

Colossians

Deity of Christ vs. Syncretistic Heresy					
Supremacy/Deity			Practical Instruction		
Chapters 1–2			Chapters 3–4		
Heretical Living			Holy Living		
Belief			Behaviour		
Greeting & Prayer 1:1-14	Supremacy & Deity 1:15–2:5	Syncretistic Heresy 2:6-23	Position: Union with Christ 3:1-4	Practice: Holiness in Relationships 3:5–4:6	Conclusion 4:7-18
Rome					
Autumn AD 61 (first Roman imprisonment)					

Key Word: Deity

Key Verse: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9).

Summary Statement: The way to protect the church from *syncretistic heresy* is to embrace the *deity of Christ* and holy living.

Application:

Affirm Christ’s deity and holy relationships to fight the New Age movement and other heresies.

Colossians

Introduction

I. **Title:** The Greek title (*Πρὸς Κολοσσαεῖς To the Colossians*) follows the practice of naming Paul's epistles after their recipients, even though the letter was to be read in nearby Laodicea too (4:16).

II. Authorship

A. **External Evidence:** Early Christian writers attributed the authorship to Paul but modern radical critics assume a second century author using Paul's name.

1. Early support for Pauline authorship comes from Justin (*Dialogue* 85.2; 138.2), Marcion (*Dialogue* 84, 85), Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.14.1; ca. AD 185), Tertullian (*DePreascr. Haer.* 7), and Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.1).
2. Pauline authorship was unquestioned until the 19th century German scholars denied it based on internal factors. Mayerhoff argued for dependency upon Ephesians and Baur with his Tübingen School considered the heresy combated in the letter as second century Gnosticism.

B. **Internal Evidence:** Several verses within the letter itself affirm Paul's authorship:

1. The letter claims to have been written by Paul (1:1, 23; 4:18).
2. The similarity of Colossians to Ephesians argues for Pauline authorship in that they were written about the same time (see comparison in "Characteristics" section below).
3. Colossians has many affinities with Paul's letter to Philemon, of which the authenticity is impeccable (Geisler, *BKC*, 2:667). Both books include Timothy's name in the salutation (1:1; Philemon 1); mention Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas (4:10-14; Philemon 23-24); refer to Archippus' ministry (4:17; Philemon 2); and confirm the sending of the slave Onesimus back to Colosse (4:9; Philemon 10).

III. Circumstances

A. **Date:** Paul wrote Colossians during his first imprisonment in Rome (Feb. 60-March 62; cf. Acts 28:30; dates from Hoehner, 381-84). The best evidence suggests a specific date of autumn 61.

B. **Origin/Recipients:** As noted above, the epistle mentions Paul's many associates (4:7-17), especially Tychicus (4:7), who carried the Colossian and Ephesian letters (Eph 6:21) accompanied by Onesimus (4:9) with the letter to Philemon (Philemon 10, 12, 17). This shows that the Ephesian, Colossian, and Philemon letters all had the same origin. The other two books mention Paul's imprisonment (Eph 3:1; 4:1; Philemon 1, 9) that was in Rome (see Ephesians notes). Therefore, Colossians must have been written in Rome to be sent to Colosse (1:2).

C. **Occasion:** Paul had never visited Colosse when he wrote this letter. However, during his nearly three-year ministry in nearby Ephesus (Sept 53-May 56; cf. Acts 19) he probably met (and may have converted) Epaphras, who returned to Colosse and founded the church (1:7). Five years later, when Epaphras heard of Paul's imprisonment, he visited the apostle and brought news of their love (1:8).

Epaphras evidently also told Paul of a serious heresy plaguing the church. This prompted Paul to pen the epistle to the Colossians for Tychicus to deliver since he was returning to Colosse with Onesimus anyway. The nature of the heresy has been much debated, but the internal evidence suggests that it was the seedbed for what later developed into Gnosticism in the second century.

Paul's response reveals the many problems with this heresy:

1. Its Jewish nature showed in its legalism by imposing Old Testament laws and rituals (2:16-17).
2. It had Greek philosophical roots in a so-called "deeper knowledge" (*gnosis*; 2:2b-4, 8-10) revealed only to a special "elite."

3. The system taught the worship of angels as mediators between man and God (2:18).
4. The heresy denied the deity of Christ (1:15; 2:9), and thus his supremacy (1:15b, 17a) and ability to create (1:16) and sustain the world (1:17).
5. Its ascetic nature had a low view of the body (2:20-23).

It is difficult to peg the Colossian heresy with certainty since Paul nowhere officially lists or defines its elements, nor does he give it a name. However, the evidence above shows it to be a syncretistic Jewish-Greek-Ascetic-Pagan cult. Nevertheless, Paul fought the heresy by (1) affirming the deity and supremacy of Christ, and (2) encouraging the church to live pure lives.

IV. Characteristics

- A. Colossians uses many terms found only here in the New Testament.
 1. The 35 unique words include “visible” (1:16), “supremacy” (1:18), “fill up” (1:24), “philosophy” (2:8), and “deity” (2:9; Kubo, *A Reader's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 193-97).
 2. Paul redefines terms used by the heretical movement with an orthodox meaning (e.g., *pleroma*, “fullness,” 2:9; and *gnosis*, “knowledge” 2:3; cf. *TTTB*, 413).
 3. Many scholars see so many unique words as supporting non-Pauline authorship, but the unique Colossian setting calls for special vocabulary not needed in Paul’s other writings (Guthrie, 553).
- B. Paul uses no Old Testament references in his epistle to the Colossians.
- C. Colossians gives the fullest explanation of Christ’s deity of any NT writing. Especially worth noting are:
 - (1) “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [‘preeminent one’] over all creation. For by Him all things were made...” (1:15)
 - (2) “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him” (1:19), and
 - (3) “For in Christ all the fulness of Deity lives in bodily form” (2:9).
- D. The twin epistles of Ephesians and Colossians have many points in common and some differences (adapted and expanded from *TTTB*, 413):

Ephesians

Colossians

Similarities:

Written in prison, carried by Tychicus

Written in prison, carried by Tychicus

Stresses wisdom, knowledge, fullness, and mystery

Stresses wisdom, knowledge, fullness, and mystery

First half—position
Second half—practice

First half—position
Second half—practice

Ephesians**Colossians**

Similar passages:

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins...” (1:7)

“to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (1:10)

1:15-17

1:18

1:19-20

1:21-23

5:22-24 (wives)

5:25-33 (husbands)

6:1-3 (children)

6:4 (fathers)

6:5-8 (slaves)

6:9 (masters)

Similar passages:

“in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (1:14)

“and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross” (1:20)

1:3-4

1:27

2:12

1:16-19

3:18 (wives)

3:19 (husbands)

3:20 (children)

3:21 (fathers)

3:22-25 (slaves)

4:1 (masters)

Differences:

Emphasizes the Church
as the body of Christ

General, universal

Irenic, calm

Reflective, quiet

Emphasizes Christ
as the Head of the body

Specific, local

Polemic, concern

Spiritual conflict

Argument

Paul writes the Colossian letter to protect the church from a serious heresy threatening its very life since it is attacking the deity of Christ. His response to this cult takes a two-pronged approach. He first establishes the supremacy of Christ as God to provide the theological basis of the false teaching (Col 1–2). He then provides practical instruction in light of the deity of Christ which, when followed, will put the enemies of Christ to shame as they see holy living in the church (Col 3–4). Thus, Paul’s strategy to fight this cult is a holy lifestyle founded in a solid christological foundation. This alone could successfully defeat a heresy that is both legalistic/ascetic (not free) and philosophical/ knowledge-oriented (not lifestyle-oriented).

Synthesis**Supremacy/deity of Christ vs. syncretistic heresy****1–2**

1:1-14

1:15–2:5

2:6-23

2:6-10

2:11-17

2:18-19

2:20-23

Supremacy/deity

Greeting/prayer

Supremacy/deity

Syncretistic heresy

“Gnostic”

Legalistic

Mystic

Ascetic

3–4

3:1-4

3:5–4:6

3:5-17

3:5-9

3:10-17

3:18–4:6

3:18-21

Teaching on Holiness

Position: union with Christ

Practice: holiness in relationships

Holy living

Put off

Put on

Relationships

Family life

3:22–4:1	Work life
4:2-6	Public life
4:7-18	Conclusion
4:7-15	Commends colleagues fighting heresy
4:16-18	Distribute the letter to fight heresy

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

The way to protect the church from *syncretistic heresy* is to embrace the *deity of Christ* and holy living.

I. The way to protect the church from syncretistic heresy is to embrace the deity and supremacy of Christ over all things (Col 1–2).

- A. Paul's greeting and prayer for the believers affirms his authority and God's enabling the church to fight heresy (1:1-14).
 - 1. Paul greets the church as Christ's apostle to establish his spiritual authority before those who might question his teaching in the letter (1:1-2).
 - 2. Paul thanks God for their faith and prays that they would know Christ's adequacy in them to fight the heresy in their midst (1:3-14).
- B. Christ is over all things in his person as God and in his work as Redeemer so his labors for the church have not been in vain (1:15–2:5).
 - 1. Since Jesus is God the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, he has reconciled everything to him by his death (1:15-20).
 - 2. The gospel Paul preached is that Christ reconciled us to God from our former status as alienated enemies (1:21-23).
 - 3. The goal of Paul's suffering and work is to form Christ-likeness in the church since Jesus is wisdom in its fullness (1:24–2:5).
- C. The deity of Christ means that higher life is in Christ rather than the deceptive precepts and practices attacking the church (2:6-23).
 - 1. "Gnosticism" is wrong since deity is in Christ (2:6-10).
 - 2. Legalism is wrong since reality is in Christ (2:11-17).
 - 3. Mysticism is wrong since headship is in Christ (2:18-19).
 - 4. Asceticism is wrong since immunity is in Christ (2:20-23).

II. The way to protect the church from syncretistic heresy is to shame Christ's enemies as they see holy living in the church (Col 3–4).

- A. The believer's *position* of union with Christ is the basis for a holy (heavenly) living rather than the sinful (earthly) living of the false teachers (3:1-4).
- B. The believer's *practice* affects every area of life to shame the enemies of the church through holy living (3:5–4:6).
 - 1. Holy living replaces the sins of the old life with virtues of the new life (3:5-17).
 - a) Step 1 in holy living is to put off sins of the old life: sins of the body, materialism, and improper speech (3:5-9).

- b) Step 2 in holiness puts on virtues of the new life: holy relationships, forgiveness, love, peace, thankfulness, Scripture, singing, and glorifying God (3:10-17).
2. A believer's union with Christ leads to holy living that improves relationships in every area of life (3:18–4:6).
- a) Families improve when wives, husbands, children, and fathers obey commands about their roles (3:18-21).
- b) Work is harmonious when slaves work for Christ and masters treat their slaves with fairness (3:22–4:1).
- c) Unbelievers see a positive witness when believers pray, speak, and act with wisdom (4:2-6).
- C. Paul commends his fellow-workers and sends greetings from these who have been faithful in the face of error to affirm that the Colossians do not stand alone (4:7-18).

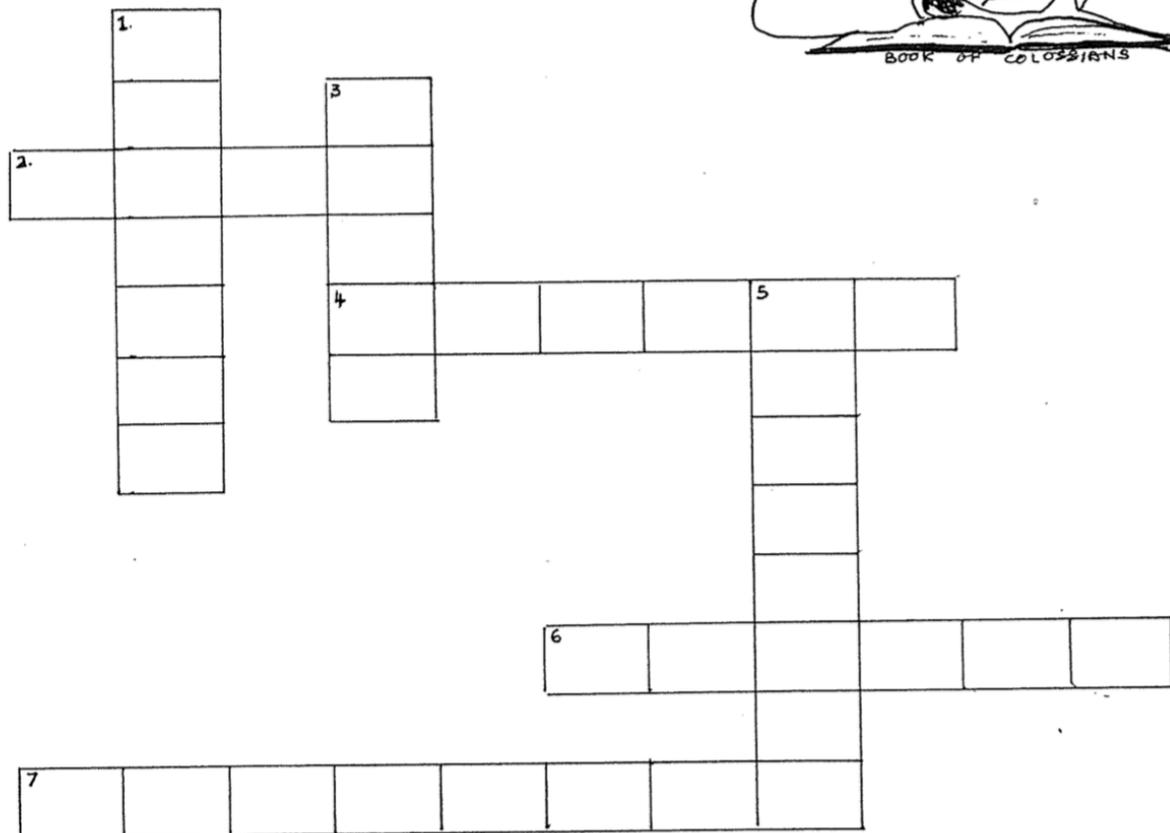
Issue	False Teaching at Colosse	New Age Movement	Christianity
Salvation	Christ + Other Ways	Many Ways	Through Jesus Christ alone
Worship	God + Angels	Via Spirit Guides	Through the Holy Spirit
Sanctification	Via Rituals and Ceremonies	Via Enlightenment	Through Holy Living in the Spirit's power
Hope	Uncertain	Reincarnation	Resurrection
Deity	Christ is not God	We are God	Christ is God
Theism	Syncretistic	Many Gods	Trinity
Basis	Human Effort + Secret Knowledge	Human Effort	Christ's Work on the Cross

Adapted from the 1997 Colossians Class Presentation

Colossians Crossword Puzzle

Adapted from an SBC Class Presentation

Let's see how much you remember. Read the questions and fill up the puzzle.



1. What type of false teaching filtering into the Colossian church emphasized knowledge?
2. Where was Paul when he wrote the letter?
3. What is the key word for the book of Colossians?
4. Colosse was located in what modern day country?
5. Who probably founded the church at Colosse?
6. What was the chief problem plaguing the church?
7. Who formed the majority of the Colossian church membership?

