

The Uniqueness of Christianity

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Christianity – How It Differs From Other Religions

In the world we all live in today, there are many religions. No one would argue this point. In fact, new religions seem to pop up every few years or so. I have just been reading about one that Oprah Winfrey is pushing at the moment. So how are we to determine if there is one religion that is actually true? Is there one true religion? Maybe all religions are false? That is possible. Or maybe we just haven't found the one true religion yet. On the other hand, the modern worldview seems to think that almost *all* religious belief systems are true as long as the person in that particular religion is sincere in his/her beliefs. Unfortunately for those folks who believe this way, logic gets in the way. Why? Well, because most of the world's religions are exclusive. In other words, many of the world's most widely embraced religions say that they have found the true and only way to their concept of God... all other religions have got it wrong.

This lecture series will cover in some detail most of the current popular religious systems and show just how unique Christianity is when compared to all other religions. Then, it will be up to you to decide if any of these religions appear to be the one true way to God and worthy of your faith in adopting their belief system. As will be shown, logic dictates that only one can be true. On the other hand, it certainly is also true that all religions may be false. It is up to each person to decide for themselves.

I have chosen the following major religions to compare (estimated size in parentheses): Christianity (500 million-Protestant + 1 billion-Catholic), Judaism (14 million), Hinduism (900 million), New Age Religions (3 million), Buddhism (375 million), the Mormons (12.5 million), Islam (1.5 billion), Christian Science (500,000), Scientology(500,000) and the Jehovah Witness (15 million). Of course, there are scores of other religions, but I cannot realistically discuss them all. The ones I have chosen to discuss have very large followings in the world today. It is also true that most of the remaining world religions are subsets of one or more of these ten.

In order to systematically compare the world's religions, I have divided up this discussion into four different sections:

Topics of discussion:

- The origin and history of each religion's scriptures and belief system
- Characteristics of God in each religion
- Eternity – concepts of heaven, eternity, salvation
- Evidence for and against the veracity of each religion

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I: The Origin and History of Each Religion:

Introduction:

In this first section, I will go into some detail concerning the origin and history of each of the ten religious systems discussed in this treatise. As will be seen, the founder(s) of these various religions vary amazingly in many ways. These people vary in character, intelligence, education, position, motives, and many other ways. Some religions were started by only one individual. Others came into existence through the efforts of many people. Some began in the span of just a few years; others developed slowly over centuries.

Some of the basic theology of each of these religions is noted in the pages to follow. Additional discussion of their theology is provided in the following two sections.

Each of these religions has developed some form of scriptures over time. They also have their own unique concept of God. These two topics are briefly discussed in this section. However, as God is such a critical part of any religion, the next section of this treatise is set aside to detail the attributes of God(s) in each of these ten religions.

Hinduism:

Hinduism is difficult to define in that it has offered a wide number of beliefs and teachings over the 3 ½ thousand years of its existence. The origin can be traced back to the region of the world that is now Pakistan and northwestern India. In fact, the name Hindu comes from the Indus River which flows through Pakistan. This area was populated by dark-skinned people, referred to as Dravidians. They had a religion that centered around polytheism, the worship of nature, fertility and human sexuality. Around the second millennium B.C., light-skinned Aryans migrated into this area from Russia and central Asia, bringing Vedism with them – this is a religion replete with much chanting and sacrifices. The mixing of the religions of these two civilizations resulted in the Hindu religion.

Some define Hinduism simply as the “religion common to the people of India”. It does not have any unified creed or set of beliefs that is accepted dogma by all adherents of the religion. Yet it has some basic tenants that can be outlined here. Hinduism originated from a body of writings known as Vedas, meaning “wisdom” or “knowledge” (written from 1500 BC to 400 BC). There are four Vedas: Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Artharvaveda. These writings are essentially chants or hymns to the various Hindu gods. The Hindus believe that these writings were divine in their origin. Hindu rishas (or seers) are said to have received this literature from the gods.

The concluding portion of the Vedas is known as the Upanishads which can be looked upon as a summary of the Hindu teachings. They were composed between 800-600 B.C. Many still exist today. These beliefs include an *impersonal god (or gods) of the universe, the concept of karma, and reincarnation*. In the Upanishads, there is a shift

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from the earlier emphasis in the Vedas on things such as polytheism, human sacrifice and rituals to pantheism and other concepts more identified with modern Hindu beliefs. The belief in many gods gave way to the belief in Brahman, the impersonal god of the universe. The concept of the atman, or soul, is also developed. It is the goal of all Hindu believers to one day unify their atman with Brahman.

The next period in the development of the Hindu religion was marked by the writing of two major epic tales: “The Ramayana” and “The Mahabharata”. Both were written in the years between 400 B.C. and 400 A.D. The first tale involves the story of the righteous king, Rama, who was supposed to be the incarnation of the god, Vishnu. The second epic concerns the deeds of the Aryan clans. The most sacred Hindu modern day book, “The Bhagavad Gita”, was added to “The Mahabharata” in the first century A.D. This book has an important theme to the Hindus. It endorses the concept of bhakti, the devotion to one particular god as a means of salvation. In this book the character, Arjuna, puts his devotion to the god Vishnu above any of his personal desires. Although this results in his readiness to kill his own relatives, it also resulted in the potential for his salvation.

One other very unique aspect of the Hindu religion was added around 500 B.C. This resulted in the caste system (Varna) which is still very much in existence today in India. Apparently, Brahma (the creator god) decided to create four sets of people, each with different characteristic abilities and stations in life:

- From Brahma’s head – Brahmins (priests)
- From Brahma’s arms – Kshatriyas (warriors and nobles)
- From Brahma’s thighs – Vaisyas (merchants and artisans)
- From Brahma’s feet – Shudras (slaves, the remaining people)

Certainly it is interesting to consider what India would be like today had it not lived under this religious caste system for the past two thousand years.

Within the United States there are several subsets of Hindu belief systems that have become popular in the last century. These include TM (Transcendental Meditation), “est”, Hare Krishna, and Rajneeshism. All four are forms of Hinduism. The fact is that it is difficult to define the commonality of all of these forms of Hinduism. They all emphasize different ideas. Ninan Smart, an expert on world religions discusses the Hindu religion: “What is the essence of Hinduism? A hard question. There are orthodox Hindus who deny the existence of God. There are others who while not denying God, relegate him to a second place, as a secondary or illusory phase of the Absolute. What remains as essential to Hindu belief? Certainly, the doctrines of **rebirth** and that of an **eternal soul**. The picture of *the world as a place where the immortal spirit within man is virtually endlessly implicated in the round of reincarnation has dominated Indian imagination for about three millennia.*” One other important doctrine of virtually all Hindu adherents is known by the term moksha. Moksha can be defined as *liberation*

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from the bondage of re-incarnation. In fact, moksha can be looked at as the Hindu equivalent of salvation. This concept will be developed to a greater extent in a later section.

As we just noted, there is no set Hindu concept of God. Theologian Walter Martin notes that Hindu concepts of God range from, “monoism (all existence is one substance); pantheism (God is in creation as a soul is in a body; that is, the creator and creation are one); animism (God or gods live in non-human objects such as trees or animals); polytheism (there are many gods), monotheism (there is only one God).

In America, one dominant form of Hinduism is called Vedanta. Vedanta means “the end of Vedas”. Recall that the Upanishads were a collection of writings that summarize the Vedas... Vedanta is the school that systemized the teaching of the Upanishads. Vedanta has become the predominant modern Hindu philosophy. This belief system teaches that there is an impersonal god called Brahman. **Brahman is real, yet nothing else is real.** Everything else is a dream of Brahman. This illusion is the entire universe including everything within it. Man himself, outwardly, is an illusion. The god, Brahman, resides within this illusory universe. Man, in his inner nature, is one with Brahman. It should be the goal of all people to go inward and obtain “enlightenment” – realization of one’s inner nature as god. The means to do this typically involves cultivation of altered states of consciousness through transcendental meditation, yoga, etc. Man will undergo a series of rebirths (reincarnation) until at some point in the future each person will achieve a merging into this impersonal god, Brahman. The karma of any given lifetime will determine how a person will come back in the next lifetime. It could be at a higher level... or at a lower level... even as an animal. The merging into Brahman may take millions of lifetimes, but once we totally recognize that all is an illusion except Brahman, we will finally be able to become “one” with Brahman... whatever that means. Then, our rebirthing cycle ends and so do we! Sounds great. What is the evidence for this being true? None.

There are massive volumes of scriptures in the Hindu religion. These have been written over the millennia. There is great inconsistency in these writings as evidenced by the Hindu’s varied concepts concerning God. One consistent concept, however, is that the Hindu states that **there was no beginning nor will there ever be an end.** **Everything exists in a cycle;** that includes the universe, God(s) and everything within the universe (including mankind). All will come forth from essentially nothing, then go back to this nothing, then come forth again, and so forth. As noted above, humanity is involved in this cycle through reincarnation, the cycle of rebirth. At some point, through a person’s own effort, his/her particular individual cycle will end. That is the goal of each human, although we may not know it yet.

