



The Resolved Church

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World Religion Apologetics | Teaching Syllabus | Pastor Duane Smets
Isaiah 45:5 "I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God."

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I. Introduction

A. The Current Cultural Climate

The Western World in the 21st Century

1. "Religion"

- a. Etymology: From *religio* (Latin), to restrain or tie back
- b. Definition: *A cause, principle, belief, or activity practiced with ardor, zeal, or conscientious devotion.*

2. Popular perspectives on "religion" expressed in music, movies, television, news, books, magazines, and newspapers:

- a. "Religion" is a crutch for weak people.
- b. "Religion" is what causes wars.
- c. "Religion" is a device used to control people.
- d. "Religion" concerns one's spirituality.
- e. "Religions" are things made up by men.
- f. "Religions" are businesses for making money.
- g. All religions basically teach the same thing.
- h. Each person has a right to believe in religion if they want.
- i. If one desires to believe in a religion, it is up to them and they the right to believe in whatever religion they choose.
- i. No one should ever push their religion on anyone else, but be tolerant.

B. Course Intentions

Responding to the Cultural Claim

1. To analyze and evaluate the viability of religious pluralism.
2. To analyze and evaluate the differences and apparent similarities among the major world religions.¹
3. To give a basic understanding of the major world religions, including their history, religious texts, and core doctrines.
4. To demonstrate the uniqueness of Christianity among the major world religions.
5. To validate the Christian doctrines of theology², anthropology³, hermeneutology⁴, and soteriology⁵ in the expressions and inadequate solutions of the major world religions.

¹ In each major world religion *World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*, Edited by Andrew Wilson, (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1995) will be used to assess specific claims of similarities between religions. *World Scripture* is devoted to the cause of religious tolerance and to showing that all religions teach the same thing. It is organized topically, so that under each topic heading it quotes religious texts it believes are teaching about that subject.

6. To provide both practical responses and challenging questions⁶ to the claims of pluralism and/or any of the major world religions.

C. Recommended Textbooks

1. Introductory Level

Ridenour, Fritz. *So What's the Difference?* Ventura, CA: Regal, 2001.

Gomes, Alan. *Truth and Error.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

Zacharias, Ravi. *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message.* Nashville: Word, 2000.

2. Intermediate Level

The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions. Edited by John Bowker. New York: Oxford, 1997.

Green, Michael. *But Don't All Religions Lead to God.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.

McDowell, Josh. Stewart, Don. *Handbook of Today's Religions.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983.

3. Advanced Level

Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics. Edited by Norman L. Geisler. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.

Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World. Edited by Stanley N. Gundry. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts. Edited by Andrew Wilson. St. Paul, MN: Paragon, 1995.

² Theology is the study of God.

³ Anthropology is the study of man.

⁴ Hamartiology is the study of sin.

⁵ Soteriology is the study of salvation.

⁶ This is sometimes called elenchtical theology. An offensive, rather than defensive approach with Christian doctrine.

II. Religious Pluralism

All religious ways equally lead to God, whatever way works for you is fine. We simply need to be tolerant of each other. Christianity is narrow-minded and exclusivistic.

A. A Brief History of Religious Pluralism

1. Religious Pluralism is not a new thing, but thousands of years old. Ancient (roughly 2000 B.C. to 800 B.C.) Babylonian, Mesopotamian, and Jewish cultures were all plagued with pluralism and syncretism, accepting belief in many gods, such as: Geb, Nut, Shu, Re, Atum, Tefnut, Osiris, Isis, Seth, Nephthys, Ogdoad, Kek, Tenem, Heh, Ptah, Khnum, Hike, Anu, Enlil, Ninhursaga, Ea, Enki, Marduk, Apsu, Tiamat, Lahmu, Iahamu, Anshar, Kishar, Nudimmud, Daminka and many others.

2. From the time of the Greek era on into the early Roman era (roughly 800 B.C. to 300 A.D.) numerous gods were simultaneously worshipped, such as: Zeus, Hera, Apollo, Ares, Artemis, Aphrodite, Asclepius, Athena Nike, Athena Polias, Castor and Pollux, Demeter, Dionysis, the Erinyes, Eros, Ge, the Graces, Hades (Pluto), Hephaestus (Vulcan), Hekate, Heracles, Heremes, Hestia, Pan, Persephone, and Poseidon and many others.

3. In 1863 a religion was started called “Baha’i” whose official core doctrine states all religions are representations of the one God.

4. In 1961 two heretical movements, the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America, merged to form the Unitarian Universalist Association. Their chief goal is to promote religious tolerance and pluralism as a virtue and to provide a place where one can come to practice all faith stances.

B. General Claims of Religious Pluralism

1. “No one way can be the right way. There are many different religions and many different ways, all are about the same thing and are all equally salvific.”⁷

a. Illustration: The Blind Men and the Elephant⁸

All the world’s religions are like six blind men feeling an elephant. The first blind man, feeling the trunk thought it was a snake; the second blind man, feeling the ears thought it was a fan; the third blind man, feeling the body thought it was a wall; the fourth blind man feeling a leg thought it was a tree; the fifth blind man, feeling the tail thought it was a rope; and the sixth blind man, feeling a tusk thought it was a spear.⁹ Thus, no one man is right, all have a piece of the truth, or as John Hick¹⁰ calls it, “ultimate reality.”¹¹

b. Responses:

1) If one says no one way can be the right way they merely

⁷ John Hick, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, “A Pluralist View,” ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 47.

⁸ A common analogy used to explain and support religious pluralism.

⁹ Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990). 257.

¹⁰ A prominent advocate and voice for religious pluralism.

¹¹ *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 39.

present another position of one right way. This statement says that the one right way of seeing things is that there is no one right way. Thus, it is a self-refuting, and meaningless statement.

2) Three responses to the blind men and the elephant analogy

a) The illustration begins already knowing that all the blind men are feeling an elephant. If all the world's religions are the six blind men then there is no way any of them could know whether it was an elephant or not. Pluralism assumes that it is not one of the blind men and already knows everyone else is feeling an elephant. If this were truly so, then pluralism ought to be able to prove to everyone else with evidence that there really is an elephant. Yet it cannot, in fact, the evidence is the opposite.¹²

b) Since pluralism is another theory of religion, it too must be one of the blind men and is therefore cannot be right.

c) If all the blind men were truly feeling an elephant then there would be a way to reconcile all their conceptions by communicating with each other, they are not mute. Dialogue between world religions has proven they believe radically different things.¹³

3) R. Douglas Geivett states, "The religious pluralist's insistence that God cannot have arranged for our salvation in the exclusivist way of Christianity presupposes a greater knowledge of God than radical religious pluralists are in a position to have on their own assumptions."¹⁴

2. Each individual person's religion may be true for them, just not for me.

responses:

a. If anyone ever says this, then they have violated their belief because they want someone to accept their truth that is only true for them. It is like saying "nothing is universally true" and "my view is universally true" in the same breath.¹⁵

b. This statement eliminates the possibility of a person ever being wrong about anything.¹⁶

3. If you grew up in India, you would be a Hindu. Thus, one's religion is conditioned by their culture.

responses:

a. This is merely a descriptive statement. It says nothing about the truth or content of any religion.

¹² There is no tangible substance, no coherent evidence for the self-refuting claims of pluralism.

¹³ see III below.

¹⁴ R. Douglas Geivett. *Jesus Under Fire*, "Is Jesus the Only Way?" ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 199.

¹⁵ Paul Copan, *True For You But Not For Me*, (Minneapolis, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 25.

¹⁶ *When Skeptics Ask*, 259.

b. Many things are conditioned by the culture, like dress. Though one's beliefs may be conditioned, it does not make them either true or false. Children are conditioned by society to go to school and learn math there. Yet that conditioning does not prove math to be either true or false, but rather its content. Likewise, if a child goes to school and learns about UFO's it does not prove the existence or non-existence of UFO's.

C. Specific Criticisms of Religious Pluralism Against Christianity

1. Why are Christians so arrogant that they will not even consider other religions and think they are the only right people in all the world? Christians are exclusivistic elitists.

responses:

a. Is this question the result of considering the other religions in the world? In most cases it is not and thus in those cases the one making this charge condemns themselves for not considering other religions and for being arrogant.

b. If something is true it is not arrogant to believe it. For example, it is not arrogant to believe that two plus two is four. Other answers can be considered but they do not work and instead prove the conclusion that two plus two can only equal four.

c. Christians simply claim to be followers of Christ, thus their name. If the one making this charge acknowledges that Jesus Christ was a good teacher¹⁷ then the Christian response is that they simply believe what the good teacher taught when He said "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me (John 14:6)."

d. The purpose of being a Christian is not to be exclusivistic or elitist but quite the opposite. Christians desire that all people in the whole world might be saved and included as believers in God.

2. Christians just need to be open-minded and tolerant of other religions.

responses:

a. To be open-minded is "the most closed-minded position of all because it eliminates any absolute view from consideration."¹⁸ A truly "open-minded" person can never make a judgment or evaluation about anything, for the instant they do they become closed-minded.

b. If being tolerant means accepting all views as true, then that very position is being intolerant if one does not accept *it*. Tolerance really means "putting up with error."¹⁹

c. It is the desire of Christians neither to have their mind "opened" or "closed" but rather to have the mind of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:16).

¹⁷ For more on the possibility of Jesus simply being a good teacher see Josh McDowell, *More Than A Carpenter*, (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1973), 9-35.

¹⁸ *When Skeptics Ask*, 259.

¹⁹ *True For You But Not For Me*, 37. Christians are actually quite tolerant in this sense.

D. A Christian Challenge to the Religious Pluralist - If all religions are equally valid and whatever is true is true for me and I have the right to my own follow my own beliefs, then I can believe stealing and rape are okay and go to someone's house at night do those things and they must be tolerant of my belief.