The Sabbath in Colosse

Adapted from Richard J. Griffith, "The Eschatological Significance of the Sabbath," ThD diss., Dallas Seminary, 1990, pp. 164-171

"Of all of the statements in the New Testament, these verses most strongly refute the Sabbatarian claim for observance of the Jewish Sabbath."¹ Colossians 2:16 expressly forbids observance of the Sabbath day which served as a mere shadow of what was to come, that reality being in Christ (v. 17). Chafer summarized Paul's argument thus, "Having the Substance, the believer is warned against turning to the mere shadow."² Throughout Paul's ministry he fought the continued encroachments from Judaizers who sought to place believers under the yoke of the law. Such was the situation with the church at Colosse, which was confronted with infiltrators whose teachings were destroying the believers' freedom under the gospel message and thus threatening a relapse back into Judaism.

Some argue that Colossians 2:16 points not to the regular *weekly* Sabbath, but *yearly and monthly* Sabbaths (i.e., "ceremonial" sabbaths). This is the official Seventh-day Adventist position affirmed in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*:

SDA's . . . have usually held that since the context deals with ritual matters, the sabbaths here referred to are the ceremonial sabbaths of the Jewish annual festivals "which are a shadow," or type, of which the fulfillments were to come in Christ; that although the sequence of terms might appear to class the Sabbath with the ceremonial holy days, the rhetorical form cannot outweigh the facts established elsewhere in the Bible, that the types and symbols extending only to Christ do not include the Sabbath of the Decalogue.³

The eminent Seventh-day Adventist scholar Nichol also claims that Colossians 2:16 refers to the ceremonial or annual, not weekly, sabbaths.⁴ Nearly all Adventists⁵ and even several non-Adventist⁶ scholars follow this reasoning. They say that the underlying assumption of this argument is a distinction between the so-called "moral" and "ceremonial" aspects of the Law⁷ and the belief that the designation of a weekly *σαββάτων* as a "shadow" (*σκιά*; v. 17) is inappropriate:

Paul can hardly be referring to the seventh-day Sabbath of the Decalogue, for the Sabbath is not a shadow of anything, it is the reality. Further, although to some extent the Sabbath points forward

¹M. Martin, 162.

²Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:108.

³*SDAE*, s.v. "Sabbath," by Neufeld, ed., CRS, 10:1110-1111.

⁴"If Paul here was referring to the weekly Sabbath of the Decalogue, then the only conclusion to reach would be that in the Christian Era there is no weekly holy day of rest. And does Christendom, in general, believe that? No. The sternly enforced Sunday laws of the different Christian lands . . . provide . . . proof . . . that a weekly holy day is proper, right, and Scriptural" (Francis D. Nichol, *Answers to Objections*, 165; cf. 49, 166-70, 190). Unfortunately, rather than dealing with the textual evidence, Nichol appeals to a recent practice arising from the time of the Puritans which considers Sunday the "Christian Sabbath." This imposing of tradition upon exegesis is unacceptable.

⁵Others include Kenneth H. Wood, "The 'Sabbath Days' of Colossians 2:16, 17," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 338-42; Paul Giem, "Sabbaton in Col. 2:16," *AUSS* 19 (Autumn 1981): 195-210; Donald F. Neufeld, "Sabbath Day or Sabbath Days," *Review and Herald* 148 (April 15, 1971): 13; and especially the official statements of the Adventist movement in *Questions on Doctrine*, 131, and the *SDABC*, Nichol *et al.*, eds., 7:205-6.

⁶Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, 6:294; A. R. Fausset, "Colossians," *JFB*, 6:448; Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, 1070; John Davenant, *An Exposition of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians*, 1:477-88; Glenn N. Davies, "The Christian Sabbath," *RTR* 42 (May-August 1983): 39; de Lacey, "The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus," 182-83.

⁷Wood, "The 'Sabbath Days' of Colossians 2:16, 17," 338. The lack of biblical support for such a distinction has already been addressed earlier in this chapter.

to the promised rest in Christ (see Hebrews 4), it does not obtain its primary significance from "things to come" but from an event in the past—the creation of the world in six days (Gen. 2:2, 3; Ex. 20:8-11).⁸

Therefore, most Adventists believe that ceremonial sabbaths must be in view since the weekly Sabbath looks *back* to creation whereas the ceremonial sabbaths look *forward* to their fulfillment in Christ.

A second line of reasoning is also used to take away the force of Colossians 2:16. Even if Paul is referring to the weekly Sabbath, some Adventists claim that his concern is with a *ritualistic observance* of the day "as part and parcel of the works-righteousness concept of rabbinical Judaism,"⁹ not a prohibition of Sabbath observance itself. Likewise, Wood claims that the verse indicates that "sabbaths have no value for salvation."¹⁰ A modification of this ritualistic observance view sees not the Jewish Sabbath in view, but rather pagan "sacred days" based upon astrological movements.¹¹ O'Brien believes that the Sabbath *is* in view but that Paul prohibits observing it with the wrong (astrological) motive.¹²

A third argument aimed against the meaning of weekly Sabbath here is the use of the plural form "sabbaths." Some believe that this form indicates ceremonial sabbaths.¹³ Bacchiocchi acknowledges that the plural form (σαββάτων) is used for the entire week (LXX Ps. 23:1; 47:1; 93:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; Acts 20:7), so he suggests that it more properly refers to weekdays rather than to the Sabbath.¹⁴

Can these interpretations be sustained? Is Paul really speaking here of ceremonial sabbaths, ritualistic observance of the Sabbath, pagan sabbaths, or even weekdays? The best evidence, as most scholars recognize, is that Colossians 2:16 condemns all forms of Sabbath-keeping, including observance of the weekly Sabbath.¹⁵

Ritualistic observance is excluded in that all of the practices mentioned are deemed types. Surely Paul would not refer to empty, ritualistic Sabbath worship as a (divinely ordained) type. Pagan

⁸Wood, "The 'Sabbath Days' of Colossians 2:16, 17," 33; *SDABC*, Nichol *et al.*, eds., 7:205-6.

⁹*SDAE*, s.v. "Sabbath," by Neufeld, ed., 10:1110.

¹⁰Wood, "The 'Sabbath Days' of Colossians 2:16, 17," 339.

¹¹Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Herm, 115-16. Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Appendix: Paul and the Sabbath," in *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 339-69, seems to indicate this view as well as the ceremonial view.

¹²Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word BC, 139.

¹³Clarke, 6:294; Barnes, 1070.

¹⁴Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 360; *id.*, *The Sabbath in the New Testament*, 116-17.

¹⁵T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians*, ICC, 264; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 3:224-25; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 113-15; Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*, 282-97; H. M. Carson, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC, 72 ("weekly festivals"); John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, 176-77; Charles J. Ellicott, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon*, 168 ("weekly festival"); William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, NTC, 123-24; Henry Allen Ironside, *Lectures on Colossians*, 91; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, 127-28; J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 260; Martin, 162-66; Curtis Vaughan, "Colossians," *EBC*, 11:204; Kenneth Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament*, in *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 1:210; Rordorf, 135; Congdon, 344-47. William Barclay claims that the verse prohibits Gnostic and Jewish weekly sabbaths (*The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, DBS, 145).

sabbaths also must be excluded for the same reason. The apostle would not say that a heretical, astrological observance was now to be abolished because of the appearance of its antitype. Paul warns the church not to allow others to convince them of the necessity of observing Jewish holy days, irrespective of motivation.

The annual ("ceremonial") sabbaths also cannot be in view. All non-weekly Sabbaths are already mentioned in the verse as they are included under "religious festivals" (ἑορτῆς), so another designation for yearly and monthly Sabbaths in the same phrase would be redundant.¹⁶ This same list of holy days in descending order of time is repeatedly used in the Old Testament, and in each case the Sabbaths refer to the weekly day of rest and worship. The law for daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly offerings is explained in Numbers 28–29¹⁷ then listed in this same order many times elsewhere in the Old Testament.¹⁸ These are the same celebrations mentioned in Colossians 2:16, which argue convincingly against the Adventist claim that they are peculiar celebrations associated with the Colossian heresy. The contention that ceremonial sabbaths must be in view because the weekly Sabbath looks back at creation (not forward to something) is unwarranted. There is no reason the day cannot have both a retrospective and prospective viewpoint. Indeed, the present tense of τῶν μελλόντων ("which are to come") in Colossians 2:17 indicates that the festivals of verse 16 are typological of things *still* forthcoming.¹⁹

Further evidence that the weekly Sabbath is in view stems from the New Testament usage of the word σαββάτων. This word is used sixty times in the New Testament in both the singular and plural, always referring to the seventh-day Sabbath.²⁰ While Adventists themselves admit that fifty-nine times it refers to the weekly Sabbath, they still insist based upon "context" that Colossians 2:16 remains the only use of the word for ceremonial sabbaths.²¹ Such alleged contextual evidence is lacking. It appears that the normal meaning for σαββάτων has been abandoned to maintain a moral/ceremonial dichotomy within the Law. Bruce adds, "When the sabbath is mentioned in the OT or the NT with no contextual qualification, the weekly sabbath is intended."²²

Finally, the use of the plural also does not argue for the ceremonial Sabbaths in that it is simply a Hebraism.²³ As such the plural is commonly used in Scripture with a singular sense in reference to the weekly Sabbath.²⁴ The translators of the Septuagint also felt free to employ the exact plural

¹⁶See Congdon, 344-47; Ironside, *Lectures on Colossians*, 91.

¹⁷Numbers 28:3-4 (daily), 9 (Sabbath), 11 (new moon), 16, 26; 29:1, 7, 12 (five annual feasts).

¹⁸1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Neh. 10:33; cf. opposite order (parallel to Col. 2:16) in Ezek. 45:17; Hos. 2:11. The new moon and Sabbath are adjacent in several texts (Amos 8:5; Isa. 1:13; 2 Kings 4:23; Ezek. 46:3), which provides additional weight for the Sabbath referring to the weekly day.

¹⁹This eschatological meaning is further explored in the final chapter.

²⁰Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*, 285.

²¹Wood, "The 'Sabbath Days' of Colossians 2:16, 17," 339-40.

²²Bruce, *Colossians*, 115, n. 105.

²³Both the singular and plural forms indicate the weekly Sabbath in the New Testament: the singular σαββάτου and plural σαββάτων both stem from the Hebrew שַׁבָּת whereas the plural σαββάτα stems from the Aramaic (ܫܒܬܐ; cf. Acts 17:2; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 95, 105; cf. James Hope Moulton, Wilbert Francis Howard, and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 4 vols., 2:128, 153; George Benedict Winer, *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament*, 177); "σαββάτα, though plural, means 'a Sabbath day,' being, in fact, a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic, and from its form mistaken for a plural" (Abbott, 264; cf. Lightfoot, 260).

²⁴Exod. 31:13; Lev. 19:3; Isa. 56:4; Ezek. 20:12; Matt. 12:5, 10; 28:1; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14. The misleading translation "sabbath days" (KJV) in Colossians 2:16 does not reflect this usage. Adventists themselves admit that the plural often refers to a succession of weekly Sabbaths (Francis D.

form (σαββάτων) in their translation of the singular שַׁבָּת in the Decalogue itself (Exod. 20:8; Deut. 5:12), as well as in many other passages where the singular weekly Sabbath is in view.²⁵ Also, assuming Bacchiocchi's "weekday" view, one must wonder how Paul would be condemning the church for an improper use of weekdays, especially in light of the Jewish emphasis in the book. Further, how "weekdays" serve as a type is never explained by Bacchiocchi.

Since the weekly Sabbath must be in view here, it remains to ask what Paul says about it. His main purpose is to warn the Colossians not to let anyone judge them regarding the observance of the day. In other words, Paul cautions the church members against anyone convincing them of the necessity of Sabbath observance.²⁶ He does not declare Sabbath observance wrong *per se*, since Paul's attitude about Sabbath-keeping "is that it, like many other things, does neither harm nor good."²⁷ However, he does forbid required observance of the day. This is because the Sabbath served as a mere shadow, whereas Christ is the substance (v. 17).

Nichol, ["D. F. N." in article] "Sabbath Day or Sabbath Days?" *RH*, 15 April 1971, 13; *SDABC*, Nichol *et al.*, eds., 7:205); nevertheless, for the most part most of them follow the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* teaching that it refers to the ceremonial sabbaths (cf. *SDABC*, Nichol *et al.*, eds., 7:205-6).

²⁵For example, $\tau\eta\ \eta\mu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\ \tau\omega\nu\ \sigma\alpha\beta\beta\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega\nu$ in Exod. 35:3; Num. 15:32; 28:9 and simply $\tau\omega\nu\ \sigma\alpha\beta\beta\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega\nu$ in Isa. 58:13 (cf. Alfred Ralfs, *Septuaginta*, 2 vols.).

²⁶C. I. Scofield, ed., *New Scofield Reference Bible*, 1194. See also the many sources at footnote 15.

²⁷De Lacey, "The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus," 182-83.

Biblical Evidence for the Doctrine of the Trinity

(Adapted from Dr. R. Walter Martin)

Introduction

“Many people think that the Trinity is impossible to understand, that it is a logical and conceptual impossibility. The cults vehemently deny the Trinity asserting that it is a doctrine of Satan. The non-Christian religions make sport of the doctrine saying that Christians believe in three gods.

“But it is possible to understand the Trinity. We may not have exhaustive knowledge of the doctrine. But we can know it enough to state it clearly and understand it deeply....”¹

How to Prove the Trinity

1. Begin the investigation into Scripture by starting from scratch, assuming nothing.
2. Demonstrate that the Bible teaches that there is only one God (Isa. 44:6; 1 Tim. 2:5²).
3. Correctly define the Trinity: “Within the nature of the one, true God exists three Person(age)s: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who share the same attributes, are the same substance (nature, essence or reality) and are in effect the one, true God.”
4. Decide who Jesus is: a lunatic (one who made false claims unknowingly), a liar (one who made false claims knowingly) or who he said he was (one who spoke the truth).³ Assuming Christ spoke only the truth we must believe what he says. This is recorded in the Bible, so may we use only the Bible as our only authoritative source concerning this doctrine?
5. Show the person the reasonableness of this proposition: If three biblical Persons are all called God and share the same attributes of God, but there exists only one God, they are in effect *the* one, true God. (If this can be demonstrated then the Trinity is true.)
6. The Bible conclusively proves the above proposition in the following passages that identify the same attributes/titles with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit:

Attribute/Title	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Called “God” (deity)	<u>2 Pet. 1:17</u> ⁴	Heb. 1:6-8 ⁵	<u>Acts 5:3-4</u> ⁶
Worshipped as God	<u>Matt. 4:10</u> ⁷	<u>John 20:28</u> ⁸	None ⁹
Indwells believers	<u>1 Cor 3:16a</u> ¹⁰	Col. 1:27 ¹¹	<u>1 Cor 3:16b</u> ¹²
Is the truth	<u>John 3:33</u> ¹³	<u>John 14:6</u> ¹⁴	<u>1 John 5:6</u> ¹⁵
Raised Christ	<u>Acts 3:26</u> ¹⁶	<u>John 10:17</u> ¹⁷	<u>Rom. 8:11</u> ¹⁸
Omniscient (all knowing)	Ps. 139:1-5 ¹⁹	John 16:3 ²⁰	1 Cor 2:10-11 ²¹
Omnipotent (all powerful)	Matt. 19:26 ²²	Phil. 4:13 ²³	Zech. 4:6 ²⁴
Omnipresent (everywhere)	Jer. 23:24 ²⁵	Matt. 18:20 ²⁶	Ps. 139:7-12 ²⁷
Has personhood	John 3:16 ²⁸	John 1:9-18 ²⁹	John 14:17 ³⁰
Helper (<i>Paraclete</i>)	2 Cor 1:3-6	1 John 2:1	John 14:26 ³¹
Forgives sin	Isa. 45:25 ³²	1 John 2:12 ³³	
Forgets sin	Jer. 31:34 ³⁴	Heb. 8:12	Heb. 10:17 ³⁵
Immutable (changeless)	Mal. 3:6 ³⁶	Heb. 13:8 ³⁷	
Eternal	Exod. 15:18 ³⁸	John 1:1-2 ³⁹	
“I Am”	Exod. 3:14	John 8:58 ⁴⁰	
“Alpha and Omega”	<u>Rev. 1:8</u>	<u>Rev. 22:13, 16</u>	
“First and the Last”	<u>Isa. 44:6</u>	<u>Rev. 1:17</u>	
Holy	<u>Isa. 6:3</u> ⁴¹	Mark 1:24 ⁴²	Luke 11:13

Note: Underlined verses are translated correctly in the Jehovah Witness *New World Translation*.

