

A Study in Christian Apologetics – What We Believe & Why

Lesson Nine: Other Worldviews

Cogito, Ergo Credo: I Think, Therefore I (:)believe!

Lesson Nine: A Summary of Other Worldviews

Everyone has a 'religious impulse' that seeks to answer the following questions:

Creation - Where did we, and everything else, come from?

Purpose - Why are we here?

Moral Significance - What determines right and wrong?

Beauty | Love - These kinds of things seem to be 'different' from the rest of the world!

Redemption - How can I better myself and my family, and escape suffering?

All religions must have acceptable answers to these questions _

What are the Important Considerations?

We've seen that the Truth is, by definition, exclusionary. So what should one look for in their pursuit of the Truth? Is it reasonable to expect a worldview to answer the following adequately?

- Does it adequately satisfy the religious impulse (our religious condition?)
- Is it reasonable?
- Does it fit the real world?
- Is it livable?
- Is it evidential (special revelation)?
- Does it provide hope?
- Does it provide benefit for all?

Consider further the questions that James Sire (The Universe Next Door) asks of a worldview:

- What is the 'really real'?
- What is the nature of reality?
- What is a human being?
- What happens to a person at death?
- Why is it possible to know anything at all?
- How do we know right from wrong?
- What is the meaning of human history?

Cult
A belief set claiming to be 'Christian', but having beliefs outside of orthodoxy

Sect
A varied belief set within Christian orthodoxy

Naturalism | Atheism | Secular Humanism

Naturalism: The belief that the 'natural world' is all that there is. (There is no supernatural, soul, or life after death); is the core dogma of Atheism and usually results in Secular Humanism.

Atheism: (Strong) The belief that there is no God; (Weak) The belief that we cannot know if God exists (also Agnosticism)

Secular Humanism: The natural world is all that there is, and humans are the source of our problems, and the source of our salvation.

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Core Beliefs and Ramifications: Clearly a 'non-provable' position, though generally masquerading as the only 'scientific' position. Places hope for mankind in his improvement, despite the terrible track record we have throughout history. Humans have no special place in the universe—they are one of many species that have evolved from 'nothing'. There can be no basis to morality except that which the 'strong' or the 'majority' desires. Personality expires upon death, with no lasting meaning to our lives or anything we do. There is no external benchmark to judge right from wrong. Is seen to be the catalyst to 'if it feels good do it', and 'eat drink and be merry', for soon we die. Has resulted in Marxism, despotism, and many other forms of social tyranny over the individual. Has an appearance of coherence, combined with an attractive self-interested focus on life. But a proper inquiry of the resultant futility of life can lead to nihilism and despair (usually brought about by the constant failure, including the failure of success.)

Islam

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. The word 'Islam' means 'to submit', meaning submission to God (Allah is the Arabic term for God).

Muhammad (-570 AD-632AD) has proclaimed himself as the 'final prophet of God.' He claims to have received 'revelations', or visions from God, which are compiled in the Koran and other writings (including the Hadith). After the believers in Mecca rejected his teaching, he mounted a successful military campaign upon them, and conquered them. Mecca is to this day the center of Islam and the site of a required pilgrimage of all adherents.

"To those who believe and do deeds of righteousness hath Allah promised forgiveness and a great reward"
Surah 5:9

"...the prophet said, 'If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him.'
Vol. 4, Bk 52, No. 260 (Hadith)

Islam recognizes Jesus as a prophet of God, but not as divine or a member of the Trinity.

There are five pillars of faith required for all Muslims: 1) Belief and ritual recitation of the Islamic creed. 2) Ritual prayers. 3) Almsgiving to the poor. 4) Fasting during Ramadan. 5) A pilgrimage to Mecca. A sixth duty is associated with the faith, which is the practice of Jihad, or 'holy war' against the infidel (which brings into question the assertion that Islam is a religion of 'peace'.)

A Muslim gains favor of God by working for it, causing them to never have assurance of their salvation. The Koran has been revised many times, and still has internal inconsistencies. The history of Islam is one of war and conquest, and is based upon the teachings of one controversial man. Muhammad remains dead to this day.

Hinduism

"Eastern pantheistic monism is non-doctrinal-because no doctrine can be true"
James Sire The Universe Next Door

Hinduism is one of the old, surreal 'Eastern' religions. It is comprised of numerous sects, making a single analysis difficult. Essentially, "Brahman" is the eternal essence, and everything (Atman) is Brahman. In other words, God is part of us and all around us. Reincarnation enables the cycle of good/evil actions to have their consequences (the law of Karma), either in the current life or the next one.

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Nirvana is the state of perfection one enters once finally breaking the cycles of Karma. The Veda's are the 'holy scriptures'; their most sacred book is the Bhagavad Gita.

There are thousands of evil gods to tempt us, but no supreme god to save us, judge us, or teach us. The world and all its issues are illusionary, and there is no hope for one caught in the bad cycle of Karma (especially those in lower castes) except death and a potential better life later. Hinduism is one of the most confusing and complicated worldviews, eschewing logic and reason, resulting in a life that is 'unlivable' and hopeless.

Buddhism

Technically a sect of Hinduism, Buddhism was established from a dread of the hopelessness within Hinduism caused by the endless cycle of death and rebirth. Siddhartha Gautama (later known as the Buddha-"the enlightened one") left his family's riches and pursued religious satisfaction through various means, finally realizing 'enlightenment' after sitting under a tree for 7 days practicing the denial of self.

Nirvana is still the final goal for the Buddhist, but it is described as the final acceptance of the denial of **self**-in short, Buddhism teaches that suffering is caused by desire and no one will overcome suffering until they eliminate all of their worldly desires. Critical thinking is understood as misleading, and the world is illusion.