III. Major World Religions

It is estimated that there are literally hundreds of different religions being practiced in the world today. However, most of these religions fit under a larger parent religion either historically, doctrinally, or geographically. Thus, the religions this course covers are the ones which seem to be the most well known and most practiced today throughout the world.²⁰

Judaism

A. Judaic History²¹

1. The word “Judaism” or “Jew” comes from the name “Judah,” which part of Israel’s land was later named after as “Judea.”²²
2. “Judah” was the fourth son of Jacob who succeeded him as the leader of their family and people.
3. Jacob, also called Israel (the name from which Jews are also called Israelites”), was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham.
4. Abraham, had received a divine call from the LORD God. This God later declared Himself as the one who created the heavens and the earth and everything in them, including the first man. In addition, He revealed that there were twenty generations between Abraham and the first man, Adam. One man between Adam and Abraham, six generations before Abraham, was named “Eber” from which comes the name “Hebrew,” which Jews or Israelites were first called.
5. The divine call Abraham received was to leave his country along with his family and go to a land that would God would show him. God made a “promise” or a “covenant” with him that if Abraham responded to the divine call that the land he was shown would be given to him and his family would be made into a great nation.
6. The promise or the covenant, was successively passed down from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Judah and then on to his descendants.
7. During the time when Judah led the family they ended up living in Egypt to escape a severe famine. After a number of years living there, rulers changed and they became enslaved by the Egyptian Pharaoh.
8. After living in Egypt for 430 (approx. 1253 B.C.) and growing greatly in numbers, one of the Jews named Moses received a divine call from the LORD God to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt under the covering of God who would work supernatural wonders to free them and take them to the land God promised.
9. While on their way to the land that God promised Moses, God appeared before Moses giving him the law, in its most narrow and important understanding being a reference to ten commandments given (thou shall have no other gods before me, thou shall not make any idols, thou shall speak God’s name in vain, thou shall keep the

²⁰ Though many cults have large numbers following them and are spread out the world, they have been excluded from this study both due to space and to the fact that most all cults are reinventions of old, dead and defeated heresies.

²¹ Judaism’s history is very important to them as a religion because their future hope is based upon a promise and remembrance of the past (see section C.3. on messiah).

²² Jews were first called “Jews” after 721 B.C. when the northern kingdom was conquered. Those left in the southern kingdom were called “Jews” (see both A.4. and A.13.).

Sabbath, thou shall honor thy father and mother, thou shall not murder, thou shall not commit adultery, thou shall not steal, thou shall not lie, and thou shall not covet).

10. After entering the promised land and defeating many of the neighboring nations in war, the Jews eventually established a monarchy around 1075 B.C.

11. The Jews had several kings, David and Solomon being the most famous. Under King David the nation grew and became militarily strong. Under Solomon the nation grew, becoming very wealthy and building a temple for God.

12. After Solomon's reign the kingdom was divided into a northern part and a southern part. The northern kingdom was then called Israel and the southern kingdom was then called Judah.

13. The Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. and the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom in 586 B.C. and destroyed the temple. In both cases the Jews were taken away from their land and taken into captivity.

14. During the time period of 539 B.C. to 457 B.C. the Jews returned to their land in different segments and rebuilt the temple.

15. The second temple stood until its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D. during which time the Jews were scattered away from their land.

16. From 70 A.D. until the present, the Jews have experienced almost consistent persecution, most notably in the Holocaust. Yet in 1948 they managed to regain land in Israel and become a nation once again.

17. Today Judaism exists in four main different forms²³:

a. Orthodox – A sect of Jews who collectively devote themselves to following the teachings of Jewish religious texts in a manner as strict as possible.

b. Conservative – A sect of Jews between Orthodox and Reformed, who are more lenient in their devotion to following the teachings of the Jewish religious texts but still want to keep alive the Hebrew language and the traditions of Judaism.

c. Reformed – A sect of Jews who seek to adapt Judaism to the views and habits of modern civilization. Thus they do not observe much of the traditional liturgy and laws.

d. Messianic – A sect of Jews who believe that the LORD God, the creator and God of the promise, or covenant, became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. They believe that Jesus Christ fulfilled the promise, or covenant, in a spiritual way that will have physical implications in the future.

B. Judaic Religious Texts

1. The *Tanakh*

a. The *Tanakh* is an acronym for *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*.

²³ Hasidic Jews and other mystical branches such as Kabbalahism are not covered here. For information on these somewhat minor sects see *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

1) *Torah* is the Hebrew word for “law,” which in its most collective Judaic sense refers to the *Pentateuch*, or the five books (*Penta* = five *Teuchos* = books). The five books of the *Torah* include: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy,

2) *Nevi'im* is the Hebrew word for “prophets,” referring to the Jewish prophetic books. These books include: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

3) *Ketuvim* is the Hebrew word for “writings,” referring twelve other Jewish books. These books include: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

b. The *Tanakh* is also called the “Hebrew Bible” and vice versa.

c. The *Tanakh* is also called the “Old Testament” by Christians.

1) “Old” refers to the time of its writings being before the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

2) “Testament” refers to the message of its writings as a testimony of Jesus Christ.

2. The *Mishnah*

a. *Mishnah* is Hebrew for “teaching” and refers to the oral law developed by the teaching of the Rabbis during the era of the 2nd temple.

b. The *Mishnah* was passed down through generations and first recorded in writing around 200 A.D.

c. The *Mishnah* is divided into six *sedarim* (“orders”):

1) *Zeraim* – Hebrew for “seeds.” This *sedarim* or “order” deals with agricultural laws.

2) *Mo'ed* – Hebrew for “festivals.” This *sedarim* or “order” deals with Jewish holidays or festivals, Sabbaths, and fasts.

3) *Nashim* – Hebrew for “women.” This *sedarim* or “order” deals with matrimonial law and sexual morality. It also includes instructions concerning the Nazarite and other vows.

4) *Nezikin* – Hebrew for “damages.” This *sedarim* or “order” is concerned with civil law and legal procedure.

5) *Kodashim* – Hebrew for “holy things.” This *sedarim* or “order” deals with temple offerings, other sanctified things and impurities.

6) *Tohorot* – Hebrew for “purities.” This *sedarim* or “order” deals with instructions concerning ceremonial washings.

3. The *Talmud*

- a. *Talmud* is Hebrew for “learn,” “study,” or “teach.”
- b. The *Talmud* consists of commentary on the *Mishnah*, including lengthy oral discussions and debates, folklore, manners, customs, popular proverbs, prayers, and ceremonial and medical remedies.

4. Only the *Tanakh* bears evidence of divine inspiration²⁴ though the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* are considered equally authoritative.

C. Judaic Doctrine²⁵

1. God

- a. Is Creator of All Things
Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
- b. Is One
Judaism is emphatically monotheistic. Perhaps the most important verse to Jews, recited out loud daily by many, is the “The Great Shema” found in Deuteronomy 6:4, which states: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”
- c. Is Omnipotent – *all powerful*
Jeremiah 32:17 “Ah Lord God, thou hast made the heavens and the earth. By thy great power and outstretched arm, nothing is too hard for thee.”
- d. Is Omniscient – *all knowing*
Psalms 147:5 “ Great is our Lord...His understanding is infinite.”
- e. Is Omnibenevolent – *all good*
Psalms 145:9 “The LORD is good to all; And his tender mercies are over all His works.”
- f. Is Omnipresent – *everywhere present*
Psalms 139:7-10 “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast”.
- g. Is Immutable - *unchanging*
Malachi 3:6 “For I am the LORD, I change not;”

2. Law

²⁴ Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 19-44. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 74-102. *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980). Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968). John W. Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, (Pennsylvania: Whitaker, 1996). Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948).

²⁵ Doctrine in this course refers to the core teachings, or essential beliefs of each religion.

a. The *Tanakh*, *Mishnah*, and *Talmud* are considered as divine revelations of law from God, given to the Jews and therefore making them special and different than all other religions.

b. Obedience to the law, doing the works it requires, is the central goal of Judaism in all its forms, though some are more strict than others . This includes observance of the ten commandments, the holy days and festivals such as the Sabbath, the Passover, Hanukkah and much more.²⁶

3. Messiah

a. A Person

A belief that Jewish texts speak of a special person sent by God that will come and deliver Israel from oppressors, institute permanent peace and freedom, and lead Israel as a great and wealthy kingdom.

b. An Age

A belief that Jewish texts apparently speaking about an individual person who will come and deliver Israel from oppressors, are really speaking about a messianic age. This age will occur when all Israel's land is fully restored and when truth and justice reign there in peace.

D. Pluralist Claims of Judaism's Similarities with Christianity²⁷

1. Mankind

Let a man always consider himself as if the Holy One dwells within him (Talmud, Taanit 11b).

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?...God's temple is holy, and that temple you are (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

2. Death

Likewise does the process go on below; and after this design, man in the world combines brain and membrane, spirit and body, all to the more perfect ordering of the world (Zohar on Genesis 19b).

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

3. Salvation

No man is free, but he who labors in the Torah (Mishnah, Abot 6.2).

For you were called to freedom brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another (Galatians 5:13).

E. Judaism's Differences with Christianity

²⁶ For an explanation of the Jewish holidays see Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 368-370.

²⁷ A Jew would never claim that Judaism and Christianity are the same or equal.

1. God – Christians believe that God is one co-existing equally and eternally as three persons as a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jews reject this Trinity and affirm only that God is one.
2. Mankind – Christians believe that everyone is born sinful and will sin because it is their nature (Romans 1-3). Jews believe mankind is free to do good and not to sin (Talmud, Pesahim 50b).
3. Death – Christians believe at death one will face a judgment (Hebrews 9:27) and will either spend eternity in either heaven (Romans 6:23) or hell (Luke 12:5). Jews believe that all will be saved and have a part in the world to come (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 11.1).
4. Salvation – Christians believe that only those who put faith in Christ alone will be saved (Romans 1:16-17; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Jews believe that they may be saved through doing good by obeying the law (Talmud, Kiddushin 30b).