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Buddhism:

The Buddhist religion can trace its roots to Siddhartha Gautama, the son of an Indian chieftain, born around 563 B.C. At that time and in that region of the world, the Hindu religion was pre-eminent. Buddhism was an outgrowth of Hinduism as will be seen. The history of his life was written down approximately 300-400 years after his death. Certainly, it is impossible to say how much of this “history” actually happened and how much is a fanciful embellishment. For instance, one story has it that Siddhartha was born while his mother stood up holding the branch of a tree. He was immediately able to stand and walk. He took seven steps in all cardinal directions and proclaimed himself ruler of the universe! Maybe so, maybe not.

In any event, the basic story of Buddha’s life has it that shortly after his birth his father was visited by a hermit named Asita who told him that his son would become a great king if he remained in the palace, but would become a savior of the world (that is, a Buddha) if he left the palace and lived the life of a religious man. It seems that his father was more concerned about his son becoming a great king in this age than the world’s savior. Therefore, he created an atmosphere whereby his son would want for nothing and would be watched over by royal guards to make sure he never went out of the palace. Yet, one day when he was a young man, Siddhartha eluded the guards and went exploring in the outside world. There he experienced three life changing events over the course of three days:

- He saw a feeble old man
- He saw a disease ridden person
- He saw a corpse.

These three sad events resulted in the young man pondering some of life’s most perplexing questions, such as how is it that there is so much suffering in the world? Siddhartha left home in the quest for the answer to this and similar questions. As it turns out, he left on the night that his young wife gave birth to his first son, Rahula (meaning “hindrance”). That is, his son was a hindrance for him searching for the “truth”.

For six years he wandered the earth in search for this “truth”. He came across two yogis who taught him to restrict his diet to virtually nothing... this yielded no worthwhile results. Later he met five monks that told him he must practice a life of asceticism (ex. lying on thorns, giving up washing his body, holding his breath, etc.) – again, this practice gave no worthwhile results. Finally, he realized that there was a better path - the “Middle Way” - that would enable him to find life’s true meaning. Extreme asceticism was not the answer. Unrestrained sensuality was not the answer. The answer was in the *middle*. He then ate a normal meal which caused the monks to leave in disappointment. This presented no problem to Siddhartha. He simply went into Gaya (a city in northeastern India) where he sat in the lotus position under a fig tree vowing to remain there until he found the “truth” behind life’s mysteries. He was 35 years old at the time.

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That seemingly did the trick! After meditating for only a few hours, he had a vision of reincarnation, a life cycle of varying degrees of existences, both the good and bad according to their karma. With continued meditation, he soon reached complete enlightenment! He finally had understood how to obtain freedom from the cycle of reincarnation. He had achieved total understanding. He had become the “enlightened one” – i.e. Buddha. After careful consideration, he decided to share what he had learned with his fellow man. He rejected the other choice... keeping all of this knowledge of enlightenment to himself. For the next forty years, he travelled the surrounding area to teach the doctrines that he had found to be the basis of this new religion, later called Buddhism. He died at the age of eighty after purportedly eating some spoiled food.

All of Buddha’s teachings related to the goal of escaping samsara – the cycle of rebirths experienced in reincarnation. One can easily see the common ground with Hinduism. However, he did not hold with certain important Hindu beliefs such as:

- Buddha did not believe that the Vedas and Upanishads were divine writings
- Following these teachings would not result in nirvana
- Buddha denied that man had an atman (soul) that is part of the Brahman
- He did not believe that all was unreal except Brahman

Also, as opposed to the Hindu belief, Buddha did not believe that suffering was only an illusion. He felt that suffering in this life was very real. He believed that the suffering in this life had to be escaped. Once this was accomplished, the person was said to have reached **nirvana** – the complete deliverance from pain, worry, etc.

Buddha taught the following way to enlightenment, the Middle Way:

Four “Noble Truths” needed to be followed in order to eventually reach nirvana.

The Four Noble Truths:

1. Diagnosis: The condition of all existence is suffering.
2. Cause: Suffering is caused by selfishness, desire and craving
3. Prognosis: Selfishness, desire and craving can be overcome... suffering will cease when a person can rid himself of all desires
4. Treatment: **The Eightfold Path:** A system of therapy designed to develop habits that will release people from the restrictions caused by ignorance and craving

The Eightfold Path:

- Right views
- Right resolve
- Right speech
- Right behavior
- Right occupation
- Right effort
- Right contemplation
- Right Meditation

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After freeing oneself of all desires and evil, a person must concentrate his efforts in meditation so that he can overcome any sensation of pleasure or pain and enter a state of transcending consciousness and attain a state of perfection. Buddhists believe that through self effort one can attain the state of peace and eternal bliss called nirvana. Then the cycle of the curse of reincarnation is gone. Buddha claimed that anyone who would recognize the Noble Truths and then follow the Eight Fold path would be able to reach nirvana.

The essence of these four truths is the understanding that life is full of pain, everything in life is unreal because it is so transitory, and that the “self” is a false image comprised of energy, thoughts, hopes and fears. The key to reaching nirvana was to abolish all earthly desires and live an exemplary life. Do not let anything in this life give you pleasure and let nothing give you pain. Once a person is able to eliminate all desires and reach purity of thought and action, they could reach nirvana and be released from the cycle of rebirth. While still on this earth, they will experience the joy of complete oneness with reality.

Buddhism holds that the ultimate goal and end of the cycle of re-incarnation is the realization of nirvana; what happens to a person after attaining nirvana and then subsequently dying cannot be explained, as it is outside of all conceivable experience. It has been referenced by some Hindu’s as the attainment of total ‘annihilation’. Apparently there will be no more conscious realization of that individual’s atman (soul)... hence the use of the word “annihilation” to describe this state of being.

This differs slightly from the Hindu, who believes that upon reaching this stage, the person will become united with the “universal soul” (ex. Brahman). Even in Hinduism, however, there will be no conscious awareness once a person unites with Brahman. Until this stage is reached, the Buddhist will be born over and over again into different beings. The karma of any individual lifetime determines how that person will come back in his next life cycle.

Buddhism has spread far outside of India. There now exists a large sect known as Mahayana Buddhism that is followed in certain areas of China. There are so many scriptures that have been written since the original attributed to Buddha himself, that it is virtually impossible to read them all! Followers generally just find a portion of scripture that they find appealing and base their particular theology on these writings. Scriptures have been added to over the centuries to the point that contradictory teachings now appear. This generally is not a problem as each sect only adheres to their chosen sections of scriptures.

Zen Buddhism is a branch of Mahayana that has caught the fancy of many Westerners. It puts a lot of emphasis on meditation. Of course, its goal is final enlightenment as is true of Buddhism in general.

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons):

The next religion to be discussed came into existence less than two hundred years ago. Its origin is a really interesting story and certainly shines a light on the likelihood of the truthfulness of its message and scriptures.

Joseph Smith Jr. was born in Vermont, December 23, 1805. His father was well known for his treasure hunting exploits, seer-stone divination, use of divining rods, talismans, and similar things. Joe Jr. followed in his father's footsteps and the two of them spent a lot of time and energy digging for treasure on their land in Vermont and, later, in New York. A vast array of deep craters was left behind as a testament to their searches for treasure, all unsuccessful. He later regretted these numerous digs for treasure and denied that he actually undertook them. Yet his mother wrote in her biography of her son, that a man named Stoal had come to ask Joseph for help in digging for an old silver mine "on account of having heard that he (Joseph) possessed certain means by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye." There is no doubt that young Joseph was a "peep-stone" enthusiast and treasure digger in his youth. He had also told fortunes and purportedly located lost objects by the use of peep-stones using their inherent "supernatural" powers. A court hearing dated March 20, 1926 – *New York vs. Joseph Smith* revealed that Smith "had a certain stone which he had occasionally looked at to determine where hidden treasures in the bowels of the earth were". He was found guilty of money-digging as this was a crime in New York in the 1820's. This tendency may relate to those things that Joseph Smith got involved in as he reached the ripe old age of 15 (in 1920). Keep in mind that Joseph was only a boy.

In 1820, Smith writes later in the book, the *Pearl of Great Price*, he was visited by God the Father and God the Son. He was a lad of 15 years old. His two visitors told him that the Christian Church had gone astray and that they were going to restore the Church through him, Joseph Smith Jr. In 1823, Smith was visited by the angel Moroni, the glorified son of Mormon. He writes about this in the *Pearl of Great Price*. Unfortunately, in a later edition of the book, Smith identified the angel as being Nephi instead of Moroni. This blunder has plagued the Mormons ever since as it is surely poor form to credit the revelation of the book of Mormon to two different individuals. A few years after the visit by Moroni (or Nephi), Joseph Smith claimed to receive the "golden plates". The *Book of Mormon* was allegedly written on these plates. The plates were unearthed in the hill of Cumorah, near Palmyra, New York. Joseph was also provided with the Urim and Thummin, two special spectacles that enabled him to translate supernaturally the "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics" into English. This resulted in the translation of *The Book of Mormon*. A curtain separated Smith from his helpers during the two years of translation, 1827-1829. This book was published in 1830. One of those helping with the translation, Oliver Cowdery, became a good friend of Joseph.

