of the Bible book of Revelation.

The *Theocratic Ministry School* and the *Service Meeting* are usually held on a weekday evening. The 45-minute Theocratic Ministry School is designed to help Jehovah's Witnesses improve their public reading and speaking. Students receive assignments on a rotating basis. At each meeting, six students give brief speeches on pre-selected Bible topics, and an instructor comments on the speech and offers suggestions for improvement. Witnesses and non-Witnesses of all ages can enroll in this school. The Service Meeting focuses on helping Witnesses improve their ability to teach the Bible to others. Topics of discussion have included how to show good manners when approaching others with a Bible message and how to discern what Bible topics may be of interest to people in the community.

In addition to these services, Jehovah's Witnesses are also encouraged to read the Bible daily and to study the Bible at home with their families. There is, however, no "keeping of the Sabbath" as JW see this commandment unnecessary with the coming of Christ.

Conclusion

Jehovah Witnesses do not believe in the immortality of the soul and say that this is the teaching of the devil; only Jehovah has an immortal soul. They believe that immortality is given to one upon successful living (according to JW) . That is why Jesus has immortality- because he was successful with His test on the cross (elsewhere, they say that upon His baptism He was given divinity which would mean immortality but this was before His test of the cross)! They also contradict all the promises of the heavenly kingdom by making it available to only a select few. Jesus died for the sins of all people at all times not just for the consequence of Adam's sin which we inherited. Sin, repentance, restoration and communion are not at the forefront of JW teachings- following the ever-changing mandates of the Watchtower is.

It is remarkable that a thinking person would even consider a religion that was founded in the 1880s, has had 6 false prophecies regarding the end time (a time, by the way, which Jesus said was unknown EVEN to the son of man), and has changed doctrine over 200 times.

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Jehovah's Witnesses
Supreme Being	One personal/supreme God who is Creator & Lord of everything that exists. He eternally exists as Triune God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Gen. 1; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19.	One God, properly called Jehovah. His Holy Spirit is an impersonal force. Reject the doctrine of Trinity.
Key Figures in History	Jesus, the Christ, eternally one with the Father and incarnated supernaturally through the Virgin Mary. John 1:1-12; Matt 1:18-25	Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916)
Person of Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ is perfect in His divinity and perfect in His humanity, yet His divinity parted not from His humanity for a single moment nor a twinkle of an eye Supreme example of God's character & His love for humanity. Full and final revelation of God and His love. John 1:1-13	A created being with stages of existence: 1. Archangel Michael or the Word. 2. Jesus, perfect man, became Messiah at his baptism; 3. After his spiritual resurrection, became Michael again but retains the name Jesus.
Work of Jesus Christ	Jesus was born, lived, & died in a given time & place as a unique historical event. He lived a sinless life & willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. He is Messiah (Christ), Lord and Savior. John 1:14-18; 3:16	Christ's ransom sacrifice on a "stake" made salvation possible.
Sources of Authority	Bible (Old & New Testaments). Unique, revealed, factual, accurate, & inspired Word of God.. 2 Tim. 3:16-17.	Bible (<i>New World Translation of Holy Scriptures</i>) as interpreted by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.
Doctrine of Humanity	Humanity is part of creation, but distinct from the rest of creation & from God. Human beings are created in God's image. Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity & worth. Gen. 1:26-28.	Created in Jehovah's image; a soul, not immortal; capable of responding to Jehovah.
The Basic Human Problem	Sin: By their free will, human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature, & pursuing a course of life that is opposed to His essential character & revealed law. Gen.3; Rom. 3:23.	Sin: willful rebellion against Jehovah.
Solution to the Basic Human Problem	Salvation- restoring man back in communion with God. Process rather than event. Freedom from the guilt & power of sin - is God's gift of grace through Christ's atonement, new nature received through baptism Eph. 2:8-9	Allegiance to Jehovah plus works (baptism, faithfulness in Kingdom Hall work; those ignorant of Jehovah given a chance to believe during millennium).

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Jehovah's Witnesses
Ethics (Value System)	Ultimate values for humanity are based on God's character and His Ten Commandments. Human beings are potentially good, but not inevitably good. They always need God's grace to renew their characters.	Those not loyal to Jehovah are unrighteous; all earthly organizations controlled by Satan; Jehovah's Witnesses required to obey Jehovah's laws as explained by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.
Life After Death	Eternal communion with God (heaven) or eternal separation from God (hell). Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20-22	144,000 "elect" to reign with Christ in Kingdom of God (heaven). Other Jehovah's Witnesses to live on glorified paradise earth. Annihilation for all who reject Jehovah.

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The Heresy of Jehovah's Witnesses by Pope Shenouda III

Judaism

Introduction

Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions and was founded over 3500 years ago in the Middle East. Jews believe that God appointed them to be His chosen people in order to set an example of holiness and ethical behavior to the world.