F. Specific Criticisms of Judaism Against Christianity²⁸

1. General Objections

- a. Christians killed Jews in the Crusades and in the Holocaust. Hitler said he was a Christian.

responses:

- 1) Christianity agrees that all wrongdoing, whether it is done by Christians, done by people who say they are Christians, or done by anyone else, is atrocious and horrible. A Christian church of Jews and Gentiles in Galatia during the 1st century were directly commanded to “serve one another in love (Gal 5:13).” Thus Christian Scriptures command Christian to not be anti-Semitic.
- 2) Though Christians are not to do wrong and there is no excuse for Christians doing wrong, Christianity does not base its claim of being good and right upon the works, deeds, or right doing of its followers but rather on the perfect person of God and His Son, Jesus Christ (Heb 4:15)²⁹ as declared in the Christian documents.
- 4) Consider an analogy: suppose the accountant of a construction company begins embezzling money from the company and then one night gets drunk and decides to steal one of the company’s bulldozers with the company’s name on the side and goes to his ex-wife’s house and flattens it. Surely, those who saw the accountant do what he did in the company’s bulldozer would not count the accountant’s crime against the company. Rather they would consider the accounted a criminal who deserved to go to jail. In the same way the evil crimes of Christians ought not be held against Christianity.³⁰

²⁸ For an in depth response to Judaism see: Michael Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

²⁹ Josh McDowell, *A Ready Defense*, (San Bernardino, CA: Here’s Life Publishing, 1992), 415.

³⁰ Dr. Gary DeWeese, *class lecture example*, 05/13/03.

5) Hitler did attempt to associate himself with Christianity.³¹ however, consider a historical illustration by John D. Woodbridge: “Many Jewish people in 1665 and 1666 believed that a certain individual was the Messiah. But then he converted to Islam. Now, if I said to a Jewish historian today, ‘Do you want to identify that man as the Messiah?’ He’d say, ‘Of course not. He was a fraud.’” Christians would say the same thing about Hitler.

6) Christians during the Holocaust rescued and helped the Jews and Hitler did not only kill Jews but thousands of Christians too.³²

b. Christianity is a Gentile religion. Jesus is for the Gentiles.

response: Jesus Christ was a Jew and all His first followers were Jews.

2. Messianic Objections

a. If Jesus were the Messiah then why isn't there peace on earth?

response: Jesus the Messiah came to make spiritual peace between God and man. Belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah will ultimately enable one to participate in the future physical peace on earth He will bring.

b. If Jesus were the Messiah then why was he a poor carpenter, the Messiah is to be royal?

response: The Hebrew Scriptures present a Messiah both as a suffering servant (Isaiah 53) and a royal king. Jesus Christ will return to earth again one day clothed as a powerful king.

c. Many Jews throughout history have claimed to be Messiah. What makes Jesus of Nazareth any different?

response: Jesus rose from the dead proving that He, in fact, was both Messiah and God Himself.³³

3. Theological Objections

a. Christians are polytheists who worship three gods.

response: Christians are monotheists who believe that God is eternally one essence co-existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jews believe that the Holy Spirit is God (Genesis 1:2; Psalms 139:7) but they do not consider themselves duotheists.³⁴

b. Jesus of Nazareth, a mere man, cannot be God.

³¹ *ibid.*, 215.

³² *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, 176-177.

³³ For arguments supporting the resurrection of Jesus Christ see: William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Books, 1984), 255-298. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 644-670. Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972), 185-270. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 191-257. J.P. Moreland. *Scaling the Secular City*, (Grand Rapids, MI: 1987), 159-184. Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953), 184-207.

³⁴ For an in depth response to the objection of the Trinity see *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 730-737.

response: The prophesied Messiah is called God (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus messianic deity as the Son of God is based on His resurrection,³⁵ His own claims to be God (John 8:35; 17:5; Mark 2:5-11), His acceptance of worship as God (Matthew 8:2; 28:17; John 20:28), His possession of God's attributes (immutability: Hebrews 1:11-12; 13:8; eternity: John 1:1-2; omnipotence: Mark 4:9; omniscience: John 4:18; 16:30; and omnipresence: Matthew 28:20).³⁶

Islam

A. Islamic History

1. "Islam" means "submission." A follower of Islam is called a *Muslim*, a "submitted one."
2. The founder of Islam was a man named Muhammad.
3. Muhammad was born in Mecca, Arabia in 570 A.D. Muhammad's father died before he was born and his mother died when he was six, so he lived with his grandfather and then his uncle while growing up. At age 25 Muhammad married a wealthy 40 year old widow named Khadijah.
4. Muhammad did not like the polytheistic idol worship he saw during these years in Arabia. At age 40 Muhammad claimed to be receiving revelations from a god he called "Allah" through visions where one of "Allah's" messengers named "Gabriel" came and spoke to him. Muhammad claimed to receive these revelations for 22 years until his death in 632.
5. Muhammad considered himself to be a monotheist in the line of Abraham and Ishmael of the Hebrew Bible. He deemed himself the last prophet and began preaching monotheism. Some Arabians did not like Muhammad's teachings which condemned their polytheistic worship and said that there was only one god named "Allah" who all should submit to. So they made a plot to kill Muhammad.
6. Muhammad fled to a city which now called Medina. This flight to Medina is known of the *hegira* and marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.
7. Eight years later Muhammad had amassed an army of more than 10,000 men to march back to Mecca and claim the city for Allah. His forces were victorious. When Muhammad entered into the city he destroyed all the idols and declared the *Ka'aba*, the main temple, to be a holy shrine.
8. Muhammad strengthened his new position as the ruler of Arabia, and desired to take and use his army to conquer the world for Allah, but he died suddenly and unexpectedly. His followers committed themselves to carry on the mission and they did, quite successfully. In this process Islam developed into three different sects:
 - a. *Sunnis* – The branch of Islam that adheres to orthodox tradition and acknowledge the first four *caliphs* (leader of Islam) as the rightful successors of Muhammad.
 - b. *Shi'a* – The branch of Islam that believes the rightful successor of Muhammad was his son-in-law Ali and that all other successors must be through a family line.

³⁵ see footnote 29.

³⁶ For a full treatment on the deity of Jesus Christ see: *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 129-140.

c. *Sufis* – The branch of Islam that is mystical in its orientation. Its goal is to reach ecstatic personal experience with Allah.

B. Islamic Religious Texts

1. *Qur'an* (sometimes spelled “Koran”).

a. The *Qur'an*, meaning “the reciting” or “the reading” contains both dictations from Muhammad and revelations that Muhammad’s disciples remembered him saying. Thus, all 114 *surahs*, or chapters are attributed to Muhammad either directly or indirectly.

b. The *Qur'an* is the most sacred book of Islam, considered to be the very word of Allah. It conceived as a literal copy of Allah’s word existing in heaven and deemed fully divine.³⁷

2. *Hadith*

a. *Hadith* is Arabic for “narrative.” The *Hadith* contains traditions about Muhammad’s conduct as guide, judge and ruler for his Muslim followers.

b. The *Hadith* predominantly portrays Muhammad as a miracle worker.

c. Though the *Hadith* is greatly revered among Muslims, it is not considered to be divinely inspired.

3. *Shariah*

a. *Shariah* is Arabic for “the path worn by camels to the water,” which means the path to be followed in Muslim life or “law.”

b. The *Shariah* is a combination of legal interpretations and commentaries on the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. The *Shariah* contains strict and comprehensive guides for the life and conduct of Muslims such as: prohibitions against eating pork, drinking alcohol, and punishments for breaking laws.

c. The *Shariah* plays a central role in nearly all Islamic cultures and serves as the common law.

C. Islamic Doctrine

1. God

a. God is *Allah* who is one, the only true god, all-seeing, all-knowing, and all-powerful.

b. *Allah* demands submission by calling all people to perform five duties, known as the “five pillars of Islam.”

³⁷ see G.4 below.

1) *Kalima* – Meaning “creed” or “confession.” The Islamic *kalima* is known as *shahdah*, which says, “There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is the prophet of Allah.” The *shahdah* is to be vocally recited by Muslims daily.

2) *Salat* – Meaning “prayer.” Muslims are to pray five times a day, at daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, after sunset, and early evening. When they pray, they are to kneel and bow in the direction of the Mecca from wherever they are.

3) *Zakat* – Meaning “almsgiving.” Muslims are required to give one-fortieth of all their profit to Allah. The money is turned into an Islamic center which is in turn supposed to ration it to the poor and needy.

(4) *Ramadan* – Meaning “fasting.” *Ramadan* occurs in the ninth month of the Islamic year. During this entire month Muslims are required to fast or abstain from food, drink, smoking, and sex from sunrise to sunset.

(5) *Hajj* – Meaning “pilgrimage.” The *Hajj* must be performed by all Muslims at least once in their lifetime. The *Hajj* consists of taking a trip to Mecca and going through a set of ceremonies and rituals centered around the *Ka’aba* shrine.

c. Though not considered one of the “five pillars” Allah demands that men are to continue to spread Islam and conquer the world for Him through holy wars known as *Jihad*.

1) One who dies in a *Jihad* is guaranteed eternal life in paradise.

When ye encounter the infidels, strike off their heads till ye have made a great slaughter among them, and of the rest make fast the fetters. And afterwards let there either be free dismissals or ransoming, till the Jihad hath laid down its burdens. Thus do... Whosoever fight for the cause of Allah, their works he will not suffer to miscarry; He will vouchsafe them guidance, and dispose their hearts aright; And he will bring them into the Paradise, of which he hath told them (Qur’an, Sura 47:2-7).