On May 15, 1929, John the Baptist was sent to their New York home by Peter, James and John the Apostle to confer the Aaronic Priesthood onto these two young men.

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On June 9, 1830 a meeting was called to begin the new religion with some local townsfolk. A big event was the “conversion” of a zealous preacher, Parley Pratt in September 1830. Another popular preacher from Ohio, Sidney Rigdon converted 100 people of his own “flock”... the Mormon Church had begun to grow! These men had large roles to play in the beginnings of the Mormon religion. The Church soon moved to Kirtland, Ohio and then onto Jackson County, Missouri, growing along the way. Along this way, Joseph received over 135 more direct revelations from God... including one authorizing polygamy. Later in the 19th century, the Mormons abandoned this practice as they were in danger of being shut down by the U.S. Government. Some fundamentalists groups still hold to this practice today.

The holy books of the Mormon religion include *The Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine of Covenants*, the *Pearl of Great Price*, and the King James Version of the Bible. The *Book of Mormon* was written to give another witness to the truth and divinity of Jesus Christ and to explain the history of the New World and its people. It tells the story of two ancient civilizations of the American Continents. The first was named the Jaredites. They came over to the New World after the Tower of Babel dispersion. Eventually they were destroyed due to their apostasy. The second great civilization resulted from the dispersion created by the Babylonian invasion and captivity in 600 B.C. Many of the Jews were taken to Babylon, others went to Egypt, still others scattered to other parts of the world, including the New World. This group was led by Lehi and later his son, Nephi. They eventually divided into two groups, the Nephites and the Lamanites (cursed due to their sins to have a darker skin... they became known as the American Indian... i.e. Native American). It is unfortunate for the Mormons that one of their holy books looks at dark skin as a curse. Christ visited the New World to preach the gospel, institute the covenant of Baptism and Communion. Eventually the Lamanites defeated the Nephites which left the Native American Indian as the only surviving civilization when Columbus came to America in 1492. That is a very short synopsis of the history noted in *The Book of Mormon*. The question, of course, remains as to what evidence there is that any of this is true. Let us take a look at some of this evidence.

First, let us take a deeper look at what folks thought and wrote about Joseph Smith during the first half of the 19th century... when he lived and originated this religion. A man named Pomeroy Tucker collected many sworn statements written by folks who knew Joseph Smith when he lived in New York. Here is just one of these quotes: “He could utter the most palatable exaggeration or marvelous absurdity with the utmost of gravity.” Another man, E.D. Howe, obtained a statement signed by 62 residents of Smith’s hometown that included the following, “We consider them (*the Smith family*) destitute of that moral character which ought to entitle them to the confidence of the community. They were particularly famous for visionary projects, spent much of their time digging for money which they pretended was under the earth; and to this day, large excavations may be seen in the earth not far from their residence.

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Joseph Smith Sr., and his son Joseph, were in particular considered destitute of moral character and addicted to various vicious habits.”

While in Nauvoo, IL, Smith began to be disliked by that community as well, especially for his stand on polygamy. Several articles appeared in a publication of that town called the Nauvoo Expositor. Smith was arrested for his alleged involvement in the destruction of this newspaper. Unfortunately, a local mob intervened to murder Joseph and his brother before justice could run its course. Thus Smith met an untimely martyr’s death in 1843.

In any religion, it is important to evaluate the evidence for the truthfulness of its scriptures. Let’s take a look at *The Book of Mormon* and the *Pearl of Great Price*. Joseph Smith was certainly aware of the skepticism of his newly formed religion. He claimed in the *Pearl of Great Price* that a Professor, Charles Anthon from Columbia University in New York, stated that his translation of the reformed Egyptian originals was correct and that the additional un-translated scriptures that he was shown at that time were a collection of Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyrian and Arabic writings. His friend, Martin Harris (a farmer) had taken the copied scriptures to that great university for verification. There was one big problem with this story, however. It did not happen as stated by Joseph Smith!

When Professor Anthon learned that his name was being used to verify these Mormon scriptures, he flatly denied as “perfectly false” the assertion that he had affirmed them as being “reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics”. In fact, Anthon said that “it was all a trick, perhaps a hoax.” He instead stated that the supposedly copied scripture “consisted of all kinds of crooked characters disposed in columns, and had evidently been prepared by some person who had before him at the time a book containing various alphabets. Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses and nourishes, Roman letters inverted or placed sideways, were arranged in perpendicular columns, and the whole ended in a rude delineation of a circle, divided into various compartments, decked with various strange marks, and evidently copied from a Mexican Calendar.” He added, in a long letter, that people were investing large sums of money into this start-up religion and he now viewed the entire enterprise as “a part of a scheme to cheat the farmer of his money.” He concluded that the “paper” contained anything else but the purported “Egyptian hieroglyphics”. A final point on this topic is that Anthon should not have been able to establish anything concerning the scriptures anyway, as he was not using the famous special glasses... yet, Anthon was able to “read” these scriptures, or what passed as scriptures. Joseph Smith should not have even suggested that Anthon attempt to translate the words... but, Smith did ask.

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Islam:

Islam is the religion of the Muslims. It was started by the prophet Muhammad. The Muslim religion was started about 14 hundred years ago by one individual. Muhammad lived from 570 – 632 AD. Both of his parents died by the time he was six. He was raised first by his grandfather and later by his uncle. As Muhammad entered adulthood, he became markedly religious in his attitude and actions. He spent many hours praying, fasting and meditating, often in caves for added seclusion. He was a leader of men, astute and generous. When crossed, however, he could be cruel. When he was 25, he married a 40 year old woman named Khadijah.

Muhammad came to believe in one God as he grew into adulthood. During his youth spent in Mecca, most people were polytheists, a concept he eventually came to reject. He spent much time in meditation and prayer and eventually experienced what he came to believe were “visions”. His first notable vision was at the age of 40 (circa 610 AD) when he said that he was visited by the angel Gabriel and was given certain revelations that he stated were from Allah (his God). At first he was unsure of the source of his visions. His wife, Khadijah, convinced him to believe that they were from Allah. She was his first convert to this new religion. Initially, the Meccans looked at Muhammad with “smiling patience, called him a half-wit, and proposed to send him, at their own expense, to a physician who might cure him of his madness.” (Durant, The Age of Faith) But Muhammad persisted. Abu Bakr, a wealthy merchant, was his second convert and later became one of his successors. Bakr was a very important ‘catch’ as he was the first of the influential Quraish to accept Muhammad and his new religion. Abu soon led five other Meccan leaders to this new way of life. These six men became Muhammad’s “Companions” whose memories later would result in the writings of the Koran.

So Mohammad had thus begun to receive revelations from Allah. He continued to receive these revelations for the remaining 22 years of his life. He shared these teachings with those around him, first with slaves, the poor and oppressed. His teachings were not well accepted among the general population in his hometown of Mecca. After an unsuccessful ten years of evangelizing that city, he eventually was forced to leave Mecca. Not enough of the town leaders there accepted Muhammad or his teachings. In 619 AD, misfortune came to the fledgling religion. His first wife, Khadija died... so did Abu Talib, his protector. Feeling discouraged and at risk in Mecca, Muhammad left for Taif in 620 AD, sixty miles south of Mecca. He was also rejected there. Then he moved on to Medina. He took along a couple hundred converts to his religion, later to be called “Islam”. This “flight” to Medina took place on July 16, A.D. 622. This is known as the Hijira (flight). This date is the turning point for Islam. Medina is where he built up a potent theocratic dictatorship.

In the early years, Muhammad had no difficulties with Christians or Jews in this area. He even went so far as to say that Allah had revealed in his frequent visions

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that converts should pray facing the Holy City of Jerusalem during their daily prayers. Muhammad, at first, allowed the Jews and Christians to go their own way. He even incorporated many of the concepts from the Bible (very loosely) into his “Suras” – verbal ‘chapters’ that later would make up the Koran – although, he altered the original meaning of many of these biblical verses over time. However, as the Jews and Christians were unwilling to accept him and his teachings, his attitude changed. His emphasis switched from Jerusalem to Mecca, his home town... including the required direction of prayer. As it turned out, Medina was ripe for the message Muhammad brought and many of its people converted to Islam... including many slaves. For one thing, his message was one of monotheism, the message of the Jews and Christians. Some people did not evaluate the important differences in the theology and instead just accepted this new religion as it began to gain power and prestige in the area. In his first ceremony in Medina, Muhammad began the tradition of praying while facing a specific direction and prostrating oneself three times – this tradition is still in force today.