7. Additional evidence from both the Old and New Testament reaffirms the verses on the preceding chart to support the doctrine of the Trinity:

a. Old Testament Evidence:

- 1) The title *elohim* (“God”) always appears in the plural (2570 times!), thus supporting the teaching of Scripture elsewhere that God is more than one Personage (Gen. 1:1ff.).

- 2) Plural personal pronouns (“Us” rather than “Me”) are used of God (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8).
- 3) The three Persons of the Trinity appear together in the same passage as distinct from one another (Isa. 48:16; 59:20-21; 63:7-10).
- 4) Distinctions within the nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are evident in:
 - a) Immanuel (Messiah) as being “God with us” (Isa. 7:14).
 - b) The Son called “the mighty God” (Isa. 9:6).
 - c) The Father delegating sovereign authority to the Son (Ps. 2:7).
 - d) The Father sending the Holy Spirit (Ps. 104:30).
 - e) One LORD as distinguished from the LORD (Gen. 19:24; Hos. 1:7).
 - f) The Spirit of the Lord (Holy Spirit) distinct from the Father and Son (Isa. 48:16).
 - g) The Redeemer (who must be divine) as distinguished from the LORD (Isa. 59:20).
 - h) The Father sending the Angel of Jehovah, or preincarnate Christ, who is called God yet distinguished from Him (Gen. 16:7-13; 18:1-21; 19:1-28; 32:30; Mal. 3:1).

b) New Testament Evidence:

- 1) Jesus Christ is called the God incarnate (John 1:14) and the Son of **God** (Matt. 16:16) but He was conceived by the **Holy Spirit** (Matt. 1:18, 20); however, He is never called “the Son of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, the Spirit must be God since God conceived Mary to produce the Son of God!
- 2) The three Persons of the Trinity are distinguished at the baptism of Christ where the Father spoke from heaven and the Holy Spirit descended as a dove (Matt. 3:16-17).
- 3) The Father and the Comforter (Holy Spirit) are distinguished from Christ Himself (John 14:16-17).
- 4) The Great Commission command to baptize “in the name (singular) of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” breaks the rules of grammar by using a singular noun (“name”) with three (i.e., a plural number of) genitives (Matt. 28:19). Again, in this trinitarian prescription for baptism the three Persons are distinguished.
- 5) Many other passages distinguish between the Persons in the Godhead by listing all three in the same passage (John 3:21-24; 4:2-31; 15:26; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor 12:3-6; 2 Cor 1:21; 13:14; Eph. 1:17; 2:13-22; 3:14-19; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; Jude 20-21; Rev. 1:4-5).

Misunderstandings of the Trinity

1. Tritheism: three persons who are three gods
2. Modalism: one person who manifests himself in three different ways
3. Unitarianism: one person who is the only God
4. Nonsense: one person who is at the same time three persons

“

Denials of the Doctrine

Search Ministries, Dallas, Texas

The doctrine of the Trinity is clearly taught in the Scriptures and it was emphatically affirmed in church history from the earliest period to present. Yet the major cults of America deny the truth of the trinity.

I. The Mormons reject the Trinity.

- A. Their view of the Father: God the Father is the resurrected Adam. He was once a man but he became a finite god who is now populating the earth with his many celestial wives.
- B. Their view of the Son: Christ is an ordinary man who became a god. He was not produced by a direct act of the Holy Spirit but by actual sexual relations between God the Father (Adam-god) and Mary.
- C. Their world view: Polytheistic. They believe that many gods inhabit the universe and that man may become a god.

II. The Jehovah's Witnesses reject the Trinity.

- A. Their view of the Father: Jehovah is the ^{most} high god.
- B. Their view of the Son: Jesus is "god-like" but not Jehovah. Prior to his earthly life he was Michael the Archangel. At his incarnation he became a man. At the resurrection Jesus went back to his former state as an invisible spirit body.
- C. Their view of the Spirit: "So the holy spirit is the invisible active force of Almighty God which moves his servants to do his will" (Let God be True, pg. 108). Thus, the deity and the personality of the Holy Spirit are both denied.
- D. Their view of the Trinity: "The trinity doctrine was not conceived by Jesus or the early Christians (ibid. 1952, pg.93). "The plain truth is that this is another of Satan's attempts to keep the God-fearing person from learning the truth of Jehovah and His Son Christ Jesus" (ibid 93).
- E. Their world view: Jehovah's Witnesses are monotheistic: There is one God who is strictly one person.

III. The Unity School of Christianity rejects the Trinity.

- A. Their view of the Father: God is an impersonal force or a principle. "God exercises none of his attributes except through the inner consciousnesses of the universe and man" (Jesus Christ Heals, Unity Sch. of Christianity, 1944, pp. 31-32).
- B. Their view of the Son: Jesus of Nazareth was a man. The Christ principle is god or the impersonal force of the universe which resides in all mankind. Jesus of Nazareth allowed the Christ principle to so totally control him that he was elevated to Jesus Christ.
- C. Their view of the trinity: "The Father is a principle, the Son is that Principle revealed in creative plan, the Holy Spirit is the executive power of both the Father and the Son carrying out that plan" (Metaphysical Bible Dict., pg. 629).
- D. Their world view: Pantheistic. God is an impersonal force. Everything that exists is God and God is all that exists.

IV. The Christian Scientists reject the Trinity.

- A. Their view of the Father: Mary Baker Eddy denied that the God of Christian Science was pantheistic (meaning that god was to be identified with the whole material world). But when she describes God she depicts him as "the divine whole, an all pervading intelligence and love, a divine infinite principle" (Misc. Writings, p. 16). He is not an infinite personal God. He is a divine principle.
- B. Their view of the Son: Christ is a divine idea, or principle. Jesus is the human man who lived in history. Jesus the man more than any other man manifested the Christ principle and thus became Jesus Christ.
- C. Their world view: Christian Science is pantheistic. God is the world and the world is God.

In conversations with members of Cults the Trinity is the place to begin. Probe with two kinds of questions. Who was Jesus Christ? And what is Christ's relationship to the Father and the Spirit? Initially answers from cultists will sound orthodox. But as you ask questions and define terms you will quickly find a radical difference in their Christ and the person who is revealed in the Gospels.

Different Views of God Diagrammed

(Search Ministries)

Different Views Of God

Monarchianism
(Mono = One Arche = Ruler)
One Person One God

A second- and third-century heresy that denies the doctrine of the Trinity maintaining that the only true God has always existed as one Person not three Persons. The teaching exists today in two forms:

Modalistic

This view holds that God exists as one Person Who is revealed in history in different modes using different names. The Father Son and Holy Spirit are different names for the same *Person*. Therefore, the Father was born at Bethlehem and crucified at Calvary, but at the time He was called Jesus.

Currently Taught by The United Pentecostal Church

The Jesus Church also

Dynamic

This heresy teaches that Jesus is not God but a special man who became (or was adopted as) the Son of God (usually thought to have occurred at His Baptism).

but JW's say he was born of the Son of God.

Currently Taught by The Watchtower

Trinitarianism
(Trinus = triple)
Three Persons One God

The Biblical view of God. The Father Son and Holy Spirit are three separate Persons who have always existed as **ONE TRUE GOD**. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three Gods nor are they three names for the same Person.

Although the word Trinity is not found in the Bible, the idea or teaching is found throughout scripture.

Currently Taught by The Bible and Christians

Tritheism
(Tri = Three, Theos = God)
Three Persons Three Gods

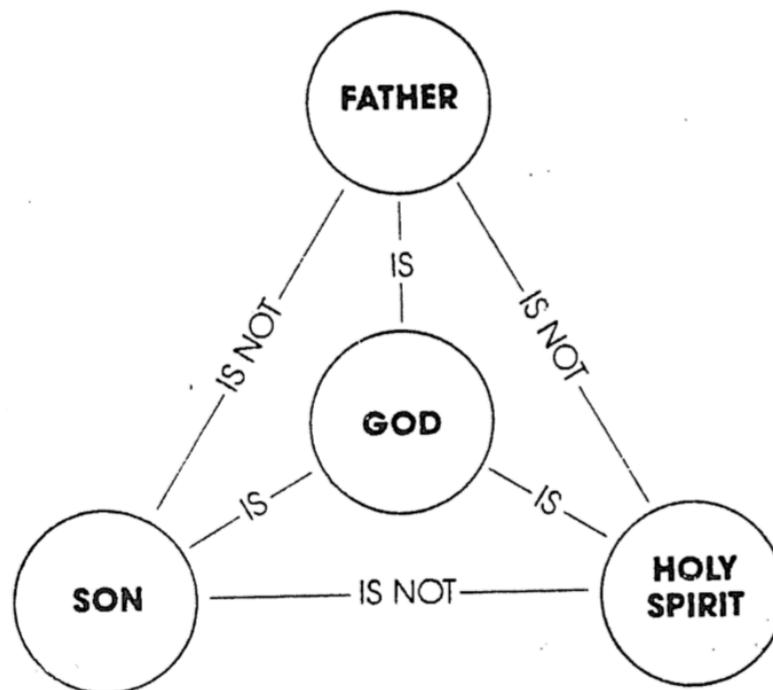
The belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate Gods. This is actually a form of Polytheism (the belief in more than one true God.)

Currently Taught by Mormonism

Illustrations of the Trinity

No illustration of the Trinity can be adequate, but the following depict some of its aspects:

1. The triple point of water: Water in a vacuum tube at zero degrees centigrade will contain liquid, ice and vapor yet each part will still be H₂O, the same substance.
2. An Egg: An egg is composed of three parts: the white, yolk and shell. However, it is one egg.
Problem: Illustrates “parts” of God which is unscriptural.
3. The Sun: The Sun is unapproachable (the Father) but is the source of beneficial light (the Son) which in turn gives power to make plants grow (the Spirit).
Problem: Impersonal illustration whereas God is a personal being.
4. A Man: A man can simultaneously be a father, son and husband although he is but one man.
Problem: Approaches modalism since it indicates three different functions for one man.
5. A Diagram: Here is the best Trinity diagram that I have seen (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 55):



Conclusion

“A popular statement about the Trinity goes like this, ‘Try to understand the Trinity and you will lose your mind, but fail to understand the Trinity and you will lose your soul.’ This betrays a misunderstanding of the doctrine. The Trinity is not a logical contradiction. For God to be three persons yet one essence is logically possible. We do know the **what** of the Trinity: God is three persons but one essence. But the **how** of the Trinity—the exhaustive knowledge of how the persons of the Trinity relate to one another—that is a mystery. It is what we **can** know coupled with what we **cannot** know that compels us to worship such a great God.”⁴³

Trinity Study Endnotes

Note: Underlined verses are translated correctly in the Jehovah Witness *New World Translation*. Those with double underline are particularly clear even in this distorted version of the Bible.

- 1 "The Trinity." An unpublished study outline by Search Ministries, Dallas, TX.
- 2 Deut. 4:39b; Isa. 43:10; 44:8; 45:22; Mark 12:29; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:5-6; Jas. 2:19; 1 Cor 8:4-6.
- 3 For a full explanation of the "Liar, Lunatic, Lord" apologetic see Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), 103-107.
- 4 1 Cor 1:3; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 1:12; 2:10; Col. 3:17.
- 5 Matt. 1:23; 4:6-7; Mark 2:1-12; John 1:1, 14; 5:18; 10:30; 12:44-45; 14:9-11; 15:23; 17:11, 21; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:8-11; Col. 1:15-19; 2:9; Tit 2:13; Heb. 1:1-4; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 John 5:20; Rev. 1:8 with 1:17-18.
- 6 Matt. 1:18 with 16:16; 2 Cor 3:17.
- 7 Exod. 20:3-5.
- 8 Matt. 2:2, 8, 11; 28:17; Heb. 1:6.
- 9 No explicit NT text (that I know of) encourages us to worship the Spirit or pray to Him.
- 10 2 Cor 6:16.
- 11 Rom. 8:10.
- 12 John 14:17; 1 Cor 6:19.
- 13 John 7:28; 8:26.
- 14 John 1:14; 8:32 with 8:36.
- 15 John 15:26; 16:13.
- 16 1 Thess. 1:10; Col. 2:12.
- 17 John 2:19-21.
- 18 Acts 17:31.
- 19 Matt. 10:29-30.
- 20 Col. 2:3; Heb. 4:13; Rev. 2:23.
- 21 Isa. 11:2.
- 22 Gen. 18:14; Job 42:4; Jer. 32:17; Zech. 8:6; Mark 10:27; Lk 1:37; 18:27.
- 23 Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3.
- 24 Perhaps also 1 Cor 12:13.
- 25 Job 22:12-14; Eph. 4:6.
- 26 Matt. 28:20; Col. 1:27.
- 27 John 14:17.
- 28 Matt. 6:9-13.
- 29 Phil. 2:6-8.
- 30 The Holy Spirit is not a "vapor" or a "divine influence." Only a person is referred to by the personal pronoun "He" (John 16:8) and only a person can be quoted (Acts 13:2).
- 31 Mark 2:7; Ps. 103:3a, 12; Isa. 1:18; 44:22; 53:5; Jer. 31:34.
- 32 Mark 2:1-11; Acts 10:43; 13:38.
- 33 John 15:26.
- 34 Isa. 43:25.
- 35 The Father's words (Jer. 31:34) are attributed to the Son (Heb. 8:12) and Spirit (Heb. 10:17). The author could not exercise this freedom unless all three are one.
- 36 James 1:17.
- 37 Heb. 1:12.
- 38 Ps. 41:13; Rev. 1:8.
- 39 Col. 1:15; Rev. 22:13.
- 40 The seven "I am" statements in John are: 6:35; 8:12; 8:58; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1.
- 41 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Rev. 4:8; 15:4
- 42 Parallel in Luke 4:34; cf. Luke 1:35; John 6:69; Acts 2:27; 13:35; Rev. 3:7.
- 43 "The Trinity." An unpublished study outline by Search Ministries, Dallas, TX.