The most important event in Judaism is the Exodus. God promised Abraham that a great nation would arise from his seed that this nation would have a homeland (Canaan) and that the entire world would be blessed by this nation. The book of Exodus opens with the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites, crying out for deliverance from their enslavement by the Egyptians. The key figure in God's plan is Moses. During his time in the desert, Moses had an encounter with God Himself who spoke through a burning bush that was not consumed. God commanded Moses to lead the Israelites from their slavery. Moses returned to Egypt and after a series of ten miraculous plagues upon the Egyptians was able to gain the release of the Israelites. The final plague was death to the firstborn of every house in Egypt. Israelites that ate a sacred meal of roasted lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread and who smeared lamb's blood on their door posts were passed over by the angel of death. When the Israelites fled Egypt they were pursued by pharaoh, God parted the waters of the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross through on dry land. This event, along with the Passover, became a main part of Jewish history, an act in which God intervened to deliver His chosen people.

After crossing the Red Sea, God communicated the law to the Israelites through Moses. The Ten Commandments are the basics to Jewish life. These commandments stress obedience and loyalty to God and decent behavior toward members of the community. The first five books of the Holy Bible called the Torah (our Pentateuch) became the single most important part of the Bible for Judaism. It is to this material that Jews have turned for centuries, looking for inspiration and guidance. This material became the basis for the later Mishnah and Talmud, which in turn became central for Judaism. It is at this point that Judaism is defined as a religion of the law and Jews as a people primarily concerned with obedience to the laws of God.

In addition to the written scriptures, there is an "Oral Torah," a tradition explaining what the scriptures mean and how to interpret them and apply the Laws. Orthodox Jews believe God taught the Oral Torah to Moses, and he taught it to others, down to the present day. This tradition was maintained in oral form only until about the 2nd century A.D., when the oral law was compiled and written down in a document called the Mishnah.

Over the next few centuries, additional commentaries elaborating on the Mishnah were written down in Jerusalem and Babylon. These additional commentaries are known as the Gemara. The Gemara and the Mishnah together are known as the Talmud. This was completed in the 5th century AD. There are actually two Talmuds: the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. The Babylonian one is more comprehensive, and is the one most people mean when they refer to The Talmud.

Modern Judaism is a complex phenomenon that incorporates both a nation and a religion, and often combines strict adherence to ritual laws with a more liberal attitude towards religious belief.

Today, Judaism exists in three main forms: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. *Orthodox* Jews maintain strict adherence to the letter of the Law. The Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) and the Talmud rules every aspect of the Orthodox Jew's life. As an example, the Law of Moses forbids the eating of Pork or shellfish. It also forbids the cooking of a young goat in its mother's milk. Orthodox Jews, therefore, will not eat meat and dairy products together going so far as to use separate dishes for meat and dairy foods. Conservative Jews have a more lenient interpretation of the Torah but believe the Law is of vital importance. *Reform* or *Liberal* Jews attempt to apply broadly Judaic notions to contemporary culture in a humanistic manner; they teach that the principles of Judaism are more important than the practices. Most reformed Jews do not adhere to dietary restrictions or laws governing what should or should not be done on the Sabbath. All however, observe the Sabbath (which goes from sundown Friday night to sundown Saturday night) and the holy days.

What Judaism Says About:

God

The central religious belief of Judaism is that there is only one [God](#). Of note is that monotheism was uncommon at the time Judaism was born. The fact of God's existence is accepted almost without question. Proof is not needed, and is rarely offered. Judaism views the existence of God as a necessary prerequisite for the existence of the universe. The existence of the universe is sufficient proof of the existence of God. There is only one God. No other being participated in the work of creation.

God is a unity. He is a single, whole, complete indivisible entity. He cannot be divided into parts or described by attributes. Any attempt to ascribe attributes to God is merely man's imperfect attempt to understand the infinite. One of the primary expressions of Jewish faith, recited thrice daily in [prayer](#), is the [Shema](#), which begins "Hear, Israel: The Lord is our God, The Lord is one." This simple statement also indicates that it is to the LORD alone to whom one should offer praise or prayer for He is the Lord alone.

In Judaism, God is seen as the creator of everything, including evil (Is.45:6-7); Jews totally reject the idea of Satan bringing evil into the world. In addition, God is Holy, incorporeal, genderless, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, and perfect. They also believe God will send the messiah and the good will be rewarded and the wicked punished.

God is not merely some supreme force but is a person, one with emotions of anger, sadness, and joy. He is above all a person with whom one can have a relationship; He desires to share the full gamut of emotions with men. To this end, God is seen as continually active in a creative way, constantly working in the world to offer men the opportunity to fulfill their obligations toward Him and toward fellow men

Man and the Universe

The material world is considered on the whole "very good" (Genesis 1:31), and man has a unique responsibility to order it according to God's purposes. Some Jews go as far as to say that all

people, animals, and things contain a "divine spark," which man is assigned to call forth to completeness through loving action.

The personhood of God and His need for relationships form an analogy for man's most pressing need: to live in harmony with other men.

History is the arena of God's purposeful activity, and Jews often look for signs of His approval or judgment in historical events.