2) “The Paradise” consists of rivers of water, milk, wine, and honey, delicious fruit (*Qur’an, Sura 47:8-9*), and seventy-two (*Hadith Al-Tirmiahi, Sunah, vol. IV, ch.21*) virgin wives laying on couches in waiting (*Qur’an, Sura 55:56,74-76*).

3) Some liberal Muslims do not believe in *Jihad*.³⁸

2. Mankind

Every child is born of the nature of purity and submission to Allah (Hadith of Bkhari).

3. Death

a. A Passage into Heaven or Hell.

1) Heaven

³⁸ see F.3 below.

But as to those who have believed and done the things which are right – These shall be inmates of Paradise: for ever shall they abide therein (Qur'an, Sura 7:40).

2) Hell

They shall make their bed in Hell, and above them shall be coverings of fire! After this sort will we recompense the evil doers (Qur'an, Sura 7:39).

b. A Weighing of One's Deeds.

Upon that Day men shall issue in scattering to see their works, And whoso has done an atom's weight of good shall see it, And whoso has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it (Qur'an, Sura 99:6-8).

4. Salvation

a. Is Earned Based upon Good Deeds

Those who have faith and do righteous deeds, they are the best of creatures. Their reward is with Allah: Gardens of Eternity, beneath which rivers flow; they will dwell therein for ever; Allah well pleased with them, and they with him; all this for such as fear their lord and cherisher (Qur'an, Sura 98:7-8).

b. Is Uncertain until Death

No person knows what delights of the eye are kept hidden for them as a reward for their good deeds (Qur'an 32:17).

D. Pluralist Claims of Islam's Similarities with Christianity

1. God

Allah's mercy embraces all things (Qur'an, Sura 7:156).

God is love (1 John 4:8).

2. Mankind

Every child is born of the nature of purity and submission to Allah (Hadith of Bkhari).

And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:2-3)."

3. Salvation

Thou bringest forth the living from the dead, and thou bringest forth the dead from the living (Qur'an, Sura 3:27).

I am the resurrection and the life; He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die (John 11:25).

E. Islam's Difference with Christianity

1. God

- a. The God of Christianity loves unrighteous, sinful, evil doers.

God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

- b. Allah, the god of Islam does not love evil doers.

Allah loveth not the doers of evil (Qur'an, Sura 3:50).

- c. Christians believe that God is one co-existing equally and eternally as three persons as a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Muslims reject this Trinity and affirm only that God is one.

2. Mankind – Christians believe that everyone is born sinful and will sin because it is their nature (Rom 1-3). Muslims believe mankind is free to do good and not to sin, pure from birth (*Hadith of Bkhari*).

3. Salvation - Christians believe that only those who put faith in Christ alone will be saved (Romans 1:16-17; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Muslims hope that somehow the good works they do (performing the pillars of Islam) will outweigh the bad works they have done and possibly earn them salvation at death (*Qur'an, Sura 32:17; 99:6-8*).

F. Specific Criticisms of Islam Against Christianity

1. Christians are polytheists who worship three gods.

response: Christians are monotheists who believe that God is eternally one essence co-existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Muslims believe the *Qur'an* is eternal and uncreated, an “expression of the Divine Will.” They do not believe it is wholly God himself but yet an imperishable expression of himself. In a similar way Jesus Christ was the expression of the Divine among men, the revelation of the divine will.

2. Muhammad is prophesied of in the Bible in: Deuteronomy 18:15-18; 33:2; 34:10; Habakkuk 3:3; Psalm 43:3-5; Isaiah 21:7; Matthew 3:11; and John 14:16;

response: A careful reading of each of these passages in the literary contexts clearly could not be talking about Muhammad. The best way to respond is to open to anyone of these passages with a Muslim and read what comes before it and after it. In addition, to show how the Bible cannot be read by taking passages out of their context, it can help to open up a passage of the *Qur'an* and take a verse out of context and make it say something that it really cannot mean.

G. Christian Challenges to Muslims

1. Muslims believe that all religious revelations that oppose the *Qur'an* involve deception (*Qur'an, Sura 5:53-89*). The respected Muslim scholar M.H.Haykal in his book titled *The Life of Muhammad* writes: “Muhammad feared possession by the devil” and Haykal quotes a passage of Islamic narrative tradition “...Stricken with panic, Muhammad arose and asked himself, Did possession of the devil which I feared all

along come to pass?”³⁹ Thus it is fair to ask a Muslim, “Is it not possible that Muhammad’s revelations in the *Qur’an* were actually deceptions from the devil?”

2. Muslims claim that Muhammad was a perfect moral example, “living proof of what man can be and of what he can accomplish in the realm of excellence and virtue.”⁴⁰ If this is so why could Muhammad have eleven wives (*Qur’an*, *Sura* 33:50) when earlier the *Qur’an* said one could only have four (*Qur’an*, *Sura* 4:3)? Why could he beat his wives (*Qur’an*, *Sura* 4:34), order that two men and two slave women be killed for speaking against him,⁴¹ and be commanded to ask Allah for forgiveness (*Qur’an*, *Sura* 40:55) if he was so perfect?

3. Why does the *Qur’an* order that “life not be taken, which Allah has made sacred, except by way of justice and law (*Qur’an*, *Sura* 6:152),” but then later command to kill any one who does not believe in Islam (*Qur’an*, *Sura* 9:5)?

a. Liberal Muslims say that they simply choose not to believe in the doctrine of *Jihad*.

responses:

1) Muhammad died in preparation for more *Jihad* and his followers continued that mission which is responsible for the massive growth of Islam as a world religion.

2) All sects of Muslims are bound to obedience and belief in their most holy book, the *Qur’an* which commands:

Fight for the cause of Allah...May it not be that if to fight were ordained you, ye would not fight?...Allah loveth those who do battle for his cause (Qur’an, Sura 2:245,247; 61:2).

b. Pluralists who attempt to conflate religious claims together and other liberal Muslims who desire to soften the force of the *Qur’an*’s commands have three different responses to this challenge.

1) *Jihad* is for defense.

response: The *Jihad* command is clearly offensive. “Go forth to *Jihad* in the land...Slacken not in the pursuit of the foe (*Qur’an*, *Sura* 3:102,105).” “Fight and kill the pagans wherever you find them...Believers! Wage *Jihad* against such of the infidels as are your neighbors, and let them find you rigorous and know that Allah is with those who fear him (*Qur’an*, *Sura* 9:5,124).”

2) *Jihad* is symbolic for fighting the spiritual battle with sin.

response: If this is so why does the *Qur’an* say, “When ye encounter the infidels, strike off their heads till ye have made a great slaughter among them (*Qur’an*, *Sura* 47:2)” and then say, “Infidels now are they who say, ‘God is the Messiah, Son of Mary...They are surely infidels who say, ‘God is the third of three (*Qur’an*, *Sura* 5:76-77). This could mean

³⁹ M.H. Haykal, *The Life of Muhammed*, (Indianapolis: American Trust, 1976), 74.

⁴⁰ H. Abdalati, *Islam in Focus* (Indianapolis: American Trust, 1975), 8.

⁴¹ *The Life of Muhammed*, 243.

nothing else but Christians. After asking this question tell a Muslim you are a Christian and then ask them nicely if they really want to cut off your head. When they say no, ask them why their god would be pleased with such a thing.

3) The *Qur'an* says "Let there be no compulsion in Religion (*Qur'an, Sura 2:257*)." Thus, Jihad cannot mean that Muslims are to kill people who are not Muslims so that the world will know that Allah is great.

response: A careful reading of the context in which this sentence occurs clearly shows that this text is not talking about *Jihad*. The immediately preceding paragraph to this sentence is a passage praising the greatness of Allah. The idea of "Let there be no compulsion in Religion" clearly is intending to teach that because Allah is so great, there is nothing more that could compel one to believe in him.

4. The *Qur'an* can be shown not divine.

a. Muslims claim the *Qur'an* is divine because they say it is perfect in its literary form and eloquence. However, there are numerous grammatical errors⁴² and even if it is eloquent that does not make it divine. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are eloquent but that does not make them divine.

b. Muslims claim that the *Qur'an* could not come from someone who was illiterate such as Muhammad and therefore must be divine. However, other Islamic narrative tradition contains records of Muhammad being able to write⁴³ and he was known as a wealthy merchant before his prophetic career, which would have almost absolutely required writing skills. In addition, even if Muhammad was illiterate, his authoring the *Qur'an* from such an incapacity, does not make it divine. Homer was blind and still wrote his books and they are not considered divine.

c. Muslims claim there is a great unity in the *Qur'an* which demonstrates it is divine. However, despite the nearly 150 variations of the *Qur'an* there are numerous blatant contradictions within it. Here are a couple examples:

1) *Qur'an, Sura 2:106* says, "Such of our revelations as we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring one better or the like thereof." But *Qur'an, Sura 6:34* says, "There is none that can alter the words of Allah."

2) *Qur'an, Sura 7:54* says Allah created the world in six days but *Qur'an, Sura 41: 9-12* says it took Allah eight days to create the world.

d. Muslims claim that the *Qur'an* is scientifically accurate and thus must be divine. However, there are things within the *Qur'an* that are clearly not scientifically accurate. Such as the passage which teaches that if one travels west they will find that the sun sets in a muddy spring (*Qur'an, Sura 18:86*).

e. Muslims claim that the *Qur'an* contained predictive prophecies which were fulfilled in history. However, the majority of these supposed prophecies are statements of Muhammad that they will fight and win wars because Allah is with them. Rallying troops with such statements hardly constitutes for predictive prophecy. The two other supposedly predictive prophecies of the *Qur'an* fail too.

⁴² Ali Dashti, *Twenty-Three Years: A Study of the Prophetic Career of Mohammad*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), 48-50.

⁴³ C.G. Pfander, *The Mizanu'l Haqq: The Balance of Truth*, (Austria: Light of Life, 1986), 255.