Reincarnation

Responding to an Age-Old Belief

I. Some Terms

- A. *Reincarnation* believes that after death people return to earth again in another human body (cf. Latin *carne*, "flesh"). *Transmigration* is similar, saying one could become an animal (bird, cow, flea, cockroach) or inanimate object (rock, piece of chalk, etc.) in the next life. Reincarnationists say people may go through hundreds or even millions of reincarnations.
- B. *Karma* (good and bad thoughts, words, and deeds in this life) decides the status of the new body—economically, intellectually, physically, etc. If one earns more good karma, he or she has a higher form in the next life, but bad karma results in lower forms of existence.
- C. *Pantheism* (Greek *pan*, "all" + *theism*, "God") is the worldview of reincarnation in which God is an impersonal force; the universe is God and God is the universe. Thus, every human and all created beings are an extension of or an emanation from God. Similar to this is *Panentheism* that teaches that God is not all things but God is *in* all things.
- D. Buddhists and Hindus have long believed in reincarnation, but a recent Gallup Poll noted that one in four Americans also believe in it. One modern author, Gary Zukav, has popularized reincarnation in his book *The Seat of the Soul* (Fireside, 1990; 256 pp.) and through regular appearances on the Oprah Winfrey show. The adherents are growing.

II. Five Arguments of Reincarnation Critiqued²⁸

- A. *Hypnotic regression* is when someone vividly and accurately describes people, places, and events he or she could not have previously known. But must these be from a former life? Many "hypnotized" people have outright lied or simply not remembered the real details. "Although hypnosis increases recall, it also increases errors... During hypnosis, you are creating memories."²⁹ Patients under hypnosis are also mostly children or are easily influenced by leading questions, which is why law courts do not accept testimony under hypnosis. Also, why is "past life recall" mostly prevalent in south and western Asia where "stories from a former life" are viewed with admiration? If reincarnation is really true, one should observe "past life recall" in all cultures, not just where it is believed.
- B. *Déjà vu* is a feeling that one has done a present action before (e.g., been at a certain place). Reincarnation advocates say this place or event occurred in a previous life, but researchers say the brain is simply fusing a similar past experience in this life with the current one.
- C. *Xenoglossy* is a sudden ability to speak a language one has never learned. Reincarnation attributes this to one's previous language in a former life, but *cryptoamnesia* is more likely (when one recalls previously forgotten data such as languages heard as a child).
- D. *Birthmarks* also supposedly support reincarnation since some are similar to those on deceased individuals. Perhaps if these were identical then the reincarnationists might have a case, but similarity certainly does not prove that the same soul inhabited both bodies.

²⁸ This section and the following biblical section mostly summarizes Patrick Zuckerman, "The Mystery of Reincarnation," Richardson, TX: Probe Ministries, n.d. (<http://www.probe.org/docs/reincarn.html> or email him at pzuckeran@probe.org). He is a research associate with Probe, former pastor, and ThM graduate of Dallas Seminary.

²⁹ Elizabeth Stark, "Hypnosis on Trial," *Psychology Today* (February 1984), 35.

- E. *The Bible* is also used to teach reincarnation. The Bible agrees with it that man's immaterial soul and spirit never dies, but it does not teach reincarnation (see below).

III. Responses to Reincarnation

A. A Biblical Response³⁰

1. Where explanations above fail, Scripture notes the possibility of demonic possession. The NT has several examples of persons whose bodies and minds were controlled by demons. These demons, while not all-knowing, have observed humans for thousands of years and can interject knowledge into the minds of those possessed. Edgar Cayce (father of the New Age movement) and others espousing reincarnation confess that the "emptying" of their minds allowed demons to control them.³¹
2. The Bible teaches clearly that we live once, die once, and then enter our eternal state. Hebrews 9:26b-28a states, "But now [Christ] has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once..." (NIV). Jesus and all people die but once, thus excluding reincarnation teaching within the Bible.
3. Reincarnation advocates often appeal to John 9:1-3. Here the disciples asked Christ whether a man was born blind due to his own sin or sin of his parents. Jewish belief at that time attributed birth defects to sin by the baby in the womb (cf. Jacob and Esau in Gen. 25:22) or to parental sin (cf. Exod. 20:5). However, Jesus refuted the idea of the man's blindness due to *anyone's* previous sins, so he actually taught *against* karma.
4. The Bible even gives examples of people after their death who did not go through the evolutionary process taught by reincarnation. For example, Samuel was brought back from the dead (1 Sam. 28). This would not have been possible had he already returned to earth in another body. Also, Lazarus and especially the evil and rich man (Luke 16) did not return to earth in further incarnations.
5. The Bible teaches resurrection into one body—not reincarnation into many bodies. As the crops harvested first were called "firstfruits" (Exod. 23:16), so Christ's own resurrection is deemed the "firstfruits" of believers who have died (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). After his resurrection, Jesus received an eternal body that resembled his mortal one. In like manner, Christians will also be raised into new, glorious bodies—not return to earth in different mortal bodies. Similarly, after judgment unbelievers will rise to inhabit indestructible bodies, yet for punishment (Rev. 20:14-15; cf. Luke 16:19-31).

³⁰ For biblical critiques of reincarnation see Mark Albrecht, *Reincarnation: A Christian Critique of a New Age Doctrine* (Chicago: IVP, 1982, 1987), 35-50, 105-26; Norman L. Geisler and J. Yutaka Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1986), 105-7, 113-54; Walter Martin, *The Riddle of Reincarnation* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1977); Craig S. Hawkins, *Witchcraft: Exploring the World of Wicca* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 121-27; and Craig S. Hawkins, *Goddess Worship, Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1998), 65-68; cited by Hawkins, n. 1 at <http://www.apologeticsinfo.org/papers/critiquereincarnation.html>. See also Robert M. Bowman, "Reincarnation—Did the Church Suppress It?" in the *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (Summer 1987): 8-12; Paul Edwards, "The Case Against Reincarnation: Part 1," *Free Inquiry* 6 (Fall 1986): 24-34; "The Case Against Reincarnation: Part 2," *Free Inquiry* 7 (Winter 1986/87): 38-43.

³¹ Thomas Sugue, *The Story of Edgar Cayce: There is a River* (Virginia Beach: Association for Research and Enlightenment, 1973), 219, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 79.

B. A Philosophical Response (for those who do not hold the Bible as authoritative)³²

1. Reincarnation encourages murder. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* ("the song of God" in Sanskrit, which is Hinduism's most popular sacred book), the god Krishna counsels the warrior Arjuna not to worry or mourn over killing anyone in battle. Why not? Murder is not sin but is virtuous since it helps the murdered deal with their karma. Krishna says that Arjuna can't really kill anyway since, "Death is certain for the born. Rebirth is certain for the dead. You should not grieve for what is unavoidable.... Die, and you win heaven. Conquer, and you enjoy the earth. Stand up now, Son of Kunti, and resolve to fight. Realize that pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, are all one and the same: then go into battle. Do this and you cannot commit any sin."³³ Many reincarnation proponents agree with this concept of murder not being a sin.³⁴
2. Reincarnation claims that everything that happens is due to choice. This choice in one's previous or present life may be conscious or unconscious, but each individual still chooses it. Shirley MacLaine expressed this pitiful view after her daughter's acting teacher burned to death beyond recognition. MacLaine asked, "Why did she choose to die that way?"³⁵ One occult leader claims, "Many other deaths do not seem to be choices: accidents, illnesses, murder, the deaths of young people... But in the occult view these deaths were not arbitrary nor beyond the control of the people involved. The death-choices were subconscious choices, but choices just the same for any of a myriad of reasons."³⁶ But do even reincarnationists choose their own deaths?
3. Reincarnationists need to have every (or close to it) type of experience possible. This may be to pay off negative karma, actualize their potential, or learn from different experiences in their "evolution as a deity." The witch Raymond Buckland states, "Why should one be born crippled, another fit and strong?... because we must all eventually experience all things."³⁷ Sadly, life as a murderer, prostitute, rapist, and terrorist is thus necessary in their system. Also, undergoing everything is impossible since time marches on and no one can experience all there is in a given age.
4. Reincarnation is fatalistic, saying that whatever happens in life is the best or morally correct course of events. No matter what happens to one, it ought to occur because, as one witch says, it "was the best possible thing that could happen to him."³⁸

³² This philosophical section summarizes Craig S. Hawkins, "A Philosophical Critique of Reincarnation and Related Worldview Correlatives," Santa Ana, CA: Apologetics Information Ministry, 1999; rev. 7/26/00 (<http://www.apologeticsinfo.org/papers/critiquereincarnation.html>).

³³ *Bhagavad-Gita: The Song of God*, translated by Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, with an introduction by Aldous Huxley (New York: Mentor Books, 1944, 1951), 38-39.

³⁴ Rajneesh clarifies the *Bhagavad-Gita* (including the section cited above): "Even if you kill someone consciously, while fully conscious it is meditative. That is what Krishna was saying to Arjuna...Kill, murder, fully conscious, knowing fully that no one is murdered and no one is killed....Just become the instrument of Divine hands and know well that no one is killed, no one can be killed" (Rajneesh, *The Book of the Secrets: Discourses on Vigyana Bhairava Tantra* [New York: Harper Colophon, 1977], 1:399; as quoted in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Cult Watch*, 290). The founder of Transcendental Meditation wrote in his commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita* that Arjuna should attain "a state of consciousness which will justify any action of his and will allow him even to kill in love in support of the purpose of evolution" (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *On the Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation and Commentary* [Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1974], 76; as quoted in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Cult Watch*, 290-91).

³⁵ Shirley MacLaine, *It's All in the Playing* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), cited by Ron Rhodes, *New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 17.

³⁶ Marion Weinstein, *Positive Magic: Occult Self-Help*, rev. ed. (Custer, WA: Phoenix Pub., 1981), 98.

³⁷ Raymond Buckland, *Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Pub., 1988), 17.

³⁸ Sybil Leek, *Reincarnation: The Second Chance* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 50.

5. Reincarnation leads one never to care for others. “If a woman gets raped (or any other tragedy occurs to someone) in this life, does that mean she raped someone in a previous (or will in a future) life, or committed (or will commit) some other equally despicable act to bring about her own rape? Therefore, she is only getting what she has sown (deserves?), thus, reaping her own karma? Hence, why should we feel sorry for her or attempt to intervene? (Furthermore, how can we punish the rapist if he is only fulfilling the law of karma, and actually helping the women?) These are detestable views... if these ideas were true, one could rightly ask if anything is unjust, wrong, or evil. But, this flies in the face of our intuition, our innate sense of sympathy, right and wrong, good and evil, and fairness.”³⁹
6. Reincarnationists cannot, or at least do not, live consistent to their views. If devout reincarnationists could live consistently by their philosophy, then the following scenario could genuinely happen: “Imagine that Shirley MacLaine's house is broken into and that many of her valuable possessions are destroyed or stolen, and she and her household are badly beaten-up and abused. Suppose further that just after her assailants are done and getting ready to leave, Shirley MacLaine musters what little strength she has and says, ‘Thank you, thank you so much. I really mean it. Oh, and don't worry about me calling the police and trying to see you punished, you have done me a great favor. Now, actually, I owe you a great favor; you have helped me work-off a great [amount] of negative karma, and of course, after all I did choose to have this happen, and besides, I needed to experience this, sooner or later, so thank you. Have a nice day!’ [...Why won't she respond like this? We all know that this crime] is wrong, and the perpetrators ought to be held responsible for their actions!”⁴⁰
7. Reincarnation makes us unable to morally distinguish good from evil. If all is the way it ought to be, morality is unnecessary and irrelevant. If things that look “bad” or “evil” are actually good, how can one know whether one is accruing negative or positive karma by “helping” others or oneself? To make such a judgment would be arbitrary without objective standards of right and wrong. Ironically, Satan himself promised us ability to tell right from wrong (Gen. 3:5b). What a lie.
8. Reincarnation teaches that the divinity is responsible for all the pain, suffering, and evil that has, does, or ever will exist. This is the ultimate conclusion to the pantheistic belief of reincarnation that “all is God.” If all is God, then both good and evil are aspects of this One who ultimately becomes responsible for evil. Reincarnation in witchcraft thus sustains Satan's first lie—that sin makes us “be like God” (Gen. 3:5a).
9. Reincarnation believes that evil is eternal. In fact, “we can have no assurance that the deity(ies) or divinity can or wants to defeat evil. Nor can we be sure that this is even an appropriate question, since in the [pantheistic or panentheistic] worlds evil is always part of the deity's or One's very nature.”⁴¹

IV. Conclusion

Reincarnation provides no real hope for conquering evil in our world or us. It is a philosophy that even reincarnationists do not believe. They intuitively know that right and wrong exist, so they do not live consistent with the teaching that everything is legitimate. Instead of helping defeat evil in the world, reincarnation provides justification for more of it.

V. Thought Questions

- A. Why is reincarnation a popular theory—especially in the West where it is relatively new?
- B. How can we prove the finality of death as opposed to the reincarnation theory?

³⁹ Hawkins, “A Philosophical Critique of Reincarnation and Related Worldview Correlatives,” after note 32.

⁴⁰ Ibid., after note 35.

⁴¹ Ibid., after note 39.

Colossian Heresy in the True Jesus Church

1. Founder and History

This group apparently began this century in Taiwan, but I'm not too sure about this since none of the sixteen pamphlets of True Jesus Church literature which I obtained provides any historical background to the group! To me this appears to be a conscious omission, since they believe that they alone have salvation. The logical result of such a belief is that no one else since the New Testament church has been saved until they came along as the "True Jesus Church, established by Jesus through the Holy Spirit during the end-time" as "the restored true church of the apostolic times." However, they do correctly state, "Our church IS NOT another denomination" (*Words of Life* pamphlet 16:4).

2. Teachings

- a. Anti-Trinitarian: The above may sound as if the TJC believes in the Trinity, but this is not so. Another pamphlet clears this up by declaring that "Jesus is the Heavenly Father...Jesus is 'Johovoh' [sic] God in the Old Testament, and so is He [sic] the Heavenly Father, the Father of the spirits. He said, 'I and the Father are one' (Jn. 10:30)" (*Words of Life* pamphlets 12:22; 14:16). Thus, they believe in the ancient heresy known as Modalistic Monarchianism—that there exists only one God *and one person* who assumes different modes using different names.
- b. Salvation: There exists an elaborate and complicated formula of several things one must do in order to be saved. In fact, they seem to have covered all of the "additions" taught by other groups but missed the most important—faith in Christ!

Identification with the True Jesus Church

+

Water Baptism in the TJC with Head Bowed

+

Foot Washing by a Minister of the TJC

+

Holy Communion (Transubstantiation)

+

Reception of the Holy Spirit

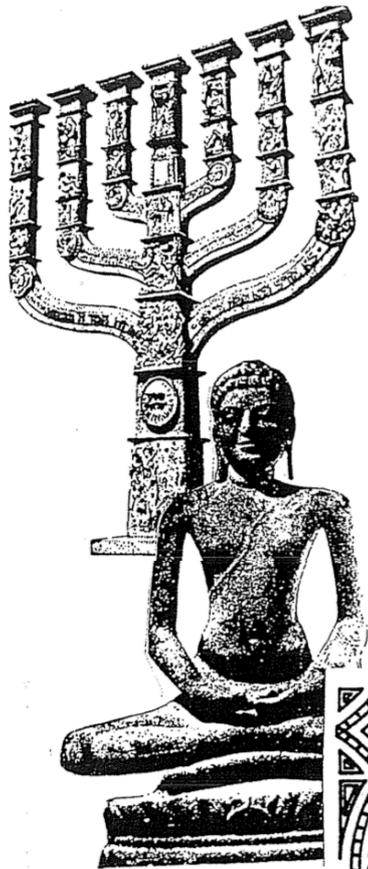
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Speaking in Tongues (as the Sign of Receiving the Spirit)

=

Salvation!