The great responsibility of man as well as his frailty and wickedness are emphasized. The distinguishing mark of humans is their ability to make ethical choices; it is to those choices that Judaism most often addresses itself directly.

When Genesis 2:7 says "God formed man," it uses the Hebrew word *vayyitzer* ("formed"). The Talmud finds special meaning in the unique spelling of the word in this context, with two *yods* instead of one. The two *yods*, the rabbis explain, stand for the two impulses found in humans: the *yetzer tov* and the *yetzer ra*.

According to this view, the *yetzer tov* is the moral conscience that reminds a person of God's law when one considers a specific action or choice. The *yetzer ra* is the impulse to satisfy one's own needs and desires. There is nothing intrinsically evil about the *yetzer ra*, as it was created by God and is natural to humankind. It is also what drives us to good things such as eating, drinking, having a family, and making a living. However, it can easily lead to sin when not kept in check by the *yetzer tov*.

The idea of human free will is fundamental to Judaism. The concept of original sin is rejected, and every person has the ability to choose good or evil.

Salvation and the Afterlife

For the Jew, it seems, salvation and the afterlife are disconnected from one another.

In the Jewish mindset, the concept of salvation is more corporate (national) than personal (as Christians view it). The salvation of the individual Jew is directly bound up with the salvation of the entire people, and includes the hope of being rescued from national enemies, of the Temple's complete restoration and of the full corporate inheritance of the covenantal blessings of God. For the Jew, the messiah (savior) is a this-worldly, temporal leader who will rescue corporate Israel from her enemies and make the nation great in all the earth.

The idea of a "Savior of the Jewish people," then, is bound up with the idea of national Israel and the restoration of the Kingdom of David on earth. This partly explains why the Jewish people tend to reject Jesus as their Savior: from their point of view, Jesus did not rescue national Israel for set up the kingdom of David. *

The Messianic Age (the period when the messiah comes), it is taught, will usher in the following:

- Peace among all nations (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3)
- Perfect harmony and abundance in nature (Isaiah 11:6-9) (but some interpret this as an allegory for peace and prosperity)
- All Jews return from exile to Israel (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5)
- Universal acceptance of the Jewish God and Jewish religion (Isaiah 2:3; 11:10; 66:23; Micah 4:2-3; Zechariah 14:9)

- No sin or evil; all Israel will obey the commandments (Zephaniah 3:13; Ezekiel 37:24)
- Reinstatement of the Temple (Ezekiel 37:26-27)
- At this time, the righteous dead will be resurrected but the wicked will not

The Messianic age is only one part of what Jews mean when they say “the world to come”. The other part refers to the afterlife. But there really is not much discussion on what happens after death. The Torah and Talmud alike focus on the purpose of earthly life, which is to fulfill one's duties to God and one's fellow man. Succeeding at this brings reward, failing at it brings punishment.

In Judaism the belief in afterlife is less a leap of faith than a logical outgrowth of other Jewish beliefs. If one believes in a [God](#) who is all-powerful and all-just, one cannot believe that this world, in which evil far too often triumphs, is the only arena in which human life exists. For if this existence is the final word, and God permits evil to win, then it cannot be that God is good. Thus, when someone says he or she believes in God but not in afterlife, it would seem that either they have not thought the issue through, or they don't believe in God, or the divine being in whom they believe is amoral or immoral.

Morals

The source and ideal of all morality is God, in whose ways man is to walk (Deut. xi. 22). As He is merciful and gracious so man should be. When the Israelites accepted the Ten Commandments from God at Mount Sinai, they committed themselves to following a code of law which regulates both how they relate with God and **how they treat other people**.

Torah ("to point the way, give direction"), often translated "law," refers in Judaism to a total pattern of behavior, applicable to all aspects of communal and individual life. It is to be found not only in the Old Testament Scriptures but also in a wide variety of oral traditions, rituals, ceremonies, stories, and commentaries on Scripture.

Jews have often tried to develop rules of behavior to cover each situation encountered in their various cultures. Thus a gigantic literature covering codes of conduct has arisen. From time to time movements have emerged that have tried to cut through those rules and get back to the original meaning of *tora*, but legalism has been a perennial problem of Judaism.

Marriage and children are held in high regard by Judaism. Singleness is looked down on even for religious leaders, and much time is spent teaching children the precepts of the faith.

Worship

God was worshipped by burning animal sacrifices on altars built in the open. The Israelites did not worship their God in a building or temple until the time of Solomon (961-922 BC). Offering of animal sacrifice continued with the flesh burned in the courtyard of the Temple while prayers were offered to God inside the Temple. During the years the southern kingdom was in exile (606 B.C. to 536 B.C.), changes took place with regard to Jewish worship. Since the temple could not be used as a central place of worship, houses of prayer, called synagogues, were established. By the time the Jews returned to their land, the synagogue had become firmly established as the place of worship (but not sacrifice).

The practice of sacrifice officially stopped in the year 70 A.D., when the Roman army destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, the place where sacrifices were offered. The Torah specifically

commands the Jews not to offer sacrifices wherever they feel like it; they are only permitted to offer sacrifices in the place that God has chosen for that purpose. (Deut. 12:13-14) It would be a sin to offer sacrifices in any other place.