Now with a powerful following collected from his time in Medina, he began his quest of spreading this new religion. As his fame and power increased, he displayed a severe ruthlessness towards those who would not convert to his new religion – often resulting in wholesale slaughter of his enemies. He zealously propagated Islam in the years until his death in A.D. 632. Much of this was accomplished via military might. In fact, he led twenty-seven raids and planned a total of thirty-eight more! This was certainly *a religion of war*. In 630 AD, Muhammad led a raid on Mecca and took over the city of his youth. He proclaimed this city to be the Holy City of Islam and decreed that no unbeliever should ever be allowed to set foot on its sacred soil. Now, this formerly exiled “prophet” had returned as master of that city and all that he held important in life!

None can reasonably deny that Muhammad was subject to visions, seizures, mood swings and other unusual emotional states. The question that remains is, “Why?” Was it some form of demon possession? Was it a mental illness? Or was it direct communication with Allah? At times, both Muhammad himself and his step mother thought that he was possessed by one of the Jinn (a demonic spirit). In fact, in his first vision, Muhammad was going to throw himself off of a cliff because he was so perplexed. Only Gabriel’s intervention telling him that he was Allah’s apostle kept him from killing himself. Eventually, Muhammad became convinced that these visions were “real” messages to him from Allah. When he received these revelations he would become agitated and sweat profusely. At times, it was reported he would fall to the ground and foam at the mouth.

Early on in the production of the Koran (the primary Muslim Holy Book based on Muhammad’s visions), many others would venture to doubt that its ultimate source was Allah. Of course, as his influence and power grew, these dissenting opinions were rarely offered... if one valued his life. In conclusion, these visions of Muhammad, when

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written down, became the scriptures for the religion of Islam. Muhammad died without naming a successor. This fact resulted in a power struggle that created the Sunni and the Shiite branches of Islam. Each claims to be the true Islam.

Islam holy books include the *Holy Bible* and the *Koran*. Muslims believe, however, that Jews and Christians have corrupted the Bible. Therefore, if there are any discrepancies between the Koran and the Bible, it is because of the corruption of the Bible by *the infidels*. The Koran is the only real source of truth as it has not been corrupted.

One final point concerning the relation of Muhammad and the Jews: Medina had a lot of Jewish settlers, and initially Muhammad incorporated some of Jewish history as part of his religion. For example, he noted the Arabs were descendants of Abraham through his son Ishmael. However, in the Koran, Abraham's connection to the Jews is denied. Muhammad asserts that Abraham is only the patriarch of Islam, not Judaism as well. Also, as noted earlier, although he originally told his converts that they should pray while facing Jerusalem, he eventually changed the direction from Jerusalem to Mecca. His anger toward the Jews continued to grow, eventually resulting in the expulsion of two Jewish tribes from Medina and the murder of all the members of a third Jewish tribe (except for the women and children, who were sold into slavery). Even worse for the long-term treatment of the Jews were a number of inflammatory statements about Jews that Muhammad made that appear in the Koran — which, over the years, has stoked Arab/Islamic anti-Semitism. So, in conclusion, Islam (the name given to this religion) came from the teaching of just one individual, Muhammad. If what he stated was not true, then there is no truth as a basis for the Muslim religion!

Modern day Islam teaches about “Five Pillars of Islam” that all Muslims are expected to observe as they work their way to heaven. They are:

- ❖ Profession of faith in Allah and noting that Muhammad is his prophet
- ❖ Worship is to be observed five times each day
- ❖ Alms-giving of 2% is to be given to the poor
- ❖ Fasting during the month of Ramadan
- ❖ Pilgrimage to Mecca at some time during one’s life

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Jehovah's Witnesses:

Charles Taze Russell was the founder of this religion. In 1876, at the age of 24 he was elected to be a pastor of a small group of people in Pittsburgh. Charles had quite a few unusual ideas on the Bible, and was able to express them through his writings in a publication he began at that time, which eventually became known as the "Watchtower", still published today. Another periodical, "Awake", was later added, and the two of them grew to have a combined circulation of approximately 30 million copies per month!

Sadly for those following Russell, he was shown to be an individual who used his position to profit financially – in ways reminiscent of some television evangelists today. He even advertised special wheat seed that would grow 5 times faster than typical wheat – it was \$1.00 per pound. The proceeds would go to the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, which contributed to the publication of Russell's sermons... and to Russell himself. Naturally, when the government investigated, they found the whole thing a scam.

There were many other instances in Russell's lifetime where he was found to be using his position for personal profit. A court case in 1913 resulted in Russell being labeled a "charlatan". A Rev. Ross had published a pamphlet denouncing Russell in 1912. Russell unadvisedly sued Ross for libel. Unfortunately, the tables were turned on Russell and he was indeed *proven* to be a charlatan in that court case. Some of the findings included the fact that this self-proclaimed Bible "scholar" had only a seventh grade education and he could not read Hebrew or Greek. Russell had just previously stated that he did have a fine higher education, and that he was ordained (he was not) and that he could understand Greek and Hebrew well. This was why people were to believe him regarding his atypical interpretations of the Bible. This was a man who said it would be better to leave the Bible unread than to neglect his books on the Bible. He also noted that without his commentaries, a person would be walking in darkness if left with only the Holy Bible at their disposal.

After the death of Russell, a lawyer named Joseph F. Rutherford became the new president of this Society. He kept this position until his death twenty-five years later. He instituted many changes, including the name change for the Society to *Jehovah's Witness*. He also began their now famous door-to-door witnessing program. He wanted to build the organization and felt that this would be a great mechanism to do so. He convinced many people to join, as he told them that there would be only 144,000 people who would make it to heaven – and, of course, one would have to be a *Witness* to be one of them! He also said that Armageddon would come in 1925. When this did not happen, he carried on, undeterred. He just kept pushing the date back intermittently. Another problem arose when the *Witnesses* reached the total of 144,000 members. Now there would be no stimulus to join since heaven was no longer attainable. Not a problem. Those who joined prior to 1935 would be part of the 144,000 going to heaven. Subsequent members would become a part of the great crowd who would stay on earth in

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a new paradise after Armageddon and the Millennium. Later this was amended so that there are still slots available today to be part of the 144,000 destined for heaven. Those who are superb individuals may become part of this heaven bound group. They will know if they are included in that lucky number.

Today, many Jehovah Witnesses attempt to distance themselves from their founder. The problem is that their belief system is still based on his teachings. If it were not for his confused interpretation of so many doctrines of the Bible, there would be no Jehovah Witnesses. Given that the founder was a confused, uneducated charlatan, one would expect his religion would be faulty and incorrect in its beliefs. Note that I certainly do not suggest that most of the people of this religious cult are themselves charlatans, uneducated or anything but fine people. They have just latched onto the wrong belief system and are under massive intimidation (to be discussed later) not to search out the truth. Any religion that attempts to stop their adult members from the pursuit of the truth, wherever it leads, is very likely to be wrong. No one should fear the truth concerning God.

Christian Science:

This Church was founded by Mary Baker Eddy. She was born in 1821 in New Hampshire. She was troubled with frequent illnesses, some apparently physical, others probably more emotional. At the age of 22, she married George Glover who died only seven months later. Mary was so distraught that she was given morphine for some mental relief – not that unusual in those days. Throughout her life, morphine was used at times for its “medicinal” value. In 1862, Mary travelled to Maine to see Dr. P.P. Quimby for the treatment of her “spinal inflammation”. She was quickly healed and gave all the credit to the doctor. Quimby had written a book entitled “Science of Health” that Mary found very helpful. Later she used much of this book as she wrote her popular *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. She had a Rev. J.H. Wiggin edit her book. He later published a manuscript in which he detailed his part in the editing and rewriting of Eddy’s book. The major problem was that Mary plagiarized several sections of Dr. Quimby’s book. No less a source than the New York Times ran a big article showing the side by side similarities in the two books. Mary did not stop her plagiarizing with her first book. She also “borrowed” great pieces of material from other authors over the years in her other books such as “Miscellaneous Readings”.

In 1866, Mary Eddy was seriously injured in a fall. She almost died, and later attributed her healing to her God. She spent the next several years studying to find the secret to this healing... and to her new religion. She dubbed this religion Christian Science in 1875 coincident with the publishing of her book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. It is worth noting that Horace T. Wentworth, whose mother was a housemate with Mary Eddy from 1867-1870, wrote the following: “As I have seen the amazing spread of this delusion and the way in which men and women are offering up

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money and the lives of their children to it, I have felt that it is a duty I owe to the public to make it known. I have no hard feelings toward Eddy, no axe to grind, no interest to serve; I simply feel that it is due the thousands of good people who have made Christian Science the anchorage of their souls and its founder the infallible guide of their daily life, to keep this no longer to myself. I desire that people who take themselves and their helpless children into Christian Science shall do so with the full knowledge that this is not divine revelation but simply the idea of an old-time Maine healer (*Quimby*).” Wentworth then added the actual manuscripts that Eddy taught from during those years she spent with his mother... a copy of P.P. Quimby’s book with Eddy’s edits on the pages!