The first, in *Qur'an*, *Sura* 30:2-4 predicts that the Romans will come and defeat them in a "few years." The Romans did come and defeat them, like they did to everyone else, but it was not until thirteen or fourteen years later. The second, in *Qur'an*, *Sura* 89:2, is a passage that talks about the first ten nights of the *hajj* pilgrimage. Some have attempted to say that maybe it was speaking about a period of ten years in Islamic history when Muslims experienced persecution. Yet, this too is an extreme stretch and certainly not clear predictive prophecy.

f. The content of the *Qur'an* is vastly dependant on other works written before it. Passages of the *Qur'an* can be directly traced to the Hebrew Bible, the Jewish Talmud, the New Testament, the Christian Apocrypha, and Zoroastrian literature. In addition, most all the religious vocabulary and even cultural vocabulary is of non-Arabic origin but rather Abyssinian, Persian, Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, and Coptic.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Arthur Jeffery, *Islam, Muhammad and His Religion*, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 2,12-32.

Zoroastrianism

A. Zoroastrian History

1. Zoroastrianism comes from "Zoroaster," which is a Greek form of the Iranian name "Zarathustra." Zoroaster or Zarathustra is the name of the man who founded Zoroastrianism.
2. Zoroaster was born around 650 B.C. in Persia (now Iran).
3. Zoroaster was the son of a camel merchant and grew up with an excellent education studying under some of the finest teachers in Persia at that time.
4. Persia in this era was a place where many gods were worshipped and many wars were fought. When Zoroaster around 30 years old he was traveling about helping wounded soldiers with some sort of medical aid he had. One day while standing on the banks of the Daitya River he had a vision.
5. In this vision a figure appeared to him who called himself *Vohu Manah*, which means "good thought." *Vohu Manah* took Zoroaster to see *Ahura-Mazda*, which means "wise lord." In the vision *Ahura-Mazda* instructed Zoroaster of the true religion.
6. Zoroaster immediately began teaching his newly discovered truth. A prince named "Vishtaspa" converted and helped Zoroaster spread the new religion. The religion began to grow but two wars hindered its progress, the second taking the life of Zoroaster at age 77.

B. Zoroastrian Religious Texts

1. The Zoroastrian religious texts are compiled together in one work known as the *Avesta*, and is written in an *Avestan*, an old Iranian language.
2. It is generally conceived that Zoroaster wrote the *Avesta*.
3. The *Avesta* contains four major sections:
 - a. *Yasna* - Meaning "sacrifice" or "worship." The *Yasna* contains seventeen hymns known as *gathas*.
 - b. *Yashts* – The *Yashts* contains epic literature.
 - c. *Videvdad* or *Vendidad* – The *Videvdad/Vendidad* contains purification and anti-demonic laws.
 - e. *Visparad* – The *Visparad* is a collection of ritual litanies to all spiritual lords.

C. Zoroastrian Doctrine

1. God
 - a. Zoroaster only speaks of one true deity who is to be worshipped, *Ahura-Mazda*.
 - b. *Ahura-Mazda* has ten main characteristics:
 - 1) creator
Avesta, Yasna 31:7,11; 44:7; 50:11; 51:7)

- 2) all-seeing
Avesta, Yasna 31:13; 44:2
- 3) all-knowing
Avesta, Yasna 31:13; 45:3; 48:2-3
- 4) most mighty
Avesta, Yasna 28:5; 33:11; 45:6
- 5) friendly
Avesta, Yasna 31:21; 44:2;
- 6) father of justice/right
Avesta, Yasna 44:3; 47:2
- 7) father of *Vohu Manah*, “good mind” or “good thought”
Avesta, Yasna 31:8; 45:4
- 8) beneficent
Avesta, Yasna 45:6; 48:3
- 9) bountiful
Avesta, Yasna 43:4-15; 44:2; 45:5; 46:9; 48:3; 51:10
- 10) is spirit
Avesta, Yasna 30:5

2. Evil

a. Zoroaster speaks of a force opposed to *Ahura-Mazda* called both *Angra Mainyu*, meaning “prince of darkness” or *Pahlavi Ahiriman*, meaning the “bad (or) destructive spirit.”

b. *Angra Mainyu* or *Pahlavi Ahiriman* is sometimes translated as “devil” and has demons who do his bidding or works.

c. Zoroaster speaks of the ultimate destruction and triumph of *Ahura-Mazda* over *Angra Mainyu* / *Pahlavi Ahiriman* at the end of all things (*Avesta, Yasna 30:2-11; 31:8,19; 32:6,15; 33:3,5; 43:12; 45:7; 46:12; 48:4; 51:6; 53:7-9*).

3. Dualism⁴⁵

a. *Ahura-Mazda* and *Angra Mainyu* / *Pahlavi Ahiriman* are considered twin primal spirits, co-equal from the beginning of time, who do battle until the end of the world.

Yes, there are two fundamental spirits, twins which are renowned to be in conflict. In thought and in word, in action, they are two: the good and the bad. And between these two, the beneficent have correctly chosen, not the maleficent. Furthermore, when these two spirits first came together, they created life and death, and now, in the end the worst existence shall be for the deceitful but the best thing for the truthful person. Of these two spirits, the deceitful one chose to bring realization the worst things. But the very virtuous spirit, who is clothed in the hardest stones, chose the truth, and so shall

⁴⁵ The doctrine that there are two co-eternal and co-equal principles, good and evil, which are in conflict with one another.

mortals who shall satisfy the wise lord continuously with true actions (Avesta, Yansa 30:3-5).

b. *Today's Handbook of World Religions* provides a chart demonstrating the opposing attributes of *Ahura-Mazda* and *Angra Mainyu / Pahlavi Ahiriman*.⁴⁶

<u><i>Ahura-Mazda Ahiriman</i></u>	<u><i>Angra Mainyu / Pahlavi</i></u>
- god of light and wisdom	- prince of darkness
- right and just	- father of falsehood
- good mind	- evil mind
- power	- coward
- love	- deceiver
- author of health	- giver of misery and suffering

4. Death – A passage to either the “house of evil” or to the “best existence” (*Avesta, Yansa 46:10-11*).

5. Salvation – Entrance into heaven, the “best existence” through doing good deeds (*Avesta, Yansa 46:10-11*).

D. Pluralist Claims of Zoroastrianism's Similarities with Christianity

1. God

As the holy one I recognized thee, O Wise Lord, When he came to me as Good Mind; The Silent Thought taught me the greatest good so that I might proclaim it (Avesta, Yansa 45:15).

[God] is not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:27-28).

2. Universal Salvation

We will make offering unto thee with worship, O Lord, and to the Right, that you may achieve through Good Mind the destiny of all creatures in the Dominion. For the salvation of the man of insight among such as you, O Wise One, will hold good for everyone (Avesta, Yansa 34:3).

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...(1 Pet 3:18).

3. Eternal Life

Then do I proclaim what the Most Beneficent spoke to me, the Words to be heeded, which are best for mortals: Those who shall give hearing and reverence shall attain unto perfection and immortality by the deeds of good spirit of the Lord of Wisdom (Avesta, Yansa 45:5).

For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

⁴⁶ *Handbook of Today's Religions*, 359.

E. Zoroastrianism's Difference with Christianity

1. God – Christians believe that God is one co-existing equally and eternally as three persons as a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Zoroastrians have no concept of God taking on humanity, much less any notion of the Trinity.
2. Evil – Christians believe that God is the only all-powerful being (Jeremiah 32:17), that Satan is a created being who must submit to God (Ezekiel 28:15), and that evil was defeated on the cross (Colossians 2:15). Zoroastrians consider Satan a twin of God, who opposes Him by fighting and working against Him with great power.
3. Salvation - Christians believe that only those who put faith in Christ alone will be saved (Romans 1:16-17; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Zoroastrians believe that they are saved through doing good deeds (*Avesta*, *Yansa* 45:5; 46:10-11).

F. Specific Criticism of Zoroastrianism Against Christianity – Many have claimed that Zoroastrianism effected and influenced the writers of the Bible so that they copied ideas from Zoroastrianism and then put them in the Bible.

response: This accusation assumes that the relevant Old Testament books were written later than traditional evidence shows. If there is any relationship between the Bible and the *Avesta* at all, it is that Zoroastrian writings borrowed ideas from the Bible. The most likely dates of the relevant Old Testament books are overwhelmingly earlier than the most likely dates of the *Avesta*'s writing.

G. A Christian Challenge to Zoroastrianism – If two equal spirits or forces exist, good and evil, then there must be some even greater standard or reality, for something cannot be called “good” or “evil” unless it is measured by something outside of itself. Whoever made this standard would then be greater than both the good god or spirit and the evil god or spirit. The creator of this standard must then be the real and greater God since good and evil operate within His system and are accountable to it.

Hinduism

A. Hindu History

1. The word “Hindu” comes from “*Sindhu*,” which is a river in the Indus Valley of what was formerly India and is now Pakistan. Hinduism is primarily the leading religion of India, though modern variations have made their way into the western world during the last century.⁴⁷
2. In the third millennium B.C. a people group named “Dravidians” lived in the Indus Valley who worshipped many different fertility gods through sexual rituals so that their crops might be abundant. Around 2000 B.C. another polytheistic people group named “Aryans” came into the Indus Valley and conquered the Dravidians. The result was a merging of the two religions and cultures into one which between 2000 and 700 B.C. composed sacred religious texts, collectively known as the “*Vedas*.”
3. In the following century three other religions began: Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, which all trace their roots to Hinduism in varying degrees.
4. In the early twentieth century two modern Hindu branches began in the western world, Transcendental Meditation and Hare Krishna. Together known as the who follow the “Vedanta movement” which recognizes Sri Ramakrishna as the most recent incarnation of the Hindu god, Vishnu.