Along with the synagogue (which can exist wherever there is a copy of the Torah and ten adult Jewish males) ,arose the figure of the rabbi. The rabbi is not a priest or a minister in the traditional sense. The word ‘rabbi’ literally means ‘my master’. With the establishment of the Torah as the voice of God, there also arose the need for someone to spend time studying the Scripture and teaching the community. Those persons who had the time, interest and intelligence to study gradually began to be singled out and eventually became known as rabbis. Recitation of prayers is the central characteristic of Jewish worship. These prayers, often with instructions and commentary, are found in the *siddur*, the traditional Jewish prayer book. Observant Jews are expected to recite three prayers daily and more on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. While solitary prayer is valid, attending synagogue to pray with a *minyan* (quorum of 10 adult males) is considered ideal.

As with most religious services, the length and content of the synagogue service depends on the sect and the customs of the particular community. In general, one can expect to hear the most Hebrew used in an Orthodox service and the least in Reform services, and services in Reform temples also tend to be shorter than those held in Orthodox *shuls* and Conservative synagogues. Many synagogues have a hazzan (cantor) who is a professional or lay-professional singer employed for the purpose of leading the congregation in prayer.

Conclusion

Since Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism, one would expect there to be a greater agreement about who God is and how we understand His relation with us. Jews completely reject a Trinitarian God. It is blasphemy as far as they are concerned. God is one-only one period. Jews really have no opinion about what happened to the death sentence Adam and Eve received at the fall. For Jews, man retained the state in which he was born—there is no corrupt nature from which we need to be freed –we all have ability to choose good or evil. Man can relate with God but to commune (be united to) with Him is not even on the radar screen. Salvation is more a matter of reward than anything else; reward for believing in God and being good. Because of this, it is not necessary for the messiah to be divine and in fact they do not expect the Messiah to be divine. It is inconceivable for them that God would ever come down in the flesh. Jesus, for them, was just a blasphemmer and false prophet.

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Judaism
Supreme Being	One personal/supreme God who is Creator & Lord of everything that exists. He eternally exists as Triune God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Gen. 1; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19.	One God, who reveals Himself as Person. He is Creator, Deliverer, & Lord of history.
Key Figures in History	Jesus, the Christ, eternally one with the Father and incarnated supernaturally through the Virgin Mary. John 1:1-12; Matt 1:18-25	Abraham, Moses, David

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Judaism
Person of Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ is perfect in His divinity and perfect in His humanity, yet His divinity parted not from His humanity for a single moment nor a twinkle of an eye Supreme example of God's character & His love for humanity. Full and final revelation of God and His love. John 1:1-13	Blasphemer and false teacher. He did some good things, though & taught the Golden Rule
Work of Jesus Christ	Jesus was born, lived, & died in a given time & place as a unique historical event. He lived a sinless life & willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. He is Messiah (Christ), Lord and Savior. John 1:14-18; 3:16	Judaism generally considers Jesus to be an itinerant Jewish teacher. His death has no saving effect. He is not the Messiah.
Sources of Authority	Bible (Old & New Testaments). Unique, revealed, factual, accurate, & inspired Word of God.. 2 Tim. 3:16-17.	Hebrew Bible including Torah, Prophets, & Writings. Basically the Christian Old Testament.
Doctrine of Humanity	Humanity is part of creation, but distinct from the rest of creation & from God. Human beings are created in God's image. Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity & worth. Gen. 1:26-28.	Humanity is part of creation, but distinct from the rest of creation & from God. Human beings are created in the image of God & are free & self-determining.
The Basic Human Problem	Sin: By their free will, human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature, & pursuing a course of life that is opposed to His essential character & revealed law. Gen.3; Rom. 3:23.	Sin: Human rebellion & unfaithfulness to God's character & revealed law.
Solution to the Basic Human Problem	Salvation- restoring man back in communion with God. Process rather than event. Freedom from the guilt & power of sin - is God's gift of grace through Christ's atonement, new nature received through baptism Eph. 2:8-9	God grants salvation to people who repent, trust in God, & obey Him according to their understanding.
Ethics (Value System)	Ultimate values for humanity are based on God's character and His Ten Commandments. Human beings are potentially good, but not inevitably good. They always need God's grace to renew their characters.	Ultimate values for humanity are based on God's character. The Ten Commandments, other laws of the Hebrew Bible, & teachings of the rabbis are moral guidelines for the Jewish community
Life After Death	Eternal communion with God (heaven) or eternal separation from God (hell). Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20-22	Range of views: *Reward or punishment in heaven or hell (orthodox) *Vagueness (conservative and reformed/reform) *Denial of afterlife (liberal)

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Mormons

Introduction

The Mormon Church or as it is officially known as the Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS), is the fastest growing and most successful cult in the United States and perhaps the world. In their advertisements as well as in their lifestyle, Mormons promote a highly attractive and admirable face that communicates strong family values, clean living and a commitment to Christ like living that would put many a Christian to shame.