Eddy left for Lynn, Massachusetts soon after publishing her book. There she opened a school which attracted 4,000 students at \$300 a person for a short semester course. This was a whole lot of money 125 years ago! She was off to a great start at making *big money*. Similar ideas over the next twenty years allowed her to die with a net worth of \$3,000,000! She had a variety of mechanisms to make money. One easy one was to frequently publish a book of “great importance” even though none but a few sentences were any different than her previous books. Yet, people would buy her books, and she would pocket the money.

Christian Science has some unusual tenants. Eddy wrote, “Man is not matter; he is not made of brain, blood, bones and other material elements... Man is spiritual and perfect; and because he is spiritual and perfect, he must be so understood in Christian Science. Man is idea, the image of Love; he is not physique.” The central idea of Christian Science is that of the restored power of healing that was somehow lost since the days of the early church.

This church of Mary Baker Eddy has survived until the present day. It had approximately 1 million members at the time of her death in 1910. This was over 1% of the population at the time. At the turn of this current century, this church still has about the same number of followers. It has fallen on some difficult times of late, especially relating to lawsuits that have been brought against members who have followed certain basic church principals... to the detriment of their own children’s health, and even life.

Scientology:

This is a religion that has made the headlines in recent years because of several movie stars that have become famous members. John Travolta and Tom Cruise are the two most often mentioned. L. Ron Hubbard is the founder of this somewhat atypical religion. Hubbard was born in 1911 and was a popular science fiction writer of the 1930’s and 40’s. You may note some science fiction themes in his religion as we review his ideas. In May 1950, Hubbard released *Dianetics: A Modern Science of Mental Health*. One year later, he released his first book specifically on the subject of Scientology and started his Church of Scientology in California in 1953.

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His books contained a biographical piece with four fallacies and/or outright lies including: his extensive travels in Asia as a youth, his excellent Ivy League education, his self-cure from extensive injuries (resulting from his own amazing discoveries) and his seemingly miraculous recoveries from twice being pronounced dead. As it turns out, **none** of the claims just mentioned are true. One thing is true, however, he was a very successful science fiction writer and his religious books have influenced many.

Hubbard was married three times. His second marriage, to Sara Northrup, ended disastrously as he entered it without having divorced his first wife. The divorce papers by his second wife also claimed that Hubbard beat his wife, strangled her and kidnapped their child while fleeing to Cuba. She also claimed that Hubbard counseled her to commit suicide if she “really loved” him. This second marriage began when Ron and Sara met at an occult meeting led by a disciple of the famous Satanist, Alister Crowley... also known as the “Beast 666”. Hubbard is mentioned in many letters exchanged between Crowley and this disciple, Jack Parsons. Sara was the girlfriend of Parsons when she first met Hubbard. She was going to become part of the whole Satan worship - black magic shenanigans that Crowley and Parsons led in those days. However, Hubbard took her away before she became too deeply involved in that lifestyle. Years later, L. Ron stated that he only was involved in this lifestyle because he was undercover for Naval Intelligence... this has never been corroborated and seems quite unlikely. For instance, why would he need to become involved in a bigamist marriage? Hubbard also impressed Crowley with his knowledge of the occult rituals (as noted in some of Crowley’s letters). Notably, Ron also uses occult sources for his *Dianetics* book including, “the Medicine Man of the Goldi people, Shamans of North Borneo, Sioux medicine men, and cults of Los Angeles. Certainly, these are vastly different sources than those of the Jewish and Christian Holy Book.

His last wife, Mary Sue Whipp was involved in a covert operation against the U.S. Government in the late 1970’s. Hubbard died in 1986 from a cerebral hemorrhage. His followers announced that he had discarded his body to move on to the next level outside his earthly body.

The basic premise of Scientology revolves around the “science of the mind”. These ideas came from the writings of Hubbard. Today, a reasonable idea of what they believe can be found by referring to their web site.

Here are some *direct quotes from their web site* describing some of their beliefs:

“The body is something you have, not who you are.”

“If you are not your body, what are you?”

“Your mind is something you use to figure things out.”

“When you think of something you get a picture of it. What is it that is looking at the pictures? It is you.”

“You are a being, an intelligence, a consciousness.”

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“You have a body. You have a mind. You *are* a thetan” “Scientology gives you tools you can use to reach your full abilities.” <However, these tools are not cheap>

“The Way to Happiness” proposes a *non-religious moral code* based wholly on what the adherents believe is common sense. More than 70,000,000 copies have been distributed worldwide. A few of the points stressed in their video... exercise, be temperate, don't be promiscuous... many other similar ideas are noted in their moral code of ethics.

Other “essential tenants” of Scientology:

- ❖ You are an immortal spiritual being.
- ❖ Your capabilities are unlimited even if not presently realized.
- ❖ Man is basically good. He is seeking to survive.
- ❖ His survival depends on himself and his fellows and his attainment of brotherhood with the universe.”
- ❖ The spirit can be saved and the spirit alone can save the body.

Self-Help seems to be the key component when current members were interviewed (and to be someone who helps others). Here are a couple more notable quotes from members concerning their religion, Scientology:

“Whatever is true for you is true for you.

“What you believe is what you believe.”

(Simply *brilliant* observations, I would add.)

Here are **more direct quotes from their web site**:

“What goal does every living thing have in common? Survival.”

“You are trying to achieve the highest level of survival as possible, for as long as possible... life can be divided into eight parts or eight urges toward survival ... called The Dynamics:

- self (effort to be an individual for as long as possible)
- creativity (family unit- making things for the future – the sexual urge)
- group (effort to survive as a group)
- species (effort to survive for all mankind)
- life-forms (interest in life, animals and plants)
- MEST (physical universe) – **m**atter, **e**nergy, **s**pace and **t**ime (basic urge of the universe to survive)
- spiritual (urge for existence as spiritual beings) – this is the life force, or theta
- infinity (the urge toward existence and survival as INFINITY. The eighth dynamic also is commonly called God, the Supreme Being or Creator, but it is correctly defined as infinity.

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Dynamics are like concentric circles... the basic characteristic of the individual includes his ability to expand into each successive dynamic. Only when the 7th dynamic is reached will a person be able to experience the 8th dynamic

Walter Martin delves a little deeper into some of their principals:

The mind can be divided into the *somatic mind*, the *analytic mind* and the *reactive mind*. Our *reactive mind* maintains “engrams” of past events of our lives. These “engrams” result in psychosomatic illness and other abnormal behaviors as they barrage our minds at inopportune times with these past experiences – “pictures”. This *reactive mind* interferes with our *analytic mind* preventing it from running our life perfectly. The “engrams” that accumulate can and do interfere with our daily experiences, making it difficult to experience the power of the *analytic mind*. The combination of the *reactive and analytic mind* direct the *somatic mind*. This **interference by the reactive mind must be eliminated in order to reach the clear. This is accomplished by removing all of our “engrams”. The goal of Dianetics is to do just that!** Hence, the purpose of Scientology. As a Scientologist, one can use all their resources: books, tapes, etc. to advance to higher and higher levels (Dynamics). Eventually, one may reach the 7th, or rarely even the 8th level! One may even “clear” himself of all the clutter from “engrams”.

One other term created by Hubbard was “thetan”. Walter Martin states that “the thetan is a timeless entity, which reincarnates in interplanetary life-forms. Once reaching earth as man, its goal is freedom from the cycle of birth and rebirth, which is where Scientology enters the scheme. As you can see, it appears that Hubbard may have made good use of his science fiction background in thinking up these terms and ideas. Either that, or this is all true!

As described above, church members attempt to reach the *clear*. There are many courses offered to train members in methods they can use to reach this enlightened state. The *cleared* thetan can learn to control his environment and reach an even higher level. A thetan can control the universe if a certain level is reached. The highest level is “Truth Revealed” – “infinity”. By the time members reach these impressive levels, no body is required. One cannot help but see the amazing analogy between reaching the *clear* and reaching nirvana – this religion can be looked upon as Hinduism/Buddhism repackaged!

It was many years into the church before anyone was noted to have been *cleared*. There are differing reports as to when the first person reached this *cleared* state. The first reported case actually was in the early 1950’s. Hubbard rented an auditorium in Los Angeles to present the first *clear*, Sonya Bianca. It should be noted that Hubbard had stated that those people who reach this state will have perfect memory, excellent health and improved eyesight. Unfortunately, although Hubbard announced that Sonya had reached the *clear*, she could not remember even the simplest things when questioned by audience members. This problem was explained away by Hubbard with some silly rhetoric that he had accidentally erred when he said certain words that resulted in a

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situation in which Bianca could only remember the “now” and not “the past”... or some such gobbledygook. Of course, that first demonstration of reaching the *clear* was a total failure. Many years later, in 1966, another *first clear* was announced to the world... but without the fanfare. This man also failed to live up to the hype. Today, there are several thousand people listed in various Scientology publications as having reached this coveted state. None have demonstrated the attributes that supposedly were to accompany this accomplishment.