We should praise God that becoming a Christian is not really as complicated as the True Jesus Church has made it. They do so because they have no concept of the grace of God, shown in the atoning death of Christ. This foundation finds little or no mention in their literature.



A Christian Response to **World Religions** *Including a Survey of Various Views*

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Assoc. Prof of Biblical Studies
Singapore Bible College*



Addressing Man's Religious Nature

"New Nation Educational Broadsheet: 2" *New Nation* newspaper (April 12, 1971)

Introduction

UNLIKE other animals, Man cooks, laughs and makes tools. Even more remarkable is the fact that he worships.

Throughout history, in every land, Man has sought to come to terms with something that he believes to be greater than himself. In every human settlement is to be found some building, place or object used for no purpose other than the performance of acts of worship.

Europe, the Americas, and Australia have churches and chapels; the Moslem world boasts its mosques; the East its mysterious temples. In primitive lands, while the great religions have their converts, the gods of many other religions are also worshipped.

In uninhabited places of the world, there are the remains of older shrines and temples — swallowed up in the jungle as at Angkor Wat in Cambodia; crumbling in the desert as in the ancient Persian city of Persepolis; or isolated in mid-ocean like the great mute statues on Easter Island in the Southern Pacific.

What could all these structures be about? What has impelled man through the ages to erect them? The universality of the human religious response suggests that the answer to these

questions must be something fundamental to the human condition.

Most people conclude that men are animals who are not content to respond merely to the demands of the body. Eating, drinking, and making merry cannot totally satisfy them. Their very self-consciousness divides each of their worlds into "I" and "the other"; and "the other" — the mysterious "that which is not me" — seems to demand some sort of response, and this response is worship.

The enormous power of Religion in shaping and moulding society is one of the most arresting facts about it. It is hard to visualise the Arab world without Islam; the East without Brahma, Buddha, Lao-Tse or Confucius; how the history of Europe would have been written if the Gospels had never been written.

Religion obliges us to adopt a particular attitude towards it, ourselves, and our environment. This attitude may be noble, grotesque, obscene or merely superstitious. It may concentrate on explanations or on ecstasy. But throughout human history it is always there, for man has always been imbued with an awesome sense of the fundamental mystery of Life.

Rules for religious liberty

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 18. Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

SEVEN RULES FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

(Drawn up by the World Council of Churches)

1. While maintaining clearly a Christian basis for religious liberty the civil liberty which Christians claim for themselves should be guaranteed everywhere to all men, whatever their religion or conviction.

2. Religious liberty includes freedom

for the individual to change his religion or belief without his social, economic or political status being affected. This right contains within it the right to continue in his belief or unbelief without incurring from the outside either constraint or hindrance.

3. Religious liberty in addition includes the freedom to express one's religion or conviction: worship, teaching, the putting into practice and observation of rites are the fundamental forms of religious expression and any law on religious liberty should directly guarantee these.

4. The right to express one's religion or belief should be guaranteed to everyone, singly or in common, in public or in private.

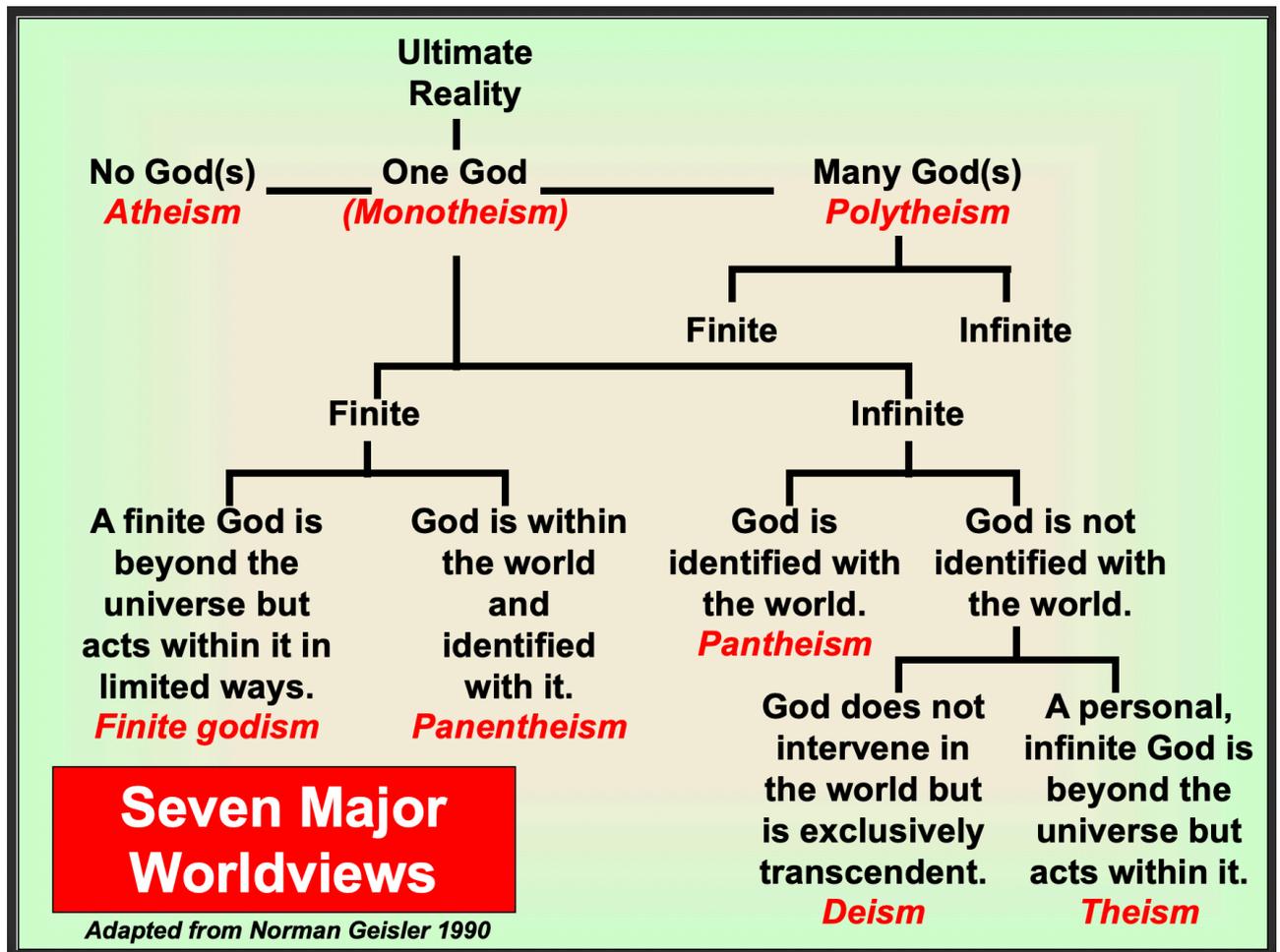
5. Religious liberty includes the freedom to maintain individual or collective links with religious communi-

ties or associations whose character transcends national frontiers: it also includes the freedom to express opinions or convictions and to communicate news and ideas by whatever means without consideration of frontiers.

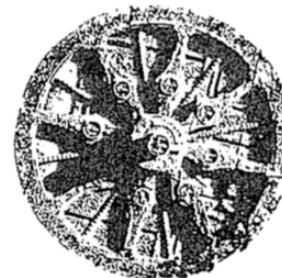
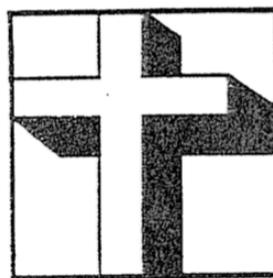
6. The norm for religious liberty should be international: it should not be interpreted in a restrictive fashion in order that it should conform to existing national constitutions and laws, but should be implemented in such a way that national laws and constitutions should be made to conform to the international norm.

7. The exercise of religious liberty, in the same way as other civil rights, should be submitted to limitations defined by law only in the interests of public order: religious rights should be valid for all, without distinction of religion or conviction.

Seven Major Worldviews



Great Living Faiths of the World



Religion	Buddhism	Christianity	Hinduism
Distribution	Throughout the Far East, China, Japan, Ceylon.	Founded in Palestine. Now world-wide.	Majority of Hindus found in India.
Date of foundation	6th Century B.C.	4 B.C.	Between 650 and 250 B.C.
Founder	Prince Gautama: the "Buddha" ("Enlightened One")	Jesus Christ: "Son of God."	Fusion of local and invading Aryan cults.
Structure	In Theravada (orthodox) lands there is a close clergy/laity relationship. Central monastic organisation.	Basis: Bible, Creeds, Episcopal transmission of Apostolic authority (this last not universally accepted).	Depends for continuance on thousands of independent Brahmins and ascetics: no overall organisation.
Scripture	The Book of Discipline (Vinaya), the Discourses (Sutta Pittaka), and the Theological Discourses (Abhidhamma) form the Tripitaka or "three baskets" (three lines of teaching). The writings were probably collected and set down from oral tradition by monks in the first century B.C.	The New Testament provides basis for all Christian thought. At first the canon was very loose; finally in A.D. 393 the present collection of books was accepted at a Church Council. Old Testament also accepted by Christians.	The Vedas (ancient hymns, liturgies, blessings, curses dating back as far as 1000 to 800 B.C.); The Upanishads (over 250 mystical interpretations of the Vedas); The Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavad-gita.
Ritual	The practice of the Eight-fold Path.	In most churches, God's grace is given in the Sacraments, variously defined. Most universal: Baptism and Communion.	Home is centre of religious activities. Congregational worship as such scarcely exists.
After Life	Temporary or permanent entry to the monastic priesthood.	In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God overcame the power of death, granting the possibility of loving union with him after life on earth.	Belief in transmigration of souls to a final goal, differently described by the different sects.
Ideals	The souls of all living things are part of a transmigratory cycle of existence. Final goal is Nirvana, a state of extinction of desire and greed and all suffering. The Doctrine of Anatta: to give up the very thought of self in order to free the mind of all suffering.	Christianity interprets all human life through God's revelation in Jesus. "Love God with thy whole heart . . . and thy neighbour as thyself."	Main doctrines: transmigration of souls; all living things have the same essence; strict system of social classes (castes).
Concept of God	Basically, the Buddhist has no god. He worships Truth and reverences the Buddha not as a god but as a principle of enlightenment.	God is creator of all—present and active in his creation. One in essence; three in his persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. God is Love.	Fundamental monotheism (Brahman, the supreme power); the hundreds of gods worshipped are subsidiary aspects of the one God.
Divisions	Four historical schools: Theravada of the Hinayana School, Mahayana School, Hinayana School, Lanka Vamsa.	Heresies and schisms occurred early. Major divisions today are between Roman Catholics, Eastern (Orthodox) Churches, and Protestants. Ecumenism is the modern movement aimed at Church Unity.	Differences exist due to its divided origin and the influences of Islam and Christianity and have grown in the last 200 years.

Adapted from the newspaper
New Nation Educational Broadsheet
April 12, 1971

Great Living Faiths of the World (2 of 2)



Islam.	Jainism	Judaism	Shinto
Arab countries, Pakistan.	A purely Indian religion.	Centred in Israel; now world-wide.	Japan: loosely organised cult.
Seventh century A.D.	Pre-600 B.C.	Twentieth century B.C.	Unknown.
Mohammed, born in Mecca.	First historical leader: Mahavira.	Traditional founder: Abraham.	No founder.
Islam excludes intermediaries between man and God, but Imams may lead mosque prayers and Mullahs teach.	Nucleus of the sect: a strict monastic order with intense discipline.	Synagogue is place of worship. No ordained priests.	Priesthood is now hereditary. Each shrine has parishioners (ujilo) and worshippers (sukeisha).
The Koran, the verses of which are called suras.	Vast Jain literature, only a fraction published. Books often concealed.	Any Jew may learn the Torah and become a Rabbi (teacher). The 1st five books of the Old Testament, variously called: the Pentateuch, the Books of Moses or the Torah — law of doctrine, religion, morals.	No official canon — creed rests on two eighth-century texts: Kojiki and Nihon Shoki.
Pilgrimage to Mecca; recital of creed, divine worship, fasting in month of Ramadan; alms giving.	No sharp distinction between laymen and monks. Great acts of penitence: paryushana.	Five main observances: The Passover; Pentecost; Tabernacles; Rosh Hashanah; Yom Kippur.	Rites connected mainly with ceremonial purification from any form of pollution.
Blessed men go to Paradise and see their Lord. Angels exist; some are the watchmen of hell and others the guardians of men.	Transmigration of indestructible souls. Every "karma" is purged off till soul is light enough to ascend to top of Universe.	Long-standing belief in the immortality of the soul.	Early Japanese had only vague notion about life to come. Influenced by Buddhism, ancestor veneration grew important.
There is but one God and Mohammed is his prophet. Faith requires belief in God, angels, inspired books, prophets (among whom is Jesus), Day of Judgment.	Many vows made, most important being never to kill anything live, even vermin. Matter exists only as mutable. Being is indefinite.	Faith in God's omniscience; reward and punishment; coming of Messiah; Israel chosen by covenant as people of the One God.	Stress on purity and perfection. Three purifying rituals: Misogi, Nakatomi, and Harai. Morally bad and criminal acts not clearly distinguished.
There is no God but one God, the first and the last. His name is Allah.	Jains believe their religion is millions of years old. 23 gods are worshipped, although they do not care for or influence the world.	One everlasting God, maker of Heaven and Earth, rules the world. Great stress on unity of God, incorporeal and eternal.	"The way of the Gods" meant the way of Kami: native indigenous spirits; anything awe-inspiring or with superior powers.
A.D. 657: Battle of Siffin — first known breach in unity of Islam. Today, two major sectarian divisions: Sunnites and Shiites.	Many schisms. Two distinct lines emerged in 3rd Century B.C. — Svetambaras and Digambaras.	Sects detached from main body of Judaism do not thrive. Present-day practising Jews may be either Orthodox (strict) or Progressive.	State Shinyo arose in early 1800s and was abolished in 1945. Shrine Shinto is now main survivor — wide variety of sects.

Singapore's Religious Harmony

① Time for S'pore to wake up to vulnerabilities

IT SHOULD not come as a shock for Singaporeans that we are also a terrorist target. No one is spared as the Osama bin Ladens and Al-Qaeda of this world seek mindless terror in the name of their brand of religion.

It is time for all of us to wake up to our vulnerabilities, not only economically but also to religious fanaticism.

Those who empathise with Osama and Al-Qaeda, and their form of religion, should be stripped of their citizenship, so that others so inclined will know that Singapore citizenship is a privilege, not a birthright.

It must be the religion of Satan which wants to shed innocent blood and cause untold harm to nations.

Certainly Prophet Muhammad did not preach mindless violence and the killing of innocent people. He was a prophet of peace who promoted education and the emancipation of women and children.

We should ban all movements which deviate from the quintessential teachings of Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, Muhammad, Zorasthra and other established prophets of peace.

We can do without newfangled religions or deviations from established ones, whose aim is anything but religious tolerance and peace!

All Singaporeans ought to be grateful to the ministries of Home Affairs and Defence, which keep a 24-hour vigil throughout the year so that the rest of us can carry on with our lives in peace.