To understand Mormonism, one needs to look at their sacred texts and consider where they came from. The church claims to believe in the Bible, "insofar as it is correctly translated" (The 8th Article of Faith), which basically means whenever it does not conflict with good Mormon theology. The real source of Mormon teachings comes from the other Sacred Works: The Book of Mormon (BOM), Doctrines and Covenants (D&C), and The Pearl of Great Price (PGP) as revealed to Joseph Smith Jr.

The story of Mormonism centers on Joseph Smith Jr. and his many revelations. When he was only 14, he had a vision where he was visited by 2 "persons"-whom he believed were the Father and the Son. When asked which denomination he should join, they responded with none, they are all "wrong and corrupt." Three years later, he had another vision, this time of the angel Moroni who told him of a book written on golden plates by former inhabitants of the continent that contained the "fullness of the everlasting gospel." At the age of 21, he found these plates and began translating them using "seer" stones an occult divination technique he had honed with his dad when hunting for treasure. By 1830, Smith had published the Book of Mormon. For the next 10 years, he continued to receive revelation which would become his additional inspired scripture of D&C and PGP.

- The Book of Mormon

This book covers the history of 2 great civilizations which supposedly made their way from the Middle East to America around 600 B.C. These 2 nations, the Nephites and Lamanites, were of Jewish origin and for centuries were enemies. Mormon, the commander of the Nephites recorded on the gold plates what was to be the BOM. Mormon gave these plates to his son, Moroni, who hid them until they were uncovered by Joseph Smith Jr. The Mormon church has gone to great lengths to justify the BOM – even coming up with its own archeological support of its authenticity. No non-Mormon archeologist, however, has given it any credibility. Interestingly, there are no manuscripts for the BOM to be studied as Moroni came back and took the gold plates. Mormons must accept all on Joseph Smith Jr.'s word.

- Doctrines and Covenants

Although the BOM was termed the "most correct of any book on the earth," the D&C has 13 key doctrines not found anywhere in the BOM. Among these new revelations were: plurality of gods, God as an exalted man, a human being's ability to become God, three degrees of heaven, polygamy, eternal progression and baptism for the dead. In addition, it is laden with prophecies by Smith that never came true (which would make him a false prophet).

- The Pearl of Great Price

This book was translated from papyrus fragments found when Smith bought some Egyptian mummies. According to Smith, this is a record of writings by Abraham while he was in Egypt. Assumed lost, these papyrus resurfaced in 1967 when they were studied by non-Mormon scholars. It was discovered that the characters were indeed Egyptian but translated

into instructions for embalmers. Smith, however, understood it to teach the Mormon doctrines of preexistence, the priesthood and the nature of God.

Mormon doctrine states that God is “progressive”, having attained His exalted state by advancing along a path that His children (Mormon) are allowed to follow. In Mormon thinking, God is not the cause of everything. He was created by other another god who had been created by another ad infinitum. The Mormon Father God actually grew up as a man on another planet, learning all he could and finally dying and then being resurrected into Godhood whereupon he returned to a heavenly place with a body of flesh and bones. There he joined with his goddess wife to have millions of spirit children who would eventually populate Earth. This spirit world is called “preexistence”. The first born of these spirit children was Jesus, followed by his brother Lucifer. God called a meeting called the Council of Heaven to tell of his plan to send the spirit children to earth to be tested and returned to him after death. He needed a savior to implement his plan. Jesus won the contest, Lucifer lost. Lucifer was so enraged with jealousy that there was war in heaven and Lucifer and his angels were cast out. All of us in our pre-existence, fought in the war; our skin color reflects how well we fought (the lighter the shade the better). Jesus came to earth, through relations between God and St. Mary, and died on the cross. Exaltation for each of us can be reached by living a worthy life and going through the temple ceremony; in the highest level of celestial glory we become gods ourselves.

Mormons hold Jesus to be the literal son of God the Father. They claim he is: "our Redeemer and our Savior. Except for him there would be no salvation and no redemption". In fact, this is a deceptive claim. True Mormon salvation has virtually nothing to do with the person of Jesus. Mormon salvation, or more correctly stated, exaltation, is a complicated quest. There is a general "salvation by grace," but this only means that one is resurrected to immortality and this applies to everyone. An individual's exaltation is much more complicated.

Salvation is a process of works, faith having no real importance. Jesus' death only made it possible to be resurrected. The real path includes living a life of good works and temple participation. Keeping the whole law is absolutely central. Doctrines of Salvation 2:41 states: Those who gain exaltation in the celestial kingdom are those who are members of the Church of the Firstborn; in other words, those who keep ALL of the commandments of the Lord". In a nutshell, a Mormon must be a member of good standing, tithing regularly, get a temple recommend, be sealed in the temple, and follow all of the Law.

Mormons are taught the doctrine of continuous revelation. Through continuous revelation, the current prophet of the church can over-rule any previous revelation, the BOM, the Bible and anything else previously taught and believed. "Modern revelation is what President Joseph Smith said, unless President Spencer Kimball (or, now, Howard W. Hunter) says differently." In essence, he's saying that God can, and does, change his mind; God can contradict himself!