In 1954, Hubbard noted that Scientology had much in common with Hinduism and Buddhism. In fact, he wrote, “that you are studying an extension of the work of Gautama Siddhartha, begun about 2,500 years ago... Buddha predicted that in 2,500 years the entire job would be finished in the West... Well, we finished it!” In other words, the *clear* and reaching for the 8th level of Dynamics is comparable to the Hindus becoming united with the “universal soul – Brahman” or Siddhartha becoming the “enlightened one” or Buddha.

In conclusion, here are some quotes from L. Ron Hubbard, himself:
“Know thyself and the truth shall set you free.” (this is a take-off from Jesus’ words but with very important differences)
Truth is subjective, Hubbard stated. What is true for one person, may not be for another. Hubbard noted, “Goodness and badness, beautifulness and ugliness are alike considerations and have no other basis than opinion.”
“Each person must seek and know the Divine Nature in and for himself”
“Man’s best evidence for God is the God he finds within himself.”
Hubbard teaches that man will evolve into “homo novis” described as “very high and godlike”.
Another principle of Hubbard’s - It is important for man to eliminate pain and gain pleasure.

These are just some of the concepts of Hubbard’s Scientology, a religion that came on the scene about 55 years ago. Certainly there are many precepts in this religion that are also found in the Hindu and Buddhist religions. It could be argued that Hubbard has just updated these ideas in a new, modern day package – using some intriguing vocabulary words and other-worldly attributes. On the other hand, Hubbard also has certain ideas that parallel those found in the New Age movement. That does not necessarily make Scientology untrue, but it gives one pause considering Hubbard’s background and proven character. Also, let us be honest, so many of his ideas seem simply ludicrous!

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New Age Religion:

The New Age movement has become popular since the 1960's. It is a loose collection of people and organizations, contrasted to many of the earlier described religious groups. The worldview is one of a coming "New Age" of mass enlightenment and the idea that one is all and all is one. The belief is that humanity is on the brink of a great new age... a common term of the 1970's was the "Age of Aquarius"... even songs were made of this idea.

David Spangler notes, "The New Age is a concept that proclaims a new opportunity, a new level of growth attained, a new power released and at work in human affairs, a new manifestation of evolutionary tide of events which, leads to a new heaven, a new earth and a new humanity." Most New Age adherents are working to bring this New Age into being as soon as possible. Where did the ideas come from that underlie this belief system? Time Magazine has called the New Age movement "a combination of spiritualism and superstition, fad and farce, about which the only thing certain is that it is not new." Many of the techniques New Agers use in their attempts to bring in the New Age of Enlightenment come right out of ancient Egyptian and Babylonian pagan religions.

Recently I was visiting a home of a typical upper class couple who were showing off their home on a tour of homes. They were fairly well off financially and well educated folks. The husband was proud of his "library"... a nice collection of books. He wanted to point out his theology collection, which was fairly large. However, his favorite topic to read on these days, he said, was in another section, that collection relating to mind-energy and New Age Religion. He was quite into that. It intrigued him... it seemed to be the thing to be into these days... at least in his opinion.

So, how do the New Age devotees delve into this deeper knowledge of the universe and attempt to do those things that will usher in the New Age of enlightenment? Channeling, astral projection, transcendental meditation, astrology, witchcraft, numerology, crystal gazing, necromancy, palm reading, and other such practices are mechanisms to gain entrance into this New Age.

The basic thought concerning the universe to the New Ager is, as noted earlier, that all is one and one is all. There is no you, no me. I am you and you are me. Everyone is everything. Everything is ultimately God. A table is God. You are God. Note once again, the marked similarities to Hinduism. They feel that the concept of a transcendent God (the Christian God) is cause for many, if not most, of the world's problems. They believe that there is no one God, there is no God outside His creation. Good and evil are in the mind of the beholder. Sin and evil are actually just illusions.

After an adequate amount of channeling, chanting, yoga, meditation, astral projection, etc., a person will eventually achieve enlightenment. As is the case with Hinduism and Buddhism, after enough works and enough cycles of re-incarnation, a person will reach re-absorption back into the ultimate "One". When enough people

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practice these New Age techniques and believe in the movement, one day the world will enter into its great New Age of 'mass enlightenment'. It is this belief that binds the members of this loose-knit movement together and gives them camaraderie as they work for their common goal.

The New Age Movement is in a class by itself. Unlike most formal religions, it has no holy text, clergy, creed or central organization. They often use mutually exclusive definitions for some of their terms. The New Age is in fact a free-flowing spiritual movement - a group of believers who share somewhat similar beliefs and practices. Their book publishers take the place of a central organization; seminars, conventions, books and informal group meetings replace sermons and religious services. (Paraphrasing of John Naisbitt)

The New Age movement is a conglomeration of Gnostic traditions, neo-paganism, spiritualism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Wicca, channeling and astrology, etc. It had its start in England in the 1960's where small groups such as the Wrekin Trust and the Findhorn Community were established. Soon the idea spread worldwide, and New Age Seminars were being held by the early 1970's in the United States. Shirley McLaine is probably the most famous of the early adherents.

New Age Beliefs:

A number of fundamental beliefs are held by many New Age followers; individuals are encouraged to "shop" for the beliefs and practices that make them feel most comfortable. The following is a list of many of these beliefs and definitions of terms:

Monism: All that exists is derived from a single source of divine energy.

Pantheism: All that exists is God; God is all that exists. This leads naturally to the concept of the divinity of the individual, that we are all Gods. They do not seek God as revealed in a sacred text or as exists in a remote heaven; they seek God within the self and throughout the entire universe.

Panentheism: God exists and interpenetrates every part of nature (like a soul within a body), *and* timelessly extends beyond as well.

Reincarnation: After death, we are reborn and live another life as a human. This cycle repeats itself many times. This belief is found in Hinduism, Buddhism and Scientology as well.

Karma: Good and bad deeds are tabulated throughout our life, and based on the balance of these deeds, a person will be reincarnated into either a better or worse new life upon rebirth. This belief is also derived from Hinduism.

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An Aura: This is an energy field radiated by the body. Invisible to most people, it can be detected by some as a shimmering, multi-colored field surrounding the body. Some can supposedly detect and interpret auras and can diagnose an individual's state of mind.

Personal Transformation: An intense mystical experience will lead to the acceptance and use of New Age beliefs and practices. Guided imagery, hypnosis, meditation, and (sometimes) the use of hallucinogenic drugs are useful to bring about and enhance this transformation. Believers hope to develop new potentials within themselves: the ability to heal oneself and others, psychic powers, a new understanding of the workings of the universe, etc. Later, when sufficient numbers of people have achieved these powers, a major spiritual, physical, psychological and cultural planet-wide transformation is expected.

Ecological Responsibility: A strong belief in the importance of uniting to preserve the pristine nature of the earth, which is often looked upon as a living entity... Gaia (Mother Earth)

Universal Religion: Since all is God, then only one reality exists, and all religions are simply different paths to that ultimate reality. The universal religion can be visualized as a mountain, with many paths to the summit. Some are hard; some easy. There is no one correct path. All paths eventually reach the top. They anticipate that a new universal religion which will be the best way to reach this reality.

New World Order: As the Age of Aquarius unfolds, a New Age will develop. This will be a utopia in which there is one world government, and end to wars, disease, hunger, pollution, and poverty. All forms of discrimination will cease. Nationalism will be replaced by their allegiance to a world government.

The Age of Aquarius is a reference to the precession of the zodiac. The earth passes through each of the signs of the zodiac approximately every 24,000 years. This interest coincides with a New Ager's interest in astrology.

New Age Doctrines:

Theologian Norman Geisler lists the following *doctrines* of the New Age Religion:

- 1) an impersonal god (force)
- 2) an eternal universe
- 3) an illusory nature of matter
- 4) a cyclical nature of life
- 5) the necessity of reincarnations
- 6) the evolution of man into godhood
- 7) continuing revelations from beings beyond the world (therefore, spirit guides, encountered via channeling, are of value)
- 8) the identity of man with God
- 9) the need for meditation (or other consciousness-changing techniques)

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- 10) occult practices (astrology, mediums and so forth)
- 11) vegetarianism and holistic health
- 12) pacifism (or anti-war activities)
- 13) one world (global) order
- 14) syncretism (unity of all religions)

New Age Practices:

Many practices are common amongst New Agers. A typical practitioner is active in only a few areas:

Channeling: A spirit of a long dead individual is conjured up. Most channelers believe that the soul evolves to higher planes of existence. They therefore attempt to gain guidance for their lives from this dead individual since he/she is supposed to have important information for those alive today.