B. Hindu Religious Texts

1. The *Sruti*

- a. *Sruti* is Sanskrit (classical language of India) for “what is heard.” The *Sruti* are considered the purest truths known by the ancient Hindu seers who were so calm and faultless that they perfectly knew the entire body of eternal truth.
- b. The *Sruti* was eventually written down over a lengthy period of time and titled the “*Vedas*,” which is Sanskrit for “knowledge.”
- c. The *Vedas* consist of three major bodies of material:
 - 1) *Mantras* – Sanskrit for “instrument of thought.” The *Mantras* are a collection of hymns, chants, prayers, and praise to the Hindu gods.
 - 2) *Brahmanas* – Sanskrit for “growth.” The *Brahmanas* contains guides for practicing ritual rights, considered an explanation of how to practice the *Mantras*.
 - 3) *Upanishads* – Sanskrit for “to sit close by.” The *Upanishads* contain the Hindu doctrines about the nature of man and the universe.

2. The *Smrti*

- a. *Smrti* is Sanskrit for “what is remembered” are a compilation of other sacred oral texts passed down through ancient Hindu seers.
- b. The *Smrti* consists of five major bodies of literature:

⁴⁷ see A.3. below.

1) *Ramayana* – Sanskrit for “exploits of Rama” contains the epic tale of Rama, a warrior and wanderer who goes through all kinds of adventures and ends up in a celestial abode.

2) *Mahabharata* – Sanskrit for the “great tale of Bharata’s descendants.” The *Mahabharata* is divided into eighteen different books which collectively tell about the escapades of the Bharata clans. Book seven of the *Mahabharata* is the *Bhagavad-Gita* (Sanskrit for song of Bhagava). The *Bhagavad-Gita* is the most famous, most read, and most sacred book of all the Hindu writings. It tells the story of how Gita (the main character) is saved because his devotion to the god Vishnu.

3) *Puranas* – Sanskrit for “ancient.” The *Puranas* include legends of gods, goddesses, demons and ancestors describing their pilgrimages and rituals.

4) *Aqamas* – The *Aqamas* contain theological treatises and manuals of worship.

5) *Sultras* – The *Sultras* are an explanation of Hindu philosophy divided into six parts.

C. Hindu Doctrine

1. God

a. God is “Brahman” and is ultimate reality, creator, immortal, imperishable, impersonal, all-pervading, supreme, changeless, absolute, indivisibly one, everything, everyone, inexpressible, indefinable, and yet at the same time none of these.⁴⁸

b. Hindus also believe that God is literally hundreds of gods such as: Vishnu (the most popular and chief god), Agni (the god of the alter fire), Krishna (the 8th incarnation of Vishnu), Ganesa (god of wisdom and prudence represented by a man with an elephant’s head), Hanuman (the monkey god), Indra (the god of rain and thunder), Lakshma (the goddess of beauty and wealth), Pavarti (the goddess daughter of the Himalayas), Sarasvati (the goddess of learning, music, and speech), Varuna (the god who rules and guards the cosmic order), the cow (the god permeating universe) and many others.

2. Mankind

Mankind is *atman*, the self, a person’s uncreated eternal soul, the life of every object and non-object which is manifested in all different types of bodies, which live eternally successive lives.

3. Morality

Karma, literally “action,” a moral law of cause and effect. One collects either bad karma or good karma based upon their actions in how they live their life. Karma is carried in the eternal soul throughout one’s different lives. Bad karma must be worked off by doing good karma.

4. Death

⁴⁸ God is thoroughly pantheistic, panentheistic, and polytheistic.

Death is the point at which *atman*, is reincarnated into a new body form wherein the soul is transferred to the new life. Souls may be reincarnated as animals, plants or other inanimate objects. This continual process or cycle of reincarnation is called *samsara*, meaning transmigration or rebirth.

5. Salvation

a. Salvation is a liberation from the cycle of *samsara* called *moksha*, wherein *atman* realizes that it is *brahman* and is freed from the process of continual reincarnation and paying off bad karma. The world that one sees, smells, feels, tastes, and touches (including evil and suffering) is only *maya*, a mere “illusion” which keeps one in the *samsara* and from realizing that *atman* is really *brahman*.

b. There are three paths to *moksha*, or salvation:

1) *Dharma*, the path of works. This path includes following the occupation of one’s caste, or class and marrying within it. Certain foods are not to be eaten, and a son must be raised who can make sacrifice to his ancestors and perform other ritual acts. By fulfilling these obligations one may get a better reincarnation and perhaps after thousands of reincarnations achieve *moksha*.

2) *Inana*, the path of knowledge. This path is only open to men in the highest caste, or class. It includes a life of self-renunciation and extensive meditation on *brahman* through the guidance of the *Upanishads*. *Yoga* is nearly always practice in this path. *Yoga*, literally “yoking” or “union,” is the practice of one attempting to control their consciousness through bodily posture, breathing patterns, and concentration so that one will understand experientially that one’s true self, the undying soul of *atman*, is identical with *Brahman*.

3) *Bhakti*, the path of passionate devotion. This path is the most popular and includes the fervent adoring dedication to a god of one’s own choice. There are approximately 330 million god, goddesses or demigods in the Hindu pantheon to choose from. The god one chooses is most commonly worshipped by burning incense to an idol of it.

c. One who achieves salvation or *moksha* before death is known as *jivanmukta*, which is Sanskrit for “liberated in this life.”

D. Pluralist Claims of Hinduism’s Similarities with Christianity

1. God

Known by the name of Protectress is the Goddess girt by Eternal Law; by her beauty are these trees green and have up on their green garlands (Atharva Veda 10.8.31)

What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20).

2. Sin

Intoxicated by the wine of illusion, like one intoxicated by wine’ rushing about, like one possessed by an evil spirit; bitten by the world, like one bitten by a great serpent; darkened by passion, like the night; illusory, like magic; false, like a

dream; pithless, like the inside of a banana tree; changing its dress in a moment, like an actor; fair in appearance, like a painted wall – thus they call him (Maitri Upanishad 4.2)

You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and I would heal them (Matthew 12:14-15).

3. Salvation

Brahman is all in all. He is action, knowledge, goodness supreme. To know him, hidden in the lotus of the heart, is to untie the knot of ignorance (Mundaka Upanishad 2.1.10)

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification (1 Corinthians 2:6-7).

E. Hinduism's Differences with Christianity

1. God – Christians believe in one supreme being, God, who is creator of all things, infinite, eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good, everywhere present, distinctly separate from His creation, co-existing in three persons as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and is alone to be worshipped. Hindus believe in *brahma*, an impersonal abstract force with no distinctive attributes and in many gods and idols who may be simultaneously worshipped.
2. Sin – Christians believe that sin is breaking God's law of right and wrong, which offends God and incurs an infinite debt of judgment by eternal punishment in a fiery hell. Hindus believe sin is *maya*, an utter illusion, and that its bad karma can be worked off by realizing that sin and suffering do not really exist.
3. Salvation – Christians believe salvation is an escape from God's just judgment for sin, which is obtained solely through faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ who, being of infinite value as God, suffered judgment in our place through death on a cross and then rose again three days later. Hindus believe that salvation is *moksha*, which is obtained through doing works to realize that the human, *atman* is really God, *brahman*.

F. Christian Challenges to Hindus

1. If everything one experiences is an illusion, then one assumes to know what something that is not an illusion is. But if everything is an illusion then it is impossible to know anything.
2. If everything one experiences with the five senses is not real, then it is impossible to learn the supposed truths of Hinduism since they are learned through reading books with sight, listening to teachers, and using the senses to meditate.
3. The famous Indian Hindu Mohanda K. Gandhi taught that all approaches to God are equally true and valid, that each Hindu chooses his or her own path and that all paths lead to the same place. If one approach to understanding God and the path(s) to him cannot be solely right alone, then Mr. Gandhi's understanding about God and the paths

to him cannot be true by his own definition for he is merely presenting another one right way of seeing things.

Buddhism

A. Buddhist History

1. The word “Buddhism” comes from the word “Buddha” which means “an enlightened one” or someone who has “awakened to the truth.”
2. Buddhism was founded by a man named “Siddhartha Gautama” who was born about 560 B.C. in northeastern India.
3. Tradition tells a story that when Siddhartha Gautama was born a seer prophesied that when he grew up he would either become a great king or find salvation for all mankind depending on whether or not he stayed home. From this point traditions vary but the basic story says that though his rich father could have made him a king, he left home and became a poor wanderer begging for food. One day he went and sat down under a bo tree and had an experience where he achieved *nirvana*, becoming enlightened. After that he was called himself the “Buddha” and set out to tell people how to reach this state.
4. Buddha died around 45 years after his “enlightenment.” By that time thousands had adopted his teachings. Not long after Buddhism developed into three main branches, though there are many others:
 - a. *Hinayana* – Sanskrit for “small vehicle” is a branch of Buddhism that believes Buddha taught that only a small number of people will experience *nirvana*. This branch is also known as *Theravada* (“the way of the elders”).
 - b. *Mahayana* – Sanskrit for “great vehicle” is a branch of Buddhism that believes Buddha taught that enlightenment is available for everyone. This branch also believes in *Bodhisattvas*, savior gods who will help one reach *nirvana*.
 - c. *Tantrism* – Sanskrit for “extension” is a branch of Buddhism that believes in using incantations and other occult means to reach *nirvana*.
5. The most recent development of Buddhism is the popularity it has gained in the western world. This branch or form is known as *Zen*, meaning “reading.” *Zen* focuses on reading the saying of Buddha and meditating. In *Zen*, *nirvana* is called *satori*, which means “reaching.” The most important statement of *Zen* is: “Look within, you are the Buddha.”