A good example of this "Latter Day Revelation" is demonstrated in the 1978 declaration which let blacks finally hold the priesthood. Previously, the church had held that black men would never hold the priesthood because they held the "mark of Cain" (i.e. they fought for Lucifer in preexistence). Joseph Smith said "Had I anything to do with the Negro, I would confine them by strict law to their own species, and put them on a national equalization." (History of the Church 217-218) Brigham Young actually said "Shall I tell you the law of God in regards to the African

race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so." (Journal of Discourse 290-291)

Clearly, the African race had no place in the early Mormon Church and was condemned by church doctrine. But, according to the church, God changed his mind in 1978, and the church changed its theology. The significance of this, and many other changes in Mormon doctrine, supposedly the Gospel restored to Earth, should not be overlooked.

What Mormons Say About:

God

Mormonism teaches polytheism (versus monotheism taught in the Bible), believing that the universe is inhabited by many gods who produce spirit children. Joseph Smith declared, "I will preach on the plurality of Gods. I have always declared God to be a distinct personage. The Lord Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit. And these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 370).

In Mormon theology the god of our planet is believed to have once been a man on another planet. Who through self-effort and the help of his own father-god, was appointed by a counsel of gods in the heavens to his high position as the god of planet Earth. And now has a physical, resurrected, glorified body. Mormonism teaches that through the atonement of Christ and by their good deeds and "holy" living, men can one day become gods, and with their multiplicity of "goddess wives," populate their own planets.

Mormonism acknowledges the divinity of Christ, but as noted above, Mormon doctrine on what constitutes divinity falls seriously short of the Biblical standard. Mormonism teaches that The Lord Jesus Christ, Lucifer, and all the demons, as well as all mankind, are actually all spirit brothers and sisters, born in the spirit world as spirit babies to our man-god Heavenly Father and his goddess wives. Mormon leaders have consistently taught that God the Father had sexual relations on earth with St. Mary (his own spirit daughter), to produce the physical body of The Lord Jesus Christ. Early Mormon apostles also asserted that Christ was a polygamist, and that His wives included Mary and Martha (the sisters of Lazarus) and Mary Magdalene.

Man and the Universe

The Mormon Church teaches that man was a pre-existent spirit and that mankind is of the same species as God. Our origin is supposed to have been as procreated children of God, born as spirits in some other realm. In that spirit world existence we progressed as far as was possible, but to become truly like our Heavenly Father we needed to obtain physical bodies. We also needed to learn the difference between good and evil. Since our Heavenly Father has progressed so far that He cannot allow evil into His presence, it was necessary for us to leave Him for some place where we could encounter and overcome evil ourselves:

- "The mind of man is as immortal as God Himself...God never did have the power to create the spirit of man at all" (Times and Seasons 5:615 and History of the Church 6:310-311).
- "We were first begotten as spirit children in heaven and then born naturally on earth" (Journal of Discourses, 4:218).
- "Before coming to this earth, all humans were begotten by our heavenly parents and were born with spirit bodies" (Mormon Doctrine p. 428, 516-17).
- "all had a previous existence, thousands of years ago, in the heavens, in the presence of God" (Journal of Discourses 1:62).

So, according to Mormon teaching, this world was prepared as a school, where we have been sent to obtain physical bodies and to learn the lessons of mortality.

The Mormon Church teaches that God, men, angels, and devils, are of the same nature, but at different levels of progression. It also teaches that man may progress to become a god.

Therefore, in Mormon theology, those who achieve godhood will have spirit children who will worship and pray to them just as we worship and pray to God the Father. This has been taught by a large number of prominent LDS leaders, including its founders.

According to LDS, Adam's fall was a 'fall upward' and it was not sinful. Mormonism maintains that Adam's sin was necessary for the propagation of the human race. As Mormon scriptures state:

- "Adam fell that men might be; and men are that they might have joy" (Book of Mormon, [2 Nephi 2:25](#)).
- "And in that day Adam blessed God...saying...for because of my transgression my eyes are opened and in this life I shall have joy" (Pearl of Great Price, [Book of Moses 5:10-11](#)).

Mormon writers go on to explain:

- Adam's sin was "a necessary step in the plan of life and a great blessing to all mankind" ([Gospel Principles](#), p.31).
- Joseph Fielding Smith stated: "The fall of Adam came as a blessing in disguise...nor do I accuse Adam of a sin...it is not always a sin to transgress a law...we can hardly look upon anything resulting in such benefits as being a sin" (Doctrines of Salvation 1:114-115).
- "Adam fell, but he fell in the right direction. He fell toward the goal...Adam fell, but he fell upward" (Desert News, p.7, July 31, 1965)
- John A. Widtsoe stated: "Adam's fall in the Garden of Eden "became a necessary and honorable act in carrying out the plan of the Almighty" (Joseph Smith---Seeker After Truth, p.160).
- "Mormonism rejects the notion that man's condition is best described by 'depravity'. Nowhere within Mormon theology is its optimism concerning man's natural condition more apparent than in this denial of the Christian doctrine of original sin" (Owen Kendall White, Jr., The Psychological Basis of Mormon New-Orthodoxy", p.101-104, University of Utah thesis, June 1967).