Crystals: Crystals are materials which has its molecules arranged in a specific, highly ordered internal pattern. New Agers believe that crystals posses healing energy.

Meditating: This process involves the blanking out of the mind and releasing oneself from conscious thought. This is often aided by repetitive chanting of a mantra.

Divination: various techniques used to foretell the future, including Tarot Cards and many other items.

Astrology: The belief that the orientation of the planets at the time of one's birth, and the location of that birth predicts the individual's future and personality.

Human Potential Movement: Therapeutic mental and physical techniques involving both individuals and groups used to help individuals to advance spiritually. Examples are est, gestalt therapy, primal scream therapy, transcendental meditation and yoga.

Conclusion: As can be seen, the New Age Movement is really an ancient religion re-packaged to be interesting to a certain group of modern day individuals. Adherents become involved in a variety of practices as noted above. Activities such as channeling, occult worship, divination, astral projection, astrology, etc. are intriguing to many. It is also the “in” thing to be heavily involved in the ecology movement, the bringing in of a New World Order and a New Age, etc. Hence, the current interest in this New Age religion.

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Judaism:

Judaism is the religion primarily of the Jews. Their scriptures were written from approximately 1400 B.C. to 400 B.C.. Their scriptures also make up a significant portion of the Christian's scriptures. They consist of the Torah, the Prophets and the The Writings... together they form the Old Testament of the Christian Bible.

According to the Jews, God was responsible for writing the entire Jewish scriptures. He did this by "telling" certain select people what to write. He did this through dreams, visions and verbally, and possibly other methods. The point is that according to the Jews (at least the Orthodox Jews), their scriptures are the inspired word of God... correct to the minute detail in their original form. The information therein is historically correct as well as infinitely valuable for all of mankind's spiritual needs. God created the heavens and the Earth at some point in the distant past. God stands outside of His creation and time. God chose a group of people, the Jews, to be His Chosen People. Through them, He would provide many things to the world including: a valid history of the world as told primarily through His dealings with this group of people; a set of Laws by which all people should strive to live; a specific concept of God; and many prophecies of future events for the edification of mankind and for the verification of His own reality, omnipotence and omniscience. Through these scriptures and historical events we should be able to determine whether this God of the Jews is, in fact, the only true God as He claims to be.

The story of Judaism begins with its "father", Abraham approximately 4,000 years ago. God told him to leave his home land in a place called Ur of the Chaldees and travel to the "Promised Land" – eventually, to be called the land of Israel. With the birth of his son, Isaac, to his wife, Sarah, God began His plan to make Abraham the *father* of so many people that they would number like the 'sands of the seas'. The story unfolds over the next 1600 years, through their captivity in Egypt, their rescue by Moses, their wanderings in the desert and their eventual conquest and possession of the Land of Promise – Israel. This was followed by a time of Judges, a United Kingdom stage (Saul, David and Solomon), and then a mostly very sad, Divided Kingdom stage when most of these *chosen people* rebelled from their God. Finally, God had given them enough chances to repent and come back to Him and His edicts. They did not. According to their scriptures, God then allowed foreign powers, the Assyrians and Babylonians to capture and disperse the twelve tribes of Israel to various areas of the earth. It was not until 1948 that the Jews once again were reunited and had a country to call their own. This incredible event was one of hundreds of prophecies in the Jewish Scriptures. The Jews still await the coming of their Messiah to bring them into a promised millennial age. They also have the promise of heaven for those who follow God and His commandments.

As previously mentioned, the scriptures of the Jews are typically divided into three sections: the Torah, the Prophets and The Writings. They were written over a

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millennium, from approximately 1400 B.C. to 400 B.C. More information will be given in later section concerning these scriptures, as they shed light on the likely veracity of this religion.

Judaism today: In today's world, the Jews seem to be divided into three main groups religiously:

- **Orthodox** – holds to the inspiration of the Scriptures. Upholding the Law is important, especially the Torah. Orthodox Judaism views itself as the continuation of the beliefs and practices of traditional Judaism, as accepted by the Jewish nation at Mt. Sinai and codified in an ongoing process that continues to this day. Orthodox Judaism believes that both the written and oral Torah are of divine origin, and represent the word of God. This is similar to the view of the Conservative movement, but the Orthodox movement holds that such information (except for scribal errors) is the exact word of God and does not represent any human creativity or influence.
- **Conservative** - founded in the 19th century, religion is important, as is culture. They believe that the Jew should be “at home” in all lands. They state that they are opposed to the idea that Palestine should be considered the homeland of the Jews. They are not dedicated to the reassertion of a Jewish nationality. The Jewish religion is what makes Jews unique in their view, not their home. Conservative Judaism holds that the laws of the *Torah* and *Talmud* are of divine origin, and thus mandates the following of Jewish law. At the same time, the Conservative movement recognizes the human element in the *Torah* and *Talmud*, and accepts modern scholarship that purport that Jewish writings also show the influence of other cultures, and in general can be treated as historical documents. Conservative Judaism affirms the legitimacy of scientific biblical criticism. The movement believes that God is real and that God's will is made known to humanity through revelation. The revelation at Sinai was the clearest and most public of such divine revelations, but revelation also took place with other people — called prophets — and, according to some, in a more subtle form can happen even today.
- **Reformed** – the liberal wing of Judaism, primarily concerned with the culture and race of the people (with religious doctrine not as important).

The Orthodox and Conservative denominations of the Jewish religion are the two that focus on their scriptures as being specifically important and relevant to their lives. Jews in these two sects put their faith in the Scriptures; the Orthodox group believes that each word is divinely inspired... the Conservative wing of the Jews leaves open more room for questioning of the total inspiration of the Word.

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Importantly, the Jews have a statement of faith that helps us understand exactly what they believe on various topics. It was made into a creed by one of the greatest Jewish Rabbis ever, **Moses Maimonides**, a Spanish Jew, living in the 12th century A.D. Here is the creed that traditional Jews follow (slightly paraphrased):

I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His name:

- Is the Creator and Guide of everything that has been created
- Is One and that there is no unity in any manner like unto His, and that He alone is our God, who was, and is, and will be
- Is not a body
- Is the first and the last
- To Him alone is it right to pray

All the words of the prophets are true

I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses, our teacher, was true

The Torah, first given to Moses, is the same that was given to Moses

This Torah will not be changed and that there will never be any other Law from God

The Creator knows every deed of children and men, and all their thoughts. He that fashioned the hearts of them all, that gives heed to all their works

God rewards those that keep His commandments and punishes those who transgress them

I believe in perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and, though he tarry, I will wait daily for his coming

There will be a revival of the dead at the time when it shall please the Creator... for Thy salvation I hope, O Lord

As can be seen by the creed above, the Jews believe that their scriptures ended with the conclusion of the Torah, the Prophets and The Writings (Old Testament). They still await the coming of the Messiah. This Messiah was prophesized in their scriptures. Their creed states that they believe in an everlasting salvation one day in the future.

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Christianity:

The Christian religion, of course, is centered around Jesus Christ. Christians are “followers of Christ”. The Bible tells us in no uncertain terms how to become a Christian. C. S. Lewis notes what a Christian is in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*. He chose this title for a reason. There are so many Christian denominations these days... unfortunately, this situation causes some folks in one denomination to believe that they are, so to speak, ‘special’ when compared to another denomination. Somehow, they feel that they have totally figured out what the Bible states in every instance (and, in some cases, they may even suggest that the Bible really did not mean something that it did actually say, oddly enough)! But, Lewis was only concerned with the “bottom line” – what does it really mean to be a Christian... hence, the title, *Mere Christianity*. So what does the Bible tell us a Christian is?

- “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. John 3: 16-18
- “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 2:5
- “Jesus said unto them, I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” John 14:6
- “For Christ sent me... to preach the Gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 1: 17-18
- “For by Grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works lest any man should boast.” Eph 2: 8-9

Just what does it mean to believe on Jesus? The following is one way of explaining the gospel message... telling people the good news of following Jesus:

People become Christians when they recognize that they, as individuals, are sinners and are unable to save themselves no matter how hard they try. God is perfect and heaven is a place of perfection. No sin, and no sinner, is allowed into heaven, at least without the penalty for the sins of that sinner being paid. In the Old Testament, God laid down many laws that people were supposed to follow, without exception. No one has ever been able to follow these laws perfectly except for Jesus Christ. God also provided for a sacrificial system to allow people to get temporary forgiveness of their sins via the sacrifice of animals such as lambs... these animals were supposed to be “perfect”... that is, without blemish. The point of this Old Testament system was, in fact, to point all

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people toward the ultimate Sacrificial Lamb, Jesus Christ. He was to come on the scene many years later.