B. Buddhist Religious Texts

1. There are literally over 5,000 volumes of Buddhist scriptures that attribute themselves in one way or another to the teachings of Buddha. Due to the many different forms of Buddhism there is no consensus on what is accepted as the actual teachings of Buddha and what is not.
2. Despite the vast amount of Buddhist scripture, there is one text that nearly all forms of Buddhism acknowledge and use called the *Dhammapada*, which is a collection of sayings attributed to the Buddha.

C. Buddhist Doctrine

1. “The Four Noble Truths” – Four successive principles Buddha taught must be learned in order to attain *nirvana*.

- a. *Suffering is universal.*
Everyone suffers for suffering is the very act of living. Death is no relief from suffering because at death one is reincarnated or reborn into another life form. *Nirvana* is to be released from the suffering experienced in the cycle of living and dying.
- b. *“Craving” or “Selfish Desire” is the cause of suffering.*
Attachment to health, wealth, status, and physical comfort are the cravings that keep one in the life and death cycle of suffering.
- c. *Suffering can be cured by overcoming ignorance and eliminating craving.*
Ignorance is not realizing craving is what causes suffering. If craving were removed suffering would end.
- d. *Craving can be removed by following an eightfold path:*
 - 1) right viewpoint 5) right occupation
 - 2) right aspiration 6) right effort
 - 3) right speech 7) right mindfulness
 - 4) right behavior 8) right meditation

D. Pluralist Claims of Buddhism’s Similarities with Christianity

1. Suffering

The noble truth of suffering is this: birth is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; association with the unpleasant is suffering; dissociation from the pleasant is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering – in brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering (Buddhism, Samyutta Nikaya Ivi.11).

All men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written, none is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one (Romans 3:9-12).

2. Emptiness

All universes are as void as space. Intrinsicly our transcendental nature is void and not a single thing can be attained. It is the same with the essence of mind, which is a state of absolute void (Buddhism, Sutra of Hui Neng 2).

I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen (Exodus 33:22-23).

3. Salvation

Few are there among men who go across to the further shore; the rest of making only run about on the bank. But those who act rightly according to the teaching, as has been well taught, will cross over to the other shore, for the realm of passions is so difficult to cross (Buddhism, Dhammapada 85-86).

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me (Psalm 69:1-2).

E. Buddhism's Differences with Christianity

1. Suffering

The noble truth of suffering is this: birth is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; association with the unpleasant is suffering; dissociation from the pleasant is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering – in brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering (Buddhism, Samyutta Nikaya Ivi.11).

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13).

2. Emptiness

The way and the self-nature of this Nirvana is emptiness which is the state of reality (Buddhism, Lankavatara Sutra 38). Regard the world as void (Buddhism, Suttanipata 119).

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:13).

3. Salvation

Be lamps unto yourselves. Be a refuge unto yourselves. Do not turn to any external refuge...Work out your own salvation with diligence (Buddhism, Mahaparinibbana-sutta 2:33; 6:10).

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Confucianism

A. Confucian History

1. The word “Confucianism” comes from “Confucius” the name of its founder.
2. Confucius was born around 550 B.C. in the ancient state of Lu (now Shantung) in China.
3. China, during the time of Confucius, was consistently war devastated. Some have described the time period Confucius lived in as a time of “social anarchy.”⁴⁹
4. Confucius desired to see change in China and set his heart to learning and teaching, with a goal of occupying a political office so that he could make social and political reforms.
5. In 479 B.C., before Confucius ever accomplished his desired goal, he died. Yet through his writings and the devotion of his disciples his system was finally put in place as China’s official state religion in 130 B.C. Confucianism stayed the official state religion for over 2,000 years and is still practiced and pursued by many in the east today.

B. Confucian Religious Texts

1. “The Five Classics”
 - a. *I Ching* – Meaning the book of “changes.” *I Ching* is a collection of 64 hexagrams expanded from 8 triagrams which are littered with broken and unbroken lines. It is assumed that there is great meaning hidden in them, but no key for interpretation have ever been found.
 - b. *Shu K’ing* – Meaning the book of “annals.” *Shu K’ing* is a history of five great Chinese dynasties. The ancient ancestors were considered by Confucius’ to be the examples superior man should seek to model their behavior after.
 - c. *Shih Ching* – Meaning the book of “ancient poetry.” *Shih Ching* was put together by Confucius because he thought reading poetry helped make man virtuous.
 - d. *Li Chi* – Meaning the book of “ceremonies.” *Li Chi* is a collection of traditional ancient ceremonies.
 - e. *Ch’un Ch’iu* – Meaning the annals of “Spring and Autumn.” *Ch’un Ch’iu* is attributed to Confucius and consists of a commentary on the events of the state of Lu.
2. *The Analects* – Sayings of Confucius and his disciples.
3. *The Great Learning* – A work dealing with the education and training of a gentleman.
4. *The Doctrine of Mean* – A book about the relationship of human nature to the order of the universe.

⁴⁹ *Handbook of Today’s Religions*, 326.

5. *The Book of Mencius* – A book written about 300 B.C. by a man named Mencius who wrote an exposition on the teachings of Confucius. It primarily gives an idealistic view of life and stresses that humans are good in their inherent nature.

C. Confucian Doctrine

1. Ancestor Worship – It is believed that ancestors can effect the fortunes of their living descendants. The continued existence of the spirits of dead ancestors can be dependent upon how much they are worshipped. Worship can consist of burning incense, money, or food to them and prayer to them.

2. Filial Piety – Loyalty and devotion to family. Serving them as a primary goal of life. Deep respect for elders.

3. *Jen* – Meaning “benevolence.” The idea of human goodness to one another. A golden rule of reciprocity: do not do anything to others that you would not have them do to you.

4. *Chun-tzu*- Meaning “gentleman.” This doctrine is about mankind striving to be of virtue, a “superior man” seeking to be “at his best.”

5. *Cheng-ming* – Meaning “administration of name.” This has to do with playing one’s part or role, administering their name. For example, a king should act like a king, a gentleman like a gentleman, a father like a father, and a son like a son.

6. *Te* – Meaning “power.” What is in view in this doctrine is the exercise of power in a virtuous manner.

7. *Li* – Meaning propriety, reverence, or courtesy. *Li* is the proper action in any given situation.

8. *Wen* – Meaning “peace art.” The arts of peace are music, poetry, and art. They are considered to be symbols of virtue that enrich a person in the pursuit of *Jen*.

D. Pluralist Claims of Confucianism’s Similarities with Christianity

1. Mankind

Gentleness and goodness are the roots of humanity (Confucianism, Book of Ritual 38:18).

They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts...(Romans 2:15)

2. Worship

Of the saying, The word “sacrifice” is like the word “present”; one should sacrifice to a spirit as though the spirit were present (Confucianism, Analects 3:12).

Whatever you do, do all for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

E. Confucianism’s Difference with Christianity

1. Mankind - Christians believe that everyone is born sinful and will sin because it is their nature (Romans 1-3). Confucians believe humanity is inherently good (Book of Ritual 38:18).

2. Worship – Christians believe there is no need for any sacrifice (Hebrews 10:18). Confucians believe you need to make sacrifices to your ancestors (Analects 3:12).

3. Death – Christians believe death is the punishment for sin (Romans 6:23) and the point of which one either enters heaven or hell depending on whether or not they have trusted in Jesus Christ for their salvation (Romans 10:9). Confucians believe death is merely change in one's relation to the perfect harmony between heaven and earth (*Ching*, Great Commentary 1.4.1-3).

Taoism

A. Taoist History

1. "Taoism" (sometimes spelled "Daoism" because Taoism is pronounced with a "D") comes from the word "Tao" which means "way" or "path."
2. Taoism was founded by a man named "Lao-tzu." Lao-tzu was born sometime between 604 and 570 B.C. in China.
3. There are many different legends about Lao-tzu which all end up with him producing a book titled, *Tao Te King*, which is Chinese for "The Way and its Power." This is where Taoism gets its name from.
4. There are two main branches of Taoism:
 - a. Philosophical Taoism – Seeks Tao as the ultimate reality attempting to bring oneself into harmony with its nature.
 - b. Religious Taoism – Has a temple and a priesthood through which Tao is worshipped.

B. Taoist Religious Text – *Tao Te King* is the sacred scripture of Taoism. It is about 5,500 words and instructs the reader of how to survive the hardships of the world through non-involvement.

C. Taoist Doctrine

1. Tao – Literally translated is "way" or "path," yet it embodies a much greater depth of meaning as the centerpiece of the Taoist religion.
 - a. Tao is unknowable.
The Tao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Tao; The name that can be named is not the eternal name (Tao Te Ching 1).
 - b. Tao is inaudible, inexpressible, invisible, undiscussable, unnamable, perfect, and peaceful.⁵⁰
 - c. Tao is creator (*Tao Te Ching*, 51).
 - d. Tao is timeless (*Chuang Tzu* 6).
 - e. Tao is the way to act (*Tao Te Ching*, 23).
2. *Yin and Yang*
 - a. *Yin and Yang* is one expression of Tao in two opposite and interdependent concepts or energies.
 - b. *Yin and Yang* can be found throughout nature in many forms. Consider this chart⁵¹:

⁵⁰ Max Mueller, Editor, *Sacred Books of the East*, (London: Krishna Press, 1879-1910), 40:68-69; 39:1992-1993.

⁵¹ *Handbook of Today's Religions*, 342-343.

<u>Yin</u>	<u>Yang</u>
Female	Male
Negative	Positive
Evil	Good
Darkness	Light
Death	Life
Winter	Summer
Passive	Active

D. Pluralist Claim of Taoism's Similarity with Christianity – God

The great Tao flows everywhere; It can go left; it can go right. The myriad things owe their existence to it, and it does not reject them. When its work is accomplished, it does not take possession. It clothes and feeds all, but does not pose as their master. Ever without ambition, it may be called small. All things return to it as their home, and yet it does not pose as their master, therefore it may be called great. Because it would never claim greatness, Therefore its greatness is fully realized (Tao Te Ching 34).