Salvation and the Afterlife

Mormon theology teaches that the atonement of Christ was essential to our salvation and eternal life with God, but that it is **not** sufficient. Christ's shed blood on the cross provides for universal

resurrection of all people, but does not pay for personal sins; according to Mormonism, only Christ's blood shed in the Garden of Gethsemane atones for personal sin. Besides faith in Christ, complete and permanent repentance of all sin as well as many good works are required. Mormonism also teaches that one must be baptized in water to be saved, and that salvation will also be available in the next world for those "missing-out" in this one. Therefore, Mormons avidly pursue genealogy and practice baptism for the dead.

Mormonism teaches that there are three degrees of glory: Celestial (for good Mormons able to cease sinning in this lifetime, Terrestrial (for good people who do not comply with all the teachings of Mormonism), and Telestial (for those who have lived unclean earthly lives). Mormonism teaches that there is a hell, but only for the "sons of perdition," a very small number of souls that cannot be redeemed. According to Mormonism, then, the vast majority of mankind will be "saved," though it should be obvious that no one will make it to the Celestial Kingdom. Black people used to be totally out of the equation: "Black people are black because of their misdeeds in the pre-existence" (*Three Degrees of Glory*, LDS Apostle Melvin J. Ballard, p. 21);

- "The Negro is an unfortunate man. He has been given a black skin. But that is nothing compared with that greater handicap. He is not permitted to receive the priesthood and the ordinances of the temple, necessary to prepare men and women to enter into and enjoy a fullness of glory in the Celestial Kingdom" (Elder George E. Richards).

In 1978, however, the Mormon Church announced that God had lifted his curse from the African race.

Morals

One of the most notable things of Mormon believers is the moral life they lead. The Church encourages Latter-day Saints to create strong families. They ask all families in the Church to set aside [one day a week](#) specifically for spiritual teaching and bonding in the family.

From an early age, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are encouraged to show their love for others through service. It is not uncommon to hear of church members providing service at a local nursing home, helping a family in need, sewing quilts or dresses for humanitarian aid projects, or providing volunteer work in their community. The idea of serving is further taught through the service that members are asked to provide within the Church.

Teachers, bishops, presidencies, those who provide music, and those who assist the ward in any way all do so out of charity; none are paid for their services.

Members are also asked to give of their own substance to help those in need. The first Sunday of each month is set apart as [fast Sunday](#). On this day members are asked to go without eating two meals. They then donate the money they would have spent on those meals (or more) to the Church. This money is used to help provide for in the area those who have less. Sometimes, the funds are used for a specific group of people or for a specific need.

Latter-day Saints are always encouraged to continue improving and make themselves better. Again from President Hinckley,

May God help us to be a little kinder, showing forth greater forbearance, to be more forgiving, more willing to walk the second mile, to reach down and lift up those who may

have sinned but have brought forth the fruits of repentance, to lay aside old grudges and nurture them no more (Gordon B. Hinckley, "[Forgiveness](#)," *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, p. 81).

In addition, Mormons abstain from tobacco, tea, coffee and limit their intake of meat.

Worship

There are 2 kinds of worship in the Church of Latter Day Saints: chapel worship and temple worship. Chapel worship is the primary family worship service called sacrament meeting. This meeting is held in chapels on Sunday and lasts approximately 70 minutes, involving the whole community together. During the service the members receive a sacramental communion of bread and water, during which they remember the Last Supper, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and their own baptismal promises to serve the Lord and keep his commandments. The sacrament is distributed by Deacons. The service is led by the bishop, and his two counselors. (The bishop is the ecclesiastical leader of the local Church, and is a lay minister.)

The service begins with hymns followed by prayers. There are a number of short talks or sermons given by members of the congregation chosen by the bishop. These talks range from quite formal doctrinal lectures, to more informal chats about the application of faith to family life. Talks can be given by any church member regardless of age.

Temple worship is something altogether different. First of all, it takes place in the Temple (unlike the chapel worship which takes place in the chapel building). Mormon temples are used for baptisms for the dead, and what is known as "endowment ceremonies" for both the living and the dead. Vicarious baptisms for the dead comprise a great majority of the activity behind temple doors. Mormon Apostle Bruce McConkie explained the endowment ceremony as "certain special, spiritual blessings given worthy and faithful saints in the temples...because in and through them the recipients are endowed with power from on high" (Mormon Doctrine, pg. 226-227). Also performed in the temple are marriages which Mormons feel will last for "time and eternity." Mormon families can also be "sealed" together with the hope that, following this life, they will be reunited as a family unit in eternity.