Thanks, too, to the Internal Security Department for its superb alertness in apprehending the would-be destroyers and potential murderers. The main lesson here is this: Let vigilance be our second nature.

ST 8 Jan 02

ANANDA PERERA

② Draconian bans will only breed hatred

REFER to the letter, "Time for S'pore to wake up to vulnerabilities" (ST, Jan 8), by Mr Ananda Perera. It is true that no one is spared as the Osamas and the Al-Qaeda of this world seek mindless terror in the name of their religion.

However, I am surprised that one can suggest stripping Singaporeans of their citizenship for empathising with Osama and the Al-Qaeda.

While violence in any form is patently against all forms of religion and no religion advocates violence, freedom of belief rules the day.

Empathy does no harm, actions do. Empathising with Osama may be an unusual point of view, but does no harm unless it is accompanied by action.

Bans on forms of religions deviating from the established few, as suggested by Mr Perera, also raise many questions. Who is to judge what is established and what is not? And what defines a deviation?

Religious tolerance can be accomplished only through mutual respect and understanding. Draconian bans can only breed ignorance, and this breeds hatred. I believe Osama and Al-Qaeda's hatred of America is due to such ignorance and lack of understanding.

It is better to allow things to exist as they are now, under the watchful eye of the Internal Security Department and related departments, so that Singaporeans have the opportunity to see and learn better judgment in the process.

ST 10 Jan 02

DANIEL ANG
Cambridge, US

THE STRAITS TIMES : Tuesday, January 15, 2002

③ Be vigilant against deviant religions

REFER to the letter, "Draconian bans will only breed hatred" (ST, Jan 12), by Mr Daniel Ang.

I am sure subsequent revelations about the activities of Al-Qaeda-trained empathisers in Singapore will make most thinking, sensible and loyal Singaporeans agree that we can do without such elements in our society.

Therefore, stripping such "Singaporeans" of their citizenship for being traitors is justified for the sake of peace and cohesion in our society.

Such people should live in the countries where their preferred leaders hide and espouse their violent and deviant causes.

History shows that such traitors were once publicly beheaded.

The Taleban used their sports stadium to execute hundreds of men and women publicly for disagreeing with their deviationist teachings.

Some were killed for not shrouding their faces, others for continuing to read and educate themselves, and yet some others for not keeping a prescribed length of beard.

The Americans learnt a bitter lesson on Sept 11 about the impact of such deviationist teachings.

In consequence, the rest of the civilised world is still reeling from this dastardly act.

If Singapore were to

wait for a learning process as advocated by Mr Ang, racial disharmony will have destroyed the fabric of our multi-racial and multi-religious society, even before this lesson is learnt.

He also asks: "Who is to judge what is established and what is not?"

All registered and established religious authorities; the Government and the majority of Singaporeans should be the judge.

As Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs Mohamad Maidin Packer said: "We should make sure that everyone is properly qualified to teach religion by getting appropriate certification."

He added that while the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, or Muis, did check new teachers to ensure their teachings were not deviant, it could look further into this concern.

The wake-up call for suitable religious leaders must apply beyond Islam to include religious teachers of other faiths as well.

We have to be vigilant to ensure that newfangled religions or deviations from established ones will not injure the fabric of our society.

ANANDA PERERA

Worldview Witnessing Strategies

Monotheism

Judaism: Fulfilled prophecy (Isa. 53)

Islam: Character of Christ (gospels)

Sikhism: Character of Christ (gospels)

Atheism

Proofs for God's existence (Rom. 1)

Truth "piece of the pie" results in agnosticism

Faith is required in every belief system (including atheism)

Personal opinion does not determine truth

Polytheism

Illogical that matter created intelligence (Gen. 1:1)

Works cannot take care of sin problem (Eph. 2:8-9)

Pantheism

Demonstrate God's power over the universe (Acts 17:24-25)

Show God as distinct from the universe (Rom. 1:20, 23, 24)

The universe had a beginning so it cannot be God (Gen. 1:1)

Man is like God (Gen. 1:26-27) but God has no equal (Isa. 46:19)

Geisler, *False Gods of Our Time*, 80-87

Religion: **Buddhism**

Dates of Origin:

Two Types of Buddhism:

Thervada: 600 B.C. (conservative)

Mahayana: 300 B.C. (liberal)

Buddhism is hardly a religion in the generally-accepted sense of the word as connoting some contact between man and divinity. It is rather a moral philosophy and a Way.



Founders:

Offspring of Hinduism and of India

Thervada: Siddhartha Gautama

Mahayana: unknown, evolved from Thervada

Sacred Writings:

Thervada: *Hinayana*

Mahayana: 5,000+ miscellaneous volumes

Beliefs About:

God:

Thervada: God in the objective, personal sense does not fit into the system; no ultimate reality.

Mahayana: varied, mostly atheistic

Sin:

Thervada: No forgiveness, redemption, heaven, hell, judgment, prayer, praise.

Mahayana: varied, but Zen lacks any deep, theological sense of sin, guilt, or separation from Ultimate Reality.

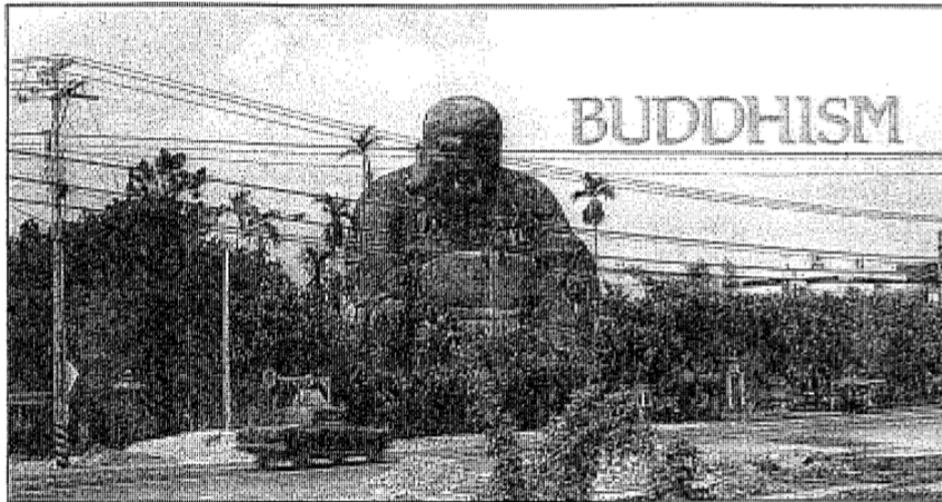
Salvation:

Thervada: *The Eightfold Path* (right views, aspirations, speech, *conduct, mode of livelihood, effort, awareness, and concentration); i.e., a self-salvation through asceticism

* Right conduct includes abstention from killing man or animal; even breaking an egg, a potential life, is condemned.

Mahayana: universal; however, the fiducial (Paradise or "Pure Land") school teaches salvation by faith through the simple recitation of the sacred formula which expresses faith in Amida Buddha.

Buddhism Supplement



Doug Thompson

Origin

Buddhism was founded by Prince Siddhartha Gautama, born about 563 B.C. to a Hindu chief in what is now southern Nepal. Troubled by what he saw of poverty, sickness and death, and dissatisfied with much of what Hinduism taught, at age 29 he began a search for truth. On his 35th birthday he sat beneath a sacred tree, declaring that he would not rise until he attained understanding. After 49 days he arose as the Buddha, "The Enlightened One," and spent the remaining 45 years of his life imparting his message.

Scriptures

Buddha's teachings were passed on orally. The first sacred books appeared in the first century B.C. The best known is *The Way of the Law*, parts of which are attributed to the Buddha himself.

Beliefs

God: The transcendent reality of which the universe and man are only manifestations.

Reincarnation: When the body dies, the soul comes back to earth in another body or form.

Nirvana: A state of bliss, the spiritual goal of freedom from the endless cycle of reincarnations.

The Four Noble Truths teach that: Suffering is universal, the cause is selfish craving, the cure is to eliminate craving, and the way is the Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path is: Right

knowledge, intention, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

The Five Precepts are to abstain from: Taking life, taking what is not given, illegal sexual pleasures, lying, and intoxicants.

Practices

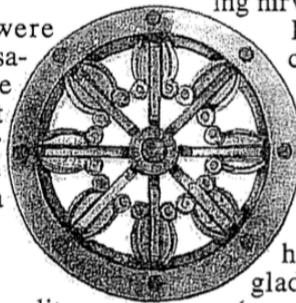
Buddhist monks officiate at funerals, perform ceremonies in monastery temples, and provide religious education for the young. Buddhism also provides for nuns.

Difficult pilgrimages to shrines or temples are considered an aid in gaining nirvana.

Domed or tower-like shrines, called *stupas*, house Buddhist relics, including teeth and hair from Buddha's body.

Scope

Worldwide: 180 million adherents. SIM fields (Bangladesh, India): 9.26 million (approximately one percent of the population).



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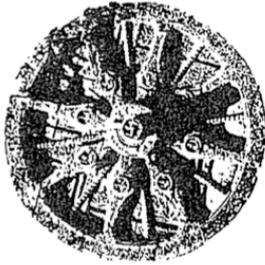
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SIM-NOW 5

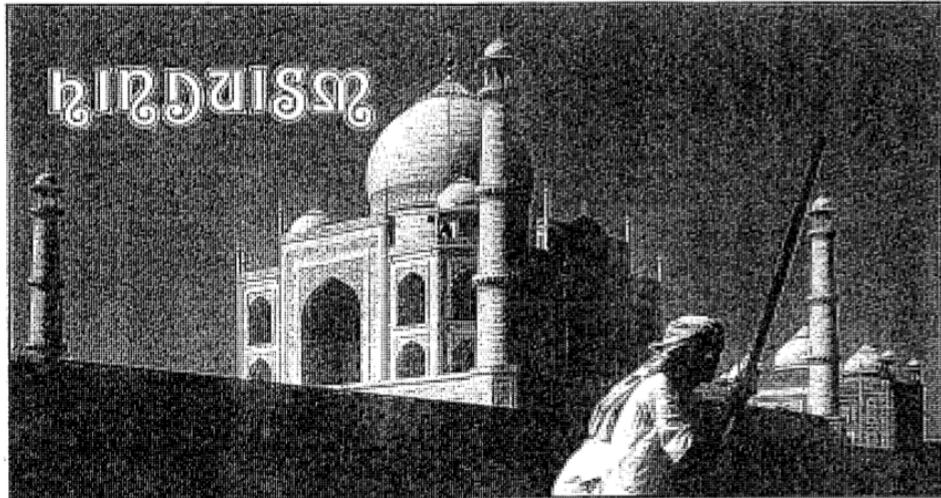
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Religion:	Hinduism
Date of Origin:	Hindus call Hinduism <i>sanatana dharma</i> ("eternal religion") approx. 2500 B.C.?
Founder:	no one founder (Krishna?)
Sacred Writings:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Śruti</i>, or "what is heard," refers to the eternal truths of religion which the <i>rishis</i> or seers saw. 2. <i>Smṛiti</i>, or "what is remembered" -Vedas, Codes of law, Ramayana and Mahabharata (<i>Bagvagita</i>, <i>Upanishods</i>), Puranas, Agamas, Darśanas)
Beliefs About:	Essentially eclectic and syncretistic
God:	<p><i>Brahma</i>, Eternal Being or Reality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Vaiseshika</i> school believes in a personal God. - <i>Vedanta</i> school sees <i>Brahma</i> as the one, abstract, all-pervading Reality.
Sin:	<p>Determined by the structures of human society (relative and metaphysical, not moral personal guilt)</p> <p><i>Karma</i> is "action" or "doing" and is a moral interpretation of the natural law of causation which states that any action is the effect of a cause and is in its turn the cause of an effect (<i>samsara</i>, rebirth or reincarnation).</p>
Salvation:	<p>Release from the wheel of <i>karma</i> (from life that never ends!)</p> <p><i>Bhakti</i> (divine grace) is devotion for its own sake rather than for the glory of God (a method to merit the grace of God).</p> <p>Through <i>Yoga</i> salvation comes to mean to become like God in his timeless perfection by the emancipated soul realizing its own immortality.</p>



Hinduism Supplement

**Origin**

Hinduism has no known founder. Its origins are traced to northern India, about 1500 B.C. The name comes from the Sanskrit word *indus*, meaning ocean or river.

It is generally regarded as one of man's oldest living religions.

Scriptures

Hinduism's sacred books are written in Sanskrit, India's most important religious language. The chief categories are:

- The four Vedas (books of knowledge)
- The Brahmanas (rituals and sacrifices)
- The Upanishads (oral treatises from 800-600 B.C., scripted in 1300 A.D.)
- The Bhagavad-Gita (a section of the 100,000-verse epic poem Mahabharata)
- The Laws of Manu (behavioral codes)
- The Puranas (18 collections of legends and instructions)

Beliefs

God: The impersonal supreme being, the primal source and ultimate goal of all beings is Brahma (sometimes Brahman), who composes a trinity with Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer. Brahma can be conceived of in any way men like — hence a pantheon of innumerable gods and idols.

God is silent and beyond personality.

Reincarnation: When the body dies, the soul comes back to earth in another body or form.

Karma: The principle that what one does today shapes one's tomorrow. Being born to poverty and suffering is attributed to the sins of past incarnations.

Salvation: A process of spiritual evolution which all men ultimately achieve after innumerable cycles of time.

Death: The eventual gateway to freedom from the reincarnation cycle.

Practices

Caste: A hierarchical system of social groupings based on occupation, and fixed at birth. Although caste is forbidden by India's constitution, it is important to Hindus. The four highest castes are: Brahman, for priests and scholars; Kshatriya, for rulers and soldiers; Vaishya, for merchants, artisans, and farmers; and Sudra, for laborers and servants. Christians are considered outside the caste system.

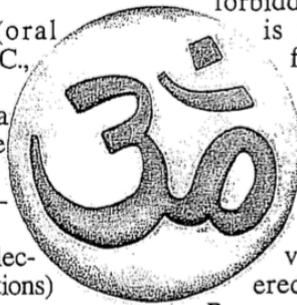
Reverence for life: Because God is in everything, all life must be revered. Cows have special status.

Cremation: Because of belief in reincarnation, bodies are burned, except for those of holy men, who are believed to be reunited directly with Brahma.

White shrouds are for men, widows, and single girls; red is for wives.

Scope

Worldwide: 700 million. SIM fields: India, 670 million (82% of population); Bangladesh, 17.5 million (16%); Pakistan, 1.7 million (1.6%).



Religion:

Islam



Date of Origin:

610 A.D.



Founder:

Muhammad (571?-632 A.D.)



- four wives (including son's ex-wife)
- pre-existent
- impeccable, ascetic (solitude, fasting)
- last and greatest of the prophets

Sacred Writing:

Qu'ran (Koran)

104 divine books of the 124,000+ prophets

Beliefs About:

God:

"There is no God but God [Allah], and Muhammad is the Prophet of God."

Jesus was the Messiah, virgin born, God's word, a spirit from God, miracle worker, greatest of the prophets, not God, didn't die on a cross.

Sin:

Most heinous of the sins are polytheism, apostasy, scepticism, and impiety.

Salvation:

Strict adherence to the "Five Pillars:"

1. Recital of the Creed
2. Prayer (five times daily)
3. Fasting
4. Almsgiving
5. Pilgrimage to Mecca

* "He who dies on the way to Mecca is enrolled in the list of martyrs."