"Life is unreal and is saturated with pain."
Buddhism's First Noble Truth

There are many sects of Buddhism, each with their respective teachings and teachers. Zen is the most commonly known sect in the West, perhaps because of its variation concerning the importance of the self: 'Look inside you, you are the Buddha'. As with Hinduism, there can be no reconciliation with Christianity, since there is no God to sin against and therefore no need for atonement. Mankind is just another being on the planet, with no God-given purpose or worth.

Mormonism

In 1838, Joseph Smith (then 14) claimed to have seen his first vision from God, which eventually led him to declare that the existing Christian churches have been embracing a false gospel. He subsequently produced a 'new revelation' interpreted from golden plates written in a heavenly tongue that only he could interpret (while reading them as they were concealed inside a closed black bag, dictating to a trusted confidant.) The plates were then mysteriously lost.

"The traditional Christ of whom they speak is not the Christ of whom I speak."

LDS President Hinckley, LDS Church News, week ending 6-20-98, pg. 7

The Mormons today consider themselves just another sect within Christendom, however one can quickly see that they fall outside of Orthodoxy. They do not believe in the concept of the Trinity. God was formerly a man who achieved 'god-ness', as can any obedient Mormon. Jesus is the spirit child of a heavenly father and mother, and is the brother of Satan. Jesus' death on the cross did not provide full atonement for all sin. Full belief in these doctrines is required, as well as submission to the church and its leaders.

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Their 'infallible' revelation has been changed many times, including finally acknowledging that people of African descent can be admitted into the priesthood in 1978. Clearly, and at their own admittance, the Mormons believe in a system of faith that is different from (therefore counter to) Christianity.

Jehovah's Witness

Along with the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witness movement is known for both their proselytizing and their search for inclusion in the vast pale of Orthodoxy. But they clearly believe a different 'religion' than orthodox Christianity.

For instance, God is neither omnipresent nor omniscient. Jesus is not God. Before Jesus lived on earth, he was Michael the Archangel. After dying on a stake, he was resurrected as a spirit, and his body was destroyed. He will not return again at the end of the eschaton.

A true believer must be baptized into the JW faith, and earn their way into salvation by works, which includes door to door witnessing. Salvation is limited to 144,000 'anointed ones'. Salvation is not achieved through grace.

The JW do not celebrate birthdays or Christmas, vote or sing patriotic songs, or join the armed forces. Typical of the various cults, the followers are mandated to learn the teachings of a few people, never interpret the Bible for themselves, and fear shunning if they dare to leave the faith.

"We all need help to understand the Bible, and we cannot find the Scriptural guidance we need outside the 'faithful and discreet slave' organization."
Watchtower, Feb 15, 1981

What About All the Different Christian Denominations?

The plethora of denominations within Christianity is used by some as an example of Christianity's incoherence. The difference, though, is the adherence to the primary Orthodox beliefs, while allowing diversity for secondary issues. A secondary issue may be items such as a preferred form of church government (Bishops, for example), or methods of baptism (sprinkle vs. submersion). These types of differences usually mark individual interpretations, and generally a church body is in agreement with them in order to be cohesive. Tertiary differences are those differences which local members may even debate amongst themselves, such as the timing of the second coming, etc.

These differences, while they may seem divisive at first glance, actually help strengthen the Body of Christ, as they allow and display the freedoms of individual expression and interpretation that foster growth and personal attention. The alternative would be a form of legalism, to which every person would be required to conform. Again, this freedom is clearly made possible assuming conformance to the 'non-negotiables', which are the core beliefs that make the Church an orthodox 'Christian Church'.

Orthodox Beliefs, as defined by the Bible

The Trinity
The deity of Christ
The resurrection of Christ
Salvation by grace, through faith

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General Marks of Cults

Additions to scripture

Supreme allegiance to one person or group

Salvation accomplished through works

Misunderstanding of the nature of God

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Thinking Points

What are the common marks of a non-Christian religion?

What are the common marks of a non-orthodox Christian cult?

How is this knowledge essential in discussions with the adherents of different faiths?

Lesson Summary

One must understand and contrast the beliefs of non-Christian doctrines against the essential requirements (Orthodoxy) of Christian belief as defined by the Bible.

Many non-Christian worldviews are dis-similar to Christianity in common ways.

The various so-called 'Christian' sects who do not adhere to Orthodoxy are by definition, not Christian.

Within Orthodoxy, there is room for healthy debate of secondary issues

Next Lesson: The Difficulty of NOT Believing!

Resources:

[The Kingdom of the Cults](#); Walter Martin; Hank Hanegraaff (general editor). Bethany House Press; 1997.

[Does God Believe in Atheists?](#); John Blanchard; Evangelical Press; 2000. A well-documented discussion about atheism.

[The Universe Next Door](#); James W. Sire; Intervarsity Press; 1997. "A worldview catalog."

[Mormonism 101](#); Bill McKeever & Eric Johnson; Baker Book House; 2002. From the founder of Mormonism Research Ministry (mrm.org). Gives an excellent history and overview of Mormon doctrine, and how to witness to a Mormon.

[A Ready Defense](#); Josh McDowell; Thomas Nelson Publishers; 1993. An excellent overview of cult beliefs and witness tips

www.equip.org; Online ministry of the Christian Research Institute; Hank Hanegraaff (the Bible Answer Man)

Online Forum: Help build our on-line community by adding your insight or asking questions regarding this topic at our Forums located at: <http://www.renewyourmind.org/dc/dcboard.php>