A former Mormon explained an endowment ceremony: "The ritual began in a small cubicle where we had to strip completely. We then put on 'the shield,' a poncho with a hole for the head, but open on the sides (similar to a hospital gown). We went through a series of 'washings and anointing', as various parts of our bodies were touched by elderly temple workers who mumbled appropriate incantations over them. Our Mormon underwear, 'the garments,' are said to have powers to protect us from 'the evil one.' It had occult markings, which were so 'sacred' that we were instructed to burn them when the garments wore out. The endowment ceremony mocked all doctrines held to by Biblical Christianity, and Christian pastors were portrayed as servants of Satan. We had to swear many blood oaths, promising we would forfeit our lives if we weren't faithful, or if we revealed any of the secrets revealed to us in the temple ceremonies. We were made to pretend by grotesque gestures to cut our throats, chests, and abdomens, indicating how we would lose our lives. We were never told who would kill us! The inference was, and history testifies to, that it would be the

Mormon priesthood." (Testimony of a former Mormon). [Note: The blood oaths and portrayal of Christian pastors were removed in April of 1990, despite the fact that the ordinance was purported to have been given originally by a revelation and was never to be changed].

Conclusion

If it weren't that people's salvations were at stake, Mormonism would make for great science fiction. Mormons are so far from historic Christianity that it is a wonder how anyone could consider this theology as true. Real Truth is eternal, it does not change. The Bible also makes it explicitly clear that God does not change; that he is the same yesterday, today and forever. Therefore, it must be stated that the Mormon doctrine of continuous revelation, that God would actually change what He has previously revealed, is blatantly untrue by any standard, and therefore has no place in a true Christian church.

The Mormon faith is polytheistic. Ask a Mormon to his/her face and they will probably tell you that they believe in "God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost." Sounds pretty orthodox, until you define those terms. In reality, Mormons believe that the three parts of the trinity are separate gods, and that there are in fact innumerable gods, and that any man can himself become one. God the Father is only the god of Earth, just as every other planet in the universe (and there ARE other inhabited planets out there) has their own god. It seems that Exodus 20:2 is a bad translation.

In point of fact, Jesus is not the one Mormons are following. . . Joseph Smith Jr. is!

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)
Supreme Being	One personal/supreme God who is Creator & Lord of everything that exists. He eternally exists as Triune God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Gen. 1; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19.	God, (Heavenly Father) is an exalted man with a physical body of flesh & bone. Was a man in a preexistence.
Key Figures in History	Jesus, the Christ, eternally one with the Father and incarnated supernaturally through the Virgin Mary. John 1:1-12; Matt 1:18-25	Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844)
Person of Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ is perfect in His divinity and perfect in His humanity, yet His divinity parted not from His humanity for a single moment nor a twinkle of an eye Supreme example of God's character & His love for humanity. Full and final revelation of God and His love. John 1:1-13	Jesus is the spiritual & physical offspring of God by procreation. Had a preexistence as God's spirit child and brother of Lucifer.
Work of Jesus Christ	Jesus was born, lived, & died in a given time & place as a unique historical event. He lived a sinless life & willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. He is Messiah (Christ), Lord and Savior. John 1:14-18; 3:16	His death guarantees immortality to all regardless of their faith, but one's exaltation must be completed by works. Suffered in Gethsemane for Adam's original sin.

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)
Sources of Authority	Bible (Old & New Testaments). Unique, revealed, factual, accurate, & inspired Word of God. 2 Tim. 3:16-17.	Bible (except the "errors"); <i>The Book of Mormon</i> ; <i>Doctrine and Covenants</i> ; <i>Pearl of Great Price</i> ; revelations of the Mormon prophets.
Doctrine of Humanity	Humanity is part of creation, but distinct from the rest of creation & from God. Human beings are created in God's image. Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity & worth. Gen. 1:26-28.	Preexistent spiritual offspring of God; basically good; gods in embryo.
The Basic Human Problem	Sin: By their free will, human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature, & pursuing a course of life that is opposed to His essential character & revealed law. Gen.3; Rom. 3:23.	Sin: disobedience to God's laws. Adam's fall, in God's plan, caused loss of immortality. Each person responsible for his or her own sin.
Solution to the Basic Human Problem	Salvation- restoring man back in communion with God. Process rather than event. Freedom from the guilt & power of sin - is God's gift of grace through Christ's atonement, new nature received through baptism Eph. 2:8-9	Exaltation or godhood through obedience to Mormon teachings: repentance, faith, baptism, endowments, celestial marriage, tithing. Baptism for the dead saves some non-Mormons posthumously
Ethics (Value System)	Ultimate values for humanity are based on God's character and His Ten Commandments. Human beings are potentially good, but not inevitably good. They always need God's grace to renew their characters.	People are to obey the laws of God; Mormons expected to observe the "Word of Wisdom" (rules for conduct).
Life After Death	Eternal communion with God (heaven) or eternal separation from God (hell). Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20-22	One of three kingdoms: 1. Celestial-renewed earth, where men become gods or angels; 2. Terrestrial-planet for righteous non-Mormons; 3. Telestial-planet for the wicked. Perdition is reserved for Satan and most wicked.

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