* "He who dies in a Jilad (Holy War) is a martyr and assured of paradise."

* "When a man marries he perfects half his religion [no more than four wives]"

Islam Supplement

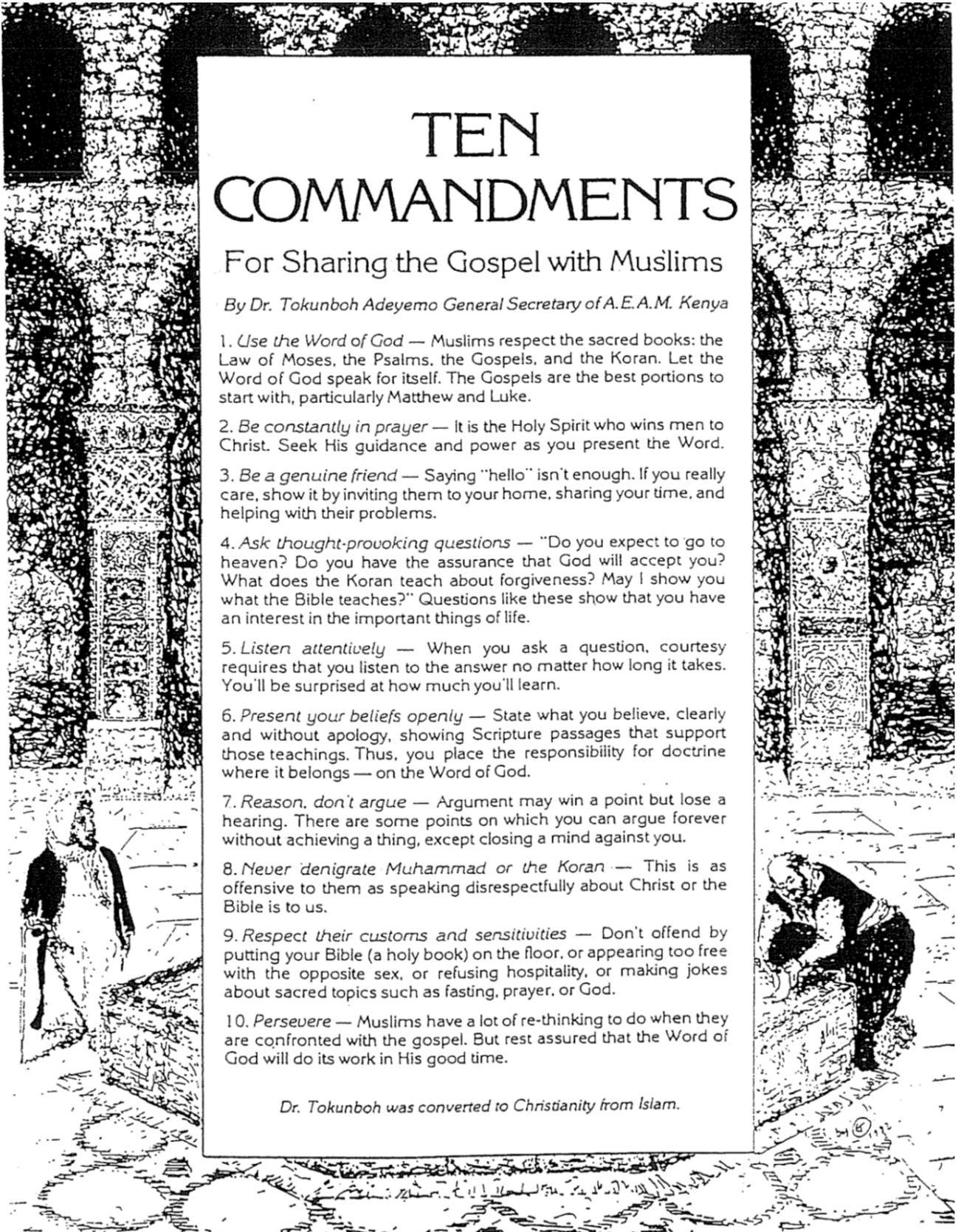
TEN COMMANDMENTS

For Sharing the Gospel with Muslims

By Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo General Secretary of A.E.A.M. Kenya

1. *Use the Word of God* — Muslims respect the sacred books: the Law of Moses, the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Koran. Let the Word of God speak for itself. The Gospels are the best portions to start with, particularly Matthew and Luke.
2. *Be constantly in prayer* — It is the Holy Spirit who wins men to Christ. Seek His guidance and power as you present the Word.
3. *Be a genuine friend* — Saying "hello" isn't enough. If you really care, show it by inviting them to your home, sharing your time, and helping with their problems.
4. *Ask thought-provoking questions* — "Do you expect to go to heaven? Do you have the assurance that God will accept you? What does the Koran teach about forgiveness? May I show you what the Bible teaches?" Questions like these show that you have an interest in the important things of life.
5. *Listen attentively* — When you ask a question, courtesy requires that you listen to the answer no matter how long it takes. You'll be surprised at how much you'll learn.
6. *Present your beliefs openly* — State what you believe, clearly and without apology, showing Scripture passages that support those teachings. Thus, you place the responsibility for doctrine where it belongs — on the Word of God.
7. *Reason, don't argue* — Argument may win a point but lose a hearing. There are some points on which you can argue forever without achieving a thing, except closing a mind against you.
8. *Never denigrate Muhammad or the Koran* — This is as offensive to them as speaking disrespectfully about Christ or the Bible is to us.
9. *Respect their customs and sensitivities* — Don't offend by putting your Bible (a holy book) on the floor, or appearing too free with the opposite sex, or refusing hospitality, or making jokes about sacred topics such as fasting, prayer, or God.
10. *Persevere* — Muslims have a lot of re-thinking to do when they are confronted with the gospel. But rest assured that the Word of God will do its work in His good time.

Dr. Tokunboh was converted to Christianity from Islam.



Judaism

SOME POINTERS...

On witnessing to your Jewish friends



1. Be a real friend. There are many spiritual scalp hunters who want to win a Jewish soul for Christ, but are completely unaware of the person who is that soul. Have a well-rounded relationship with your Jewish friend before you attempt to witness on a personal basis.

It is the continuing person-to-person witness through which most people have been won to their Messiah.

2. Don't be afraid of discussion on life issues. They can give you insight on how your friend perceives and understands things. Listen when he talks about the things which concern him, and discuss what his Jewishness means to him.

In no way let him come to the misunderstanding that you only care for him "in order to convert him."

3. In some way give testimony to the gospel. A good place to begin is to tell specifically how God has answered prayer in your life. Avoid testimonies that talk about the peace and joy that you have in the Lord . . . remember, those who follow Eastern religions or any number of the "new" cults give such testimonies, as well as those who are made happy by the Jewish religion.
4. Answer questions or objections from Scripture. But remember, you don't have to answer every question when it is asked. You can say, "I don't know the answer to that, but I'll find out;" or "Let me think about it a little more and I'll give you an answer the next time I see you."
5. See if your friend will study the Bible with you. Don't concentrate only on the messianic prophecies; there is valuable truth in all Scripture. A good beginning point is Genesis 12 through Exodus 20--the story of the major covenants. However, if your Jewish friend is willing to study the Scriptures on a person-to-person basis, you may want to consult with your pastor. He will be able to recommend an appropriate study plan.
6. Offer to pray for your friend's needs. While our prophetic or teaching ministry is not always acceptable, most people appreciate prayer; and God seems to be particularly pleased to honor prayers as evidence of his existence.
7. Encourage your friend to communicate with Jewish Christians. Such a meeting might be painful, but it does bring persons to the place where they realize that Jesus is for Jewish people too!
8. Emphasize that Christ is the sin-bearer for Jew and Gentile alike, and that a person doesn't have to relinquish his Jewishness to accept Jesus.

Remember that your Jewish friend has been taught that he will be committing spiritual treason even to consider the claims of Christ. It's up to you to show him that isn't true.

9. Ask for a decision. As a general rule, it is not good to press for a decision, but you will know the timing on the matter. Don't forget to ask the person for a decision.

Some Messianic Passages

<u>Old Testament Prophecy</u>		<u>New Testament Fulfillment</u>
1. Gen. 3:15, Isa. 7:14	Messiah to be seed of the woman, to be born of a virgin	Matt. 1:18-25 Gal. 4:4 Luke 1:26-38
2. Gen. 49:10	Messiah to be born of the tribe of Judah	Heb. 7:14 Rev. 5:5
3. Isa. 11:1-2, 10	Messiah to be from the house of Jesse	Acts 13:22-23
4. Isa. 9:6-7 Psalm 132:11	Messiah to be of David's lineage	Luke 1:32-33 Acts 13:22-23
5. Micah 5:2	Messiah to be born in Bethlehem	Matt. 2:1-6 Luke 2:4-7
6. Daniel 9:24-26	Time of Messiah's coming	Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10
7. Deut. 18:15, 18-19	Messiah, a prophet	Acts 3:20-26
8. Psalm 118:22	Messiah, the stone that was rejected	John 1:11-12 John 12:37-43 Acts 4:1-12
9. Psalm 22	Messiah's crucifixion	Matt. 27:39-43, 46 Mark 15:20, 24-26 Luke 23:11-35 John 19:15-18, 23-24
10. Psalm 110:1-4	Messiah's priestly ministry	Mark 16:19 Luke 24:50-51 Acts 2:33-36 Heb. 10:12-13
11. Isaiah 52:13 through Isaiah 53:12	The Gospel of Messiah in Isaiah	
Isa. 52:13	Matt. 21:9-11 Mark 11:7-10 Luke 19:35-38 John 12:12-15	
Isa. 52:14	John 19:1-2 Matt. 26:67-68; 27:27-30	
Isa. 53:1	John 12:37-38	
Isa. 53:2	Luke 2:40	
Isa. 53:3-4	John 1:11; 7:47-48	
Isa. 53:5-6	John 1:29; 11:49-52 I Cor. 15:3 II Cor. 5:21 I Peter 2:24-25	
Isa. 53:7	Matt. 26:59-63; 27:12-14 Mark 15:3-5 Luke 23:8-9	
Isa. 53:8	Matt. 27:1-2 Luke 23:1-25	
Isa. 53:9	Matt. 27:57-60 Mark 15:42-47 Luke 23:50-52	
Isa. 53:10	Heb. 2:10	
Isa. 53:11	Romans 3:22-24 Eph. 2:8-9	
Isa. 53:12	Luke 23:32-33 Heb. 9:26,28 I Peter 3:18	
12. Jer. 31:31	Messiah's New Covenant	Heb. 8:6-13; 9:12-22 Heb. 10:4-24 Matt. 26:17; 27-29 Luke 22:15-20 Romans 11:26-27

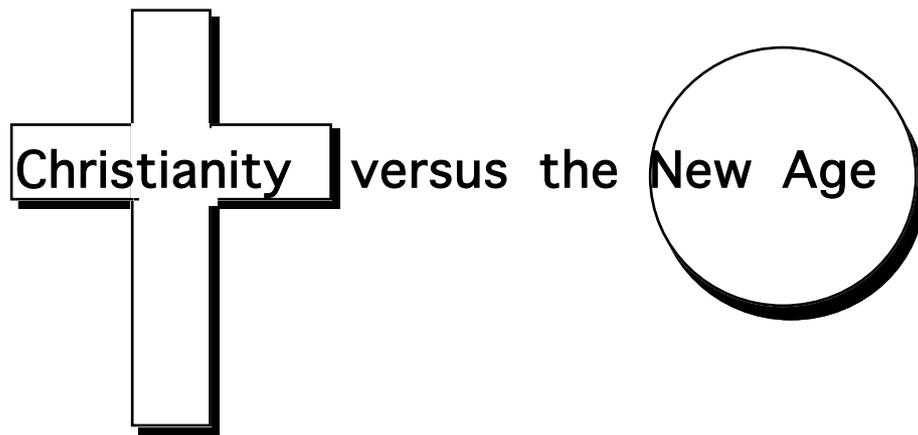
JEWS FOR JESUS
60 Haight Street
San Francisco, CA 94102-5895

Religion:	Jainism
Date of Origin:	599-527 B. C. (Mahavira's lifetime)
Founder:	Prince Mahavira, who pledged: "I shall neglect my body and abandon the care of it; I shall with equanimity bear, undergo, and suffer all calamities arising from divine powers, men, or animals." He begged 42 of his 72 years, wandering naked (accompanied for some years by another naked man, Goshala Makkhali). He spoke to nor greeted anyone in fear of forming relationships. He died by the insane rite of <i>sallakhana</i> (voluntary starvation).
Sacred Writing:	<i>Kaupya Sutra</i> (Mahavira's Sermons)
Beliefs About:	Teaching summarized in the <i>Three Jewels</i> : Right Faith, Right Knowledge, Right Conduct: don't kill anything (even insects), steal, covet, lie, live unchastely or get drunk
God:	No Supreme Ruler exists (atheistic), although many finite beings who might be called "gods" exist on various levels of the celestial regions. They cannot help man, however, since they too need redemption. Prayer to them is useless.
Sin:	Passions, self-indulgence. People are responsible for their own karma.
Salvation:	Reincarnation and karma are conquered through asceticism as the only method of release. Nirvana comes through the control of the body. Asceticism is achieved through the <i>Five Jain Vows</i> : non-violence (not killing <i>any</i> living thing), truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-covetousness. Women must be reborn as men to be saved.



Religion:	Sikhism
Date of Origin:	15th Century, A.D. (initially a reform of decadent Hinduism)
Founder:	Nanak (1469-1538 A.D.), born a Hindu but God appeared to him and said, "I am with thee... Abide uncontaminated by the world. Practice the repetition of My name, charity, ablutions, worship, and meditation. I have given thee this cup of nectar, a pledge of My regard."
Sacred Writing:	the <i>Granth</i> (a devotional hymnbook by Guru Arjan) is their one authority
Beliefs About:	A combo of Hinduism and Islam, yet unique; non-caste, syncretistic, meat-eaters, militant.
God:	Monotheistic: "There is but one God whose name is True, the Creator, devoid of fear and enmity, immortal, self-existent, great and bountiful." <i>True Name</i> is eternally one, sovereign, omnipotent, transcendent and immanent, creator and destroyer, merciful and loving.
Sin:	Lack of love for God (replaced by asceticism, bathing, pilgrimages, etc.)
Salvation:	"The all-sufficient means of bringing an end to reincarnation is the simple, complete love of God that absorbs the soul into the Absolute." Salvation is not going to Paradise...but absorption--and individuality-extinguishing absorption --in God, the True Name.

Religion:	Shinto
Date of Origin:	A.D./B.C. (2,000 years old)
Founder:	No founder; Shinto is a term which merely distinguishes the Japanese traditions from the Way of Buddha or the Teaching of Confucious. Consequently, the word does not simply refer to a religious faith or a religious way of life, but to Japanese attitudes, ideas, and ways of doing things.
Sacred Writings:	No written canon, and therefore there is no organized, clearly defined body of doctrine or unified, systemized code of behavior (eclectic). <i>Kojiki, Nihon Shoki, Kogoshui, Manyoshu, Engishiki</i> (not canons Shintos bound by).
Beliefs About:	
God:	The <i>Kami</i> are spiritual beings of today , mythological entities of ancient times, natural phenomena (including both animate and inanimate things), physical objects of worship or ancestral spirits (lack of definiteness in the term). Japanese Emperors are descendants of the sun-goddess.
Sin:	"Goodness" and "badness" not determined by measurement against any clearly defined standard or moral code; no absolutes; while man is basically good his behavior should be in keeping with the mores of the community;
Salvation:	Worship centers around the Shinto shrine and consists of four elements: purification, offering, prayer, and sacred meal.