He [God] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends the rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:45).

E. Taoism's Difference with Christianity – God

When its [Tao's] work is accomplished, it does not take possession (Tao Te Ching 34).

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it (Psalm 24:1).

It [Tao] clothes and feeds all, "If I am a Master, where is but does not pose as their master (Tao Te Ching 34).

the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty..." You show contempt for my name (Malachi 1:6)."

It [Tao] may be called great. Because it would never claim greatness, Therefore its greatness is fully realized (Tao Te Ching 34).

" I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations (Malachi 1:14)."

Shintoism

A. Shinto History

1. "Shintoism" come from the Japanese word "Shinto" which means "the way of the gods."
2. Shintoism is the official religion of Japan and is purely a Japanese religion because two of its most important gods, *Izanagi* (female who invites) and *Izanami* (male who invites) are believed to have together procreated the eight islands of Japan and Japanese people.
3. Not much is known about how Shintoism started. There is no known founder and it is not a branch of some other religion. The earliest record of Shintoism existence is around 550 B.C.

B. Shinto Religious Texts

1. *Kojiki* is Japanese for "records of ancient matters." The *Kojiki* is the oldest piece of any Japanese writing, compiled around 712 A.D. It contains tradition narrative that relates the stories of Japan's history including its imperial ancestors and imperial court.
2. *Nihongi* is Japanese for "chronicles of Japan." The *Nihongi* tells the story of *Izanagi* and *Izanami's* creation of Japan.

C. Shinto Doctrine

1. gods – Shintoites worship four main gods:
 - a. *Kami* – A sacred divine power in both animate and inanimate objects.
 - b. *Amaterasu* – The sun goddess and chief deity.
 - c. *Izanagi* – The "female who invites."
 - d. *Izanami* – The "male who invites."
2. Worship
 - a. Performed through rituals of purification, offerings of food, chanting prayers, and offerings of dance and music.
 - b. Performed in *Hondons*. A *Hondon* is a "god body," the inner sanctuary of a *Shintai*, a Shinto shrine. Numerous *Shintais* are found all over the country of Japan.
 - c. Performed at *Kami Damas*. A *Kami Dama* is a "god shelf" found in most homes. It is a little table with the names of Shinto gods or a family ancestor written on it.

D. Pluralist Claim of Shintoism's Similarity with Christianity - Worship

Then the sun goddess Amaterasu imparted unto the first emperor the myriad Maga-tama beads and the mirror which had been used to lure her out of the cave as well as

the sword Kusa-nagi...and said, "This mirror – have it with you as my spirit, and worship it just as you would worship my very presence (Shinto, Kojiki 39:2-3)."

*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts
(Psalms 96:7-8).*

E. Shintoism's Difference with Christianity

1. God – Christians believe that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4) and that they are to only worship Him (Luke 4:8). Shintoites believe in and worship more than one god (*Kojiki* 4-6).

2. Worship – Christians believe it is a violation of second commandment of God to worship any other god or idol (Exodus 20: 3-4) and is sin to worship any created thing (Romans 1:22). Shintoites believe worship created idols (*Kojiki* 39:2-3).

IV. Conclusion

A. Summary of Christianity

1. The God of Christianity is Unique

- a. God is Creator yet distinct from His creation (Isaiah 45:12; Hebrews 11:3). In Hinduism, Confucianism, and Taoism, God is just some abstract entity.
- b. God is all-powerful and to be feared (1 Chronicles 16:25) and yet loving toward all He has made (Psalms 145:13). The god of Islam is a vengeful and detached from His creatures.
- c. God is personal God who communicates with human beings (Deuteronomy 5:24; Psalms 115). The gods of Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism is are idols who cannot communicate.
- d. God gives to His creatures of His very self (John 3:16) and has complete control over all things (1 Chronicles 29:12). The god of Zoroastrianism is just a good mind giving advice and in a power struggle with evil.

2. Jesus Christ is Unique

- a. The influence of Jesus Christ is unique - His influence on the world has been greater than anyone else in history. No faith has had so many worshippers as Christianity and more books have been written about Jesus Christ than any other person. Muhammad had a large influence but scarcely comparable to that of Jesus and Muhammad's religion was militaristic, a religion of force. Jesus never compelled anyone with force, only love. Both Zoroaster and Confucius religions are nearly dead, and Buddha just wanted to escape this world away from his followers.
- b. The teaching of Jesus Christ is unique – He taught with great authority and wisdom without any training (Matthew 7:29). There have never been any improvements on any of His teachings and understandable and applicable for all people in every culture in every time. Christianity is the only religion that is successful wherever it goes, other religions simply do not work in certain places.
- c. The character of Jesus Christ was unique – He lived a perfectly moral life. No one has ever been able to find a fault in Him. Pontius Pilate the ruler who ultimately allow Jesus to be killed (Matthew 27:23-24), his wife (Matthew 27:19), and Jesus' disciples all testified that he was innocent of ever doing anything wrong (2 Corinthians 5:21). Muhammad ordered people to be killed who spoke against him. Zoroaster died fighting in a war for his religion. Buddha began his journey because he felt selfish desire. And Confucius marriage ended in divorce.
- d. The person of Jesus Christ was unique – No other person in history claimed to be God as Jesus Christ did (Matthew 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 14:9). Muhammad claimed to be a prophet but not God. Zoroaster said he saw God in a vision but did not claim to be God. Buddha claimed to know the way to enlightenment but did not claim he was God. And Confucius believed he knew how to live morally but did not claim he was God.

e. The death of Jesus Christ was unique – No other person in history died and then rose from the dead to permanently live for ever. To this day Muhammad, Zoroaster, Buddha, and Confucius are all dead, but Jesus Christ is alive.⁵²

3. The Salvation of Christianity is unique

a. Its salvation deals with human wickedness. It honestly acknowledges the inherent wickedness of all human beings (Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 15: 18; Romans 3:23; James 2:15; 4:17). Every other religion attempts to say that though all mankind continually does wicked things, people are still essentially good.

b. Its salvation cannot be earned (Ephesians 2:8-9). It honestly acknowledges that the individual's wrong doing incurs an infinite debt that could never be paid off. Every other religion attempts to do some sort of good works with the goal of achieving salvation. Jews attempt to do the works of the Torah. Muslims attempt to obey the five pillars. Zoroastrians and Confucians attempt to do good deeds. Hindus and Buddhists do good deeds to work of their bad karma. Hindus and Buddhists also do works of meditation along with Taoists. And Shintoites offer sacrifices to gods, as do Hindus.

c. Its salvation was provided for by its founder willingly giving up his life for everyone (John 10:18). No other religion's founder died for anyone else, or would have for people they knew hated them (Romans 5:7-8).

d. Its salvation is a free gift through belief in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). No other religion or its founder offered salvation as a free gift to any of its followers. In addition, no other founder of any religion called people to believe in their individual person for salvation (John 12:44).

e. Its salvation is secure, cannot change (John 10:28-29), and will result in eternity in heaven (John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:4).

B. Using Your Knowledge⁵³

1. Burden of Proof - In a courtroom, if someone makes a statement or a claim, the burden is on them to prove their case.

a. Often when talking to people about the truth of the Christian message they will raise up an objection they have not really thought through or understand. Sometimes just by asking questions about *what* people mean or *why* they think what they do, or *how* what they're saying works, can either cause them to see a problem in their thinking or cause them to really think about the truth for the first time. For example, if someone says that all religions are basically the same and are all equally valuable, ask them *how* they are the same. Most of the time when people make such a statement they do not know anything thing about different religions.

b. By asking a lot of questions you will learn more about where they are at in their thinking so that you know how to respond better.

c. Ask questions you know they cannot answer. For example, if you were talking to a Hindu you could ask them how you learn about Hinduism. They will answer:

⁵² For references to the evidence for Jesus Christ resurrection see footnote 31.

⁵³ Don Ashcraft wrote a great book with all kinds of ways one can use knowledge to be a better witness for Christ. Don Ashcraft, *Tongue-tied No More*, (Fullerton, CA: Evangelism House Publisher, 2003).

by reading the *Vedas* or by being taught by Hindu monk. Ask how one knows the *Vedas* or the teachings from the monk are true if everything one experiences with their senses is an illusion (*maya*) and not really real or true.

2. Red Herrings – Red Herrings are big sidetracks or skipping from one topic to another. Sometimes before you even begin to answer one question a person will ask you another one. Simply tell them you would love to talk about and answer that question too, but nicely ask you can finish answering their first question.
3. Be bold and confident.
 - a. Christianity is the one true religion that will stand up to any possible objection raised against it.

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5).
 - b. Do not be afraid to take the offensive. Use compound arguments to build a bigger and bigger case. For example, if you begin your conversation by answering a question about religious pluralism, do not stop once you have finished the defense but then take the offensive and start offering evidence of why Christianity is unique and better. Don't be afraid to attack other religions. You do not have to be tolerate of other religion's evil and hideous lies.
4. Body Language - Watch the person's body language, especially their eyes.
 - a. If a person looks confused slow down and restate your argument in a little bit different way.
 - b. Often times when talking to a person they will become more and more convinced of the truth of Christianity. When you see this, offer compassion and ask if they want to trust Christ as savior.
5. Pascal's Wager – Pascal said that if Christianity is right and you reject it you risk eternity in hell. If you do believe in Christianity and it turns out to be false you lose nothing. Ask them if they've ever thought much about eternity.
6. Offer a Response – Reiterate that no work or deed can save them. Explain that a prayer of faith in Christ is merely a confession of an inward work in their heart (Romans 10:9) but the proper response. Only pray with someone who truly says they want Christ. Just saying words in a prayer cannot and will not save them, they must truly desire Him in their heart and want to repent.

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