Probably the closest parallel to the ancient Colossian heresy is today's New Age Movement. It is similar in that it draws from many erroneous philosophies directly contrary to biblical Christianity.

Issue	Christianity	New Age
Theism	Monotheism	Pantheism
God	Personal	Impersonal (& personal?)
Divinity	External: "He's God"	Internal: "I'm God"
Our Origin	Creation	Evolution
Our Problem	Alienation from God	Undiscovered divinity
Our Solution	Faith in God	Feel the Force
Techniques	Unimportant	Vital: imaging, hypnosis
Faith	Historical	Mystical
Truth	Objective	Subjective
Standards	Absolute	Relative
Matter	Real & temporal	Illusion & eternal
Forgiveness	Only in Christ	Not needed
Appeal	Rational: fill mind	Experiential: empty mind
Religion	One way	Many ways
Orientation	Exclusive	Inclusive (syncretism)
Occultism	Prohibited	Practiced
Salvation	Atonement	Enlightenment
Basis	Divine salvation	Human effort
Jesus Christ	God made man	Man knowing divinity
Hope	Resurrection	Reincarnation
Afterlife	Fellowship with God	Merge with God

A Glossary of Terms Related to Non-Christian Religions

Ahura Mazda: the ethical, supreme god whose followers included Cyrus the Great, Darius I, Xerxes I, and the Magi (Zoroastrianism)

Allah: the one god who is supreme, self-existent, omnipotent, omnipresent, the creator, the judge of all mankind, one who reveals himself, yet is not imminent or personal (Islam)

Animism: the existence of souls or spirits in all living and in animate things (pre-literate societies)

Bushido Code: the code of the samurai, the military class of the feudal period of Japan, that included eight attitudes: loyalty, gratitude, courage, justice, truthfulness, politeness, reserve, and honor (Shinto)

Brahma: both the material world (pantheism) and the subjective world—reason, feeling, will, and self-awareness in mystical union (Hinduism)

Brahman: Volumes of literature that describe sacrifices (Hinduism)

Brahmin: the head priest of the ritual sacrifice (Hinduism)

dynamism: the universe made up of forces coming into interaction with one another; nonpersonal forces that affect one another with no ultimate reality (pre-literate societies)

Eightfold Path: the process to achieve Nirvana by right views, aspirations, speech, behavior, occupation, efforts, mindfulness, and absorption (Buddhism)

Fetishism: any resort to the presumed power in inanimate things (pre-literate societies)

filial piety (Hsiao): loyalty to one's family as one's first and highest consideration (Confucianism)

High god: the one supreme being who created everything and rules above the gods (pre-literate societies)

Hara-kiri: Japanese warrior-knight suicide for failure or misjudgment by the ceremonial method of disembowelment, carried out coolly and deliberately according to rule and without any expression of emotion (Shinto)

impermanence: all that exists passes through the cycle of birth, growth, decay, and death; life is one and indivisible; nothing eternal or immortal exists about man or any part of him; separate individual existence is an illusion, for self has neither beginning or ending (Buddhism)

Ise: Japanese sun goddess and high god known also as Amaterasu (天照), Amaterasu-ōmikami or Ōhirume-no-muchi-no-kami deity of the Japanese myth cycle (Shinto)

kami: spiritual beings existing today; mythological entities of ancient times; natural phenomena such as islands, sun, and mountains, or powers and processes, such as birth or growth; their generation may be spontaneous, without explanation suddenly appearing from natural objects or born as the result of physical union between parent *kami* (Shinto)

A Glossary of Terms Related to Non-Christian Religions

(2 of 2)

karma: action–reaction, denoting the law of cause and effect; reaping what one sows (Buddhism)

magic: an endeavor through the utterance of set words, or the performance of set acts, or both, to control or bend the powers of the world to man’s will (pre-literate societies)

Mahayana: liberal, syncretistic form of Buddhism that views Buddha like god (Buddhism)

Mana: occult force or supernatural power distinct from persons or spirits (pre-literate societies)

Middle Way: the balanced teaching between asceticism (Jainism) and fatalism/depression (Hinduism) that Buddhists call their religion (Buddhism)

Nichiren: nationalistic Buddhism and a branch school of Mahayana Buddhism that claims salvation from the lotus sutra (eternity of Buddha), propagated by Nichiren (born 16 February 1222) who claimed to be the resurrected Buddha (Buddhism)

Nirvana: an ethical state, a condition that eliminates any future rebirth, the extinction of all craving, the final release from suffering; a state of mind in which *karma* comes to an end (Buddhism)

popular magic: magic not confined to magicians or priests, being diffused through the group (pre-literate societies)

shaman: a religious personage found in many pre-literate societies of Asia, Oceania, and the Americas (pre-literate societies)

Siddhartha Gautama: founder of Buddhism, deified after his death (Buddhism)

taboo: prohibition or hands-off warnings applied to many things, persons, and actions because they are sacred, dangerous, or socially forbidden (pre-literate societies)

Theravada: conservative, individualistic Buddhism that views Buddha not as a deity but as a great leader (Buddhism)

Totemism: the existence of a more or less relationship between certain human groups and corresponding classes or species of animals, plants, or an animate objects in nature (pre-literate societies)

Upanishads: Holy writings of the Hindus (Hinduism)

Vedas: Holy writings of the Hindus (Hinduism)

Zoroastrianism: originally an Iranian religion following the teachings of Zoroaster (660 BC) who espoused ethical monotheism of the supreme god Ahura Mazda, but most present-day adherents reside in Bombay

A Biblical Attitude Toward Non-Christian Religions

Introduction

Mr. Howard Burkle, a United Church of Christ professor of religious studies, postulates these often-asked questions: “Can Christianity accept itself as simply one of the world’s many religions? Can it regard other religions as valid alternative pathways to salvation? Can it do this without giving up its conviction that Christianity is unique and decisive for the salvation of humankind?”

Burkle’s answer to these questions is a definitive “yes.” However, the Bible believing Christian must reply with an equally resounding “no.” Christianity is like no other religion in its basic tenants: the crucifixion and resurrection of One who was both God and man. It can therefore accept no other way as a legitimate means to reach God.

The Bible supports this conclusion. Christ said of Himself, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). John also records, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36). Similarly, Luke wrote, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Since Christianity is unique and incompatible with other religions, how should Christians respond to those of other faiths? What should be the proper, biblical attitude toward those who adhere to and teach heretical doctrines?

VI. Basic Content to Share with Other Faiths

Believers often deal with non-Christian religions in one of two extremes. The first extreme (noted above) is syncretism, while the second is isolationism. Syncretism is an “all roads lead to God” perspective that places the way of salvation offered by Christ no better or worse than the means of salvation offered by any other religion. Isolationism, on the other hand, denies any interaction with those of other faiths since it is based on a “once you’ve got what you are looking for, why look elsewhere?” kind of attitude. Both extremes should be avoided. The better approach is one of engagement, or dialogue.

Romans 1 is perhaps the best chapter to show God’s view of other religions. Verse 18 reveals that the religions of the world have come about not because of man’s *ignorance*, but because of his stubborn refusal to believe what God has already revealed about himself: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness *suppress the truth*” (italics mine). This truth that is rejected specifically relates to an innate knowledge of God’s existence as the powerful creator of the world (v. 20). This truth is common to all persons, each of whom can see the order and beauty of the universe. This is also why an atheistic civilization has yet to be discovered.

Therefore, when seeking to reach someone from another religion (or an atheist), the most important concept to teach is the correct view of God Himself. Who is He? This can be especially illustrated in the creation account, for here we see an all-powerful, totally righteous God who creates only good things—and the best of the “good things” is man himself. God has made us in His own image and as a result desires fellowship with us. This focus on creation can help us lay the theological foundation on which to build a proper understanding of salvation in Christ.

VII. Basic Behavior to Show to Other Faiths

A proper, biblical attitude towards non-Christian religions concerns far more than simply content. This is why we call it an “attitude.” In all our seriousness about Christ being the only way to God, we must be careful to communicate this narrow teaching with love and a non-judgmental spirit. The non-Christian must see a great deal of graciousness in us. We have no option but to declare truth lovingly, while reserving for God His right to judge.

Christians have a very defined and exclusive message. Communication of this narrow message calls for the utmost tact. We must be committed to proclaiming the truth, but even truth can wear an ugly garment. This is where the over-used cliché, “Love the sinner but not the sin” has merit. While doing this we must be “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (James 1:19b). We must keep our focus on the right issue—not belittle the person who follows a false system, but expose the error of the system itself.

Paul’s careful approach to the Greek philosophers of his day showed this proper approach to pagan religion (read Acts 17). He explained to these men of Athens in terms they could understand—and yet he did it in a way that they were not offended. The issues were made clear, though not as clear as they could have been (which would have turned his listeners off). These people worshipped a God whom they knew nothing about, and Paul became a spokesman for that God. He did not harangue them. He gave evidence for his claim, and while some sneered, others believed. Interestingly, Luke’s account of Paul’s speech never uses any names for Jesus Christ. The message was more important than a name.

A. Conclusion

In summary, a biblical attitude towards non-Christian religions begins with the truth. The fact is that Christianity cannot compromise its uniqueness to become compatible with other religions. God never asked us to be compatible—only to be separate and distinct. This uniqueness is not something for which the Christian should apologize, though. He should communicate the message of Christ first in terms of the character of God, and always in a spirit of love and humility.



IF THERE IS ANY USEFUL LESSON THAT CAN BE LEARNT FROM THE RECENT EPISODE, IT IS THAT SINGAPOREANS SHOULD CHERISH THE IDEAL OF ONE UNITED PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF RACE, LANGUAGE OR RELIGION.

Racial harmony must remain a priority

THE recent arrest of a group of Muslims involved in terrorist activities here has hurt the feelings of many Muslim Singaporeans, myself included. My immediate reaction to this was: How will this make non-Muslim Singaporeans feel about us?

Personally, I felt ashamed. I would like to urge my fellow Muslim Singaporean friends to come out openly in condemning all acts of terrorism, including those carried out by Muslims, regardless of where in the world they take place.

Let us all — Singaporeans of all races and faiths — stand together and fight to keep what we have inherited from our fathers; that is, racial harmony and religious tolerance.

This is so that the same privilege can be enjoyed by our children. It is an asset that no money can buy.

KHAN ABDUL MAJID

Inter-racial and inter-religious harmony between the various communities is vital, as underscored by recent developments in the country.

Let recent episode push us to know Muslims better

in Singapore.

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong is right in calling on all Singaporeans not to overreact and let this episode harm our multi-racial and multi-religious harmony.

The important question is what we can do.

It is imperative that we see this recent development in the right perspective and not draw rash conclusions based on the behaviour and actions of a few

misguided individuals, who happened to be Muslims, and blow it out of proportion.

It is also imperative that we do not overreact by making spurious comments or casting doubts on the Muslim community here.

Indeed, we must take this opportunity to understand our fellow Muslim citizens better and seek to forge a warmer and stronger relationship that will bind

us together as one people.

If there is any useful lesson that can be learnt from the recent episode, it is that Singaporeans should cherish the ideal of one united people, regardless of race/language or religion.

These are testing times for Singapore and I hope that good sense and goodwill among fellow citizens will prevail.

SEBASTIAN TAN

Six Questions to Ask an Atheist

By Margaret Manning

<http://www.rzim.org/usa/usfv/tabid/436/articleid/10284/cbmoduleid/1561/default.aspx>

Many times, as Christian theists, we find ourselves on the defensive against the critiques and questions of atheists. Sometimes, in the midst of arguments and proofs, we miss the importance of conversation. These questions, then, are meant to be a part of a conversation. They are not, in and of themselves, arguments or "proofs" for God. They are commonly asked existential or experiential questions that both atheists and theists alike can ponder.

1. ***If there is no God, "the big questions" remain unanswered***, so how do we answer the following questions: Why is there something rather than nothing? This question was asked by Aristotle and Leibniz alike—albeit with differing answers. But it is an historic concern. Why is there conscious, intelligent life on this planet, and is there any meaning to this life? If there is meaning, what kind of meaning and how is it found? Does human history lead anywhere, or is it all in vain since death is merely the end? How do you come to understand good and evil, right and wrong without a transcendent signifier? If these concepts are merely social constructions, or human opinions, whose opinion does one trust in determining what is good or bad, right or wrong? If you are content within atheism, what circumstances would serve to make you open to other answers?
2. ***If we reject the existence of God, we are left with a crisis of meaning***, so why don't we see more atheists like Jean Paul Sartre, or Friedrich Nietzsche, or Michel Foucault? These three philosophers, who also embraced atheism, recognized that in the absence of God, there was no transcendent meaning beyond one's own self-interests, pleasures, or tastes. The crisis of atheistic meaninglessness is depicted in Sartre's book *Nausea*. Without God, there is a crisis of meaning, and these three thinkers, among others, show us a world of just stuff, thrown out into space and time, going nowhere, meaning nothing.
3. ***When people have embraced atheism, [were not] the historical results... horrific***, as in the regimes of Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot who saw religion as the problem and worked to eradicate it? In other words, what set of actions are consistent with particular belief commitments? It could be argued, that these behaviors – of the regimes in question – are more consistent with the implications of atheism. [However], I'm thankful that many of the atheists I know do not live the implications of these beliefs out for themselves like others did! It could be argued that the socio-political ideologies could very well be the outworking of a particular set of beliefs – beliefs that posited the ideal state as an atheistic one.
4. ***If there is no God, the problems of evil and suffering are in no way solved***, so where is the hope of redemption, or meaning for those who suffer? Suffering is just as tragic, if not more so, without God because there is no hope of ultimate justice, or of the suffering being rendered meaningful or transcendent, redemptive or redeemable. It might be true that there is no God to blame now, but neither is there a God to reach out to for strength, transcendent meaning, or comfort. Why would we seek the alleviation of suffering without objective morality grounded in a God of justice?
5. ***If there is no God, we lose the very standard by which we critique religions and religious people***, so whose opinion matters most? Whose voice will be heard? Whose tastes or preferences will be honored? In the long run, human tastes and opinions have no more weight than we give them, and who are we to give them meaning anyway? Who is to say that lying, or cheating or adultery or child molestation are wrong—really wrong? Where do those standards come from? Sure, our societies might make these things "illegal" and impose penalties or consequences for things that are not socially acceptable, but human cultures have at various times legally or socially disapproved of everything from believing in God to believing the world revolves around the sun; from slavery, to interracial marriage, from polygamy to monogamy. Human taste, opinion law and culture are hardly dependable arbiters of Truth.
6. ***If there is no God, we don't make sense***, so how do we explain human longings and desire for the transcendent? How do we even explain human questions for meaning and purpose, or inner thoughts like, why do I feel unfulfilled or empty? Why do we hunger for the spiritual, and how do we explain these longings if nothing can exist beyond the material world?

For further reading, see Ravi Zacharias's book *The Real Face of Atheism*, and C.S. Lewis's book *Mere Christianity*. The RZIM website has many excellent resources on atheism at www.rzim.org, as does the Centre for Public Christianity at www.publicchristianity.org.