There were many reasons for the Old Testament system. For one thing, God wanted to demonstrate just how fruitless it was for people to ever think that they could actually live a perfect life. It certainly is appropriate to try to be a person of high integrity, sinless as possible, humble, and as much like Jesus as one can be, but no one will ever be able to live a perfect life. Unfortunately, no one can enter heaven unless they are sinless or they have paid the penalty for their sins. This certainly presents a serious problem. No one is able to lead a sinless life, and the penalty for sin is death!

Therefore, God needed to provide another mechanism for us to get to heaven. Jesus. The “perfect, without blemish lambs” of the Old Testament were pointing towards the actual Perfect Lamb to come... Jesus. Only Jesus would, in fact, be capable of sacrificing Himself and thereby paying the penalty for sinful man... as God required a PERFECT sacrifice ... His Only Son.

So the gospel, or ‘good news’, is that Jesus is God (one part of the Holy Trinity – i.e. God the Father, God the Son (Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit). Jesus came to earth born of a virgin, led a sinless life, was crucified on a cross to pay the penalty for mankind’s sins, then was buried, only to rise again on the third day. Jesus later ascended into heaven as the first fruits of our salvation. Those who recognize that they are sinners in need of a Savior, and turn in faith to Jesus, are indeed Christians and will one day also enter into heaven and into eternal life with Jesus, their Savior.

As one can see, the entire Christian religion rests on one individual, the God-Man Jesus Christ. If Christ were a liar or a lunatic, the entire Christian religion fails horribly and millions of people over two thousand years have been hoodwinked into believing a useless lie. If Jesus is who He says He is, then the world has the solution for all of its problems. Hopefully, the evidence will demonstrate that Jesus is indeed God, Himself! This evidence will be discussed at length at a later point in this treatise.

Now, let’s take a look at the Christian Bible. Importantly, the early books of the Bible were written by Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) nearly 1500 years before the last book was written by John (The Revelation was written in approximately A.D. 95). It is not known exactly how many authors contributed to the Bible. However, as already mentioned, there were approximately thirty Old Testament writers. The Christian Bible adds a New Testament with its approximately eleven authors. As we will see in our studies to come, all 66 of these books have a common thread running through them – from the earliest chapters of Genesis all the way through the last chapter written by John (The Revelation). Let me mention just a few of these common themes throughout the Bible:

- Jesus the Messiah is referenced throughout the Old and New Testament
- the absolute critical need for faith
- the need for a sacrificial lamb to shed its (or His) blood for our sins

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- the need for our total dependence upon God for all of our needs
- the fact that when we get out of the will of God, bad things will happen to us as individuals and as a nation
- staying in the will of God is always proper and will eventually result in good
- eventually, all those trusting in Jesus will live for eternity in heaven

These are just a few of the common themes that course through the Bible – there are many more that demonstrate this uniformity and consistency of message that suggest strongly that there was actually only one true writer of the Bible, the Holy Spirit. God led each man to write down those words that He wanted all of mankind to read and to learn about Him... including His plans for us.

The New Testament concerns itself with presenting Jesus to the world. As everyone knows, it starts with a little baby being born in Bethlehem which was prophesized in Old Testament times. The four gospels then present the life and teachings of this God-Man Jesus. He tells everyone that He is God, and that everyone should trust in Him and follow Him forevermore. In fact, Jesus states that He is **“the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but through Me.”** (John 14:6) Of course, this is quite the statement! In the last section of this treatise, I will present much of the evidence that is in support of this bold claim.

Jesus appointed twelve apostles to accompany Him and learn from Him throughout His short three to four year ministry. Upon His horrific death up on the cross, his followers were shocked and confused. They were truly puzzled as to what had just happened. Although He had warned them that He would have to die for all mankind, they never really thought the whole idea through to its logical conclusion. Was this all that would be? This was their Messiah after all! Why hadn't He brought in His kingdom at that time? The days went by as they mourned. Day one. Day two. Day three arrived... but, then Jesus did arise from the dead! This incredible event changed history and the world! Due to this wonderful show of power over death, the apostles experienced a markedly changed attitude concerning Jesus and their own lives. When the Holy Spirit came upon them just seven weeks later, they were given the power to change the world for Christ... and they went out into the world and preached the gospel to all people... in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Many of these apostles also wrote concerning Jesus, His life, death and resurrection. Hundreds witnessed His resurrected body. Tens of thousands turned to follow Jesus in that first century. The (the followers of Christ) was born. Christianity was born. This New Testament was written within about a 45 year period (approx. 50-95 A.D.) by some of these apostles. All who wrote the New Testament were either eye witnesses of Jesus and His resurrection or were intimately involved with those who had see the risen Jesus.

Over the course of the next few hundred years, the New Testament Church (that is, the Christian Church) grew to be the largest Church in the world. This was done

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despite great opposition for centuries from the Roman Empire. Tens of thousands of people were willing to die martyr's deaths for their faith in Jesus Christ... and they did indeed give their lives for Christ. Apparently, the evidence that Jesus was who He claimed to be (i.e. the resurrected Lord and Savior for all those who believe and accept Him into their hearts) was so great, that it was worth giving their earthly lives... even via the painful death of a martyr. This is a powerful statement, considering the massive numbers of those who were martyred. Certainly the truthfulness of the Christian message is worth considering.

Summation: Let us now summarize just how each of the ten religions under discussion got started:

1. **Hinduism** – started approximately 3,500 years ago in a group of writings called the Vedas – currently a religion that believes in reincarnation and karma as people work their way toward “enlightenment” (i.e. finding one’s inner god and merging into the impersonal god, Brahman) using varying types of “altered states of consciousness” (such as TM, Yoga, etc.).
2. **Buddhism** – an outgrowth of Hinduism, originating approximately 2500 years ago by *one individual*, Siddhartha Gautama. There have been multiple iterations of the religion since his time, yet all retain the notion of reincarnation and the eventual working of one’s nature to an ultimate “nirvana” where one can be released from the cycle of rebirth and, essentially, disappear from any conscious existence.
3. **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons)** – religion started by *one man*, Joseph Smith approximately 185 years ago. Smith added a few “holy” books to the Bible, giving these additional books more import than the Christian Bible. In this religion, as we shall see, a believer can attain god status himself. Yet, a woman requires a man, through marriage, to enter heaven. There are many unique concepts in this religion.
4. **Islam** – started by *one man*, Muhammad approximately 1400 years ago. Islam also uses the Holy Bible as one of its books of scripture. As with the Mormons, however, any time that there is a discrepancy between the Bible and their other main holy book (the Koran), the Koran takes precedence. This, they say, is because the Jews and Christians have distorted the Bible down through history so it cannot always be trusted
5. **Jehovah Witness** – also began by *one man* (Charles Taze Russell) in the late 19th century. It uses the Bible as its basic scripture but has a unique interpretation not shared by any Christian denomination. Proponents must not question their unusual interpretation of the Bible or they will face severe discipline.
6. **Christian Science** – started by *one woman* (Mary Baker Eddy) in the late 19th century. They also use an atypical interpretation of the Bible as scripture emphasizing unusual divine healing powers and strange concepts concerning the

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physical and/or spiritual makeup of man. Their theology also has very unusual ideas concerning the reality of man which will be discussed in a later section.

7. **Scientology** –started by one man (L. Ron Hubbard) just under 60 years ago. It emphasizes the human mind in its quest to *clear* itself of previously ingrained “engrams” on its way to reaching the total *clear* when one will have reached enlightenment - analogous to reaching nirvana. Hubbard also introduced the concept of the thetan. A thetan is basically the immortal human soul, but with a lot of strange concepts attached to it that will be noted later in this lecture series. A person should attempt to become a “*cleared* thetan... *clear* – a godlike state” (from Wikipedia)
8. **New Age Religion** – a collection of religious beliefs similar to ancient Egyptian and Babylonian pagan religions in which the world is working its way to this “New Age” where all will find total enlightenment. There is no specific god... everything is god, you are god, I am god, etc. When enough people get behind this movement, the world will have enough power to achieve total “enlightenment” ... the glorious New Age! This system of belief has experienced renewed interest in the last 45 years, especially in the United States and many other “developed” nations.
9. **Judaism** – scriptures began approximately 3,400 years ago and were written over a period of approximately one thousand years. Thirty people contributed writings to these scriptures – all inspired by God, the Holy Spirit. These scriptures were unique in their use of prophesy and historical detail. They were also unique in that a coherent, consistent message courses through their entirety.
10. **Christianity** – this religion is based on one individual, Jesus, who was born approximately 2000 years ago in Bethlehem. He claimed to be God, Himself. This claim by a religion’s prophet/founder (i.e. to be God) is totally unique to Christianity. Approximately 40 people contributed to the writings of the Christian scriptures over a period of approximately 1500 years. Every important thing in life and eternity depends on only one individual in Christianity – Jesus Christ. Jesus says that He is the only way... there is no other way to “enlightenment”, the *clear*, “nirvana”, etc..... the only way to eternal salvation... is through Jesus. No one can work their way to heaven. A person must put their trust in Him and follow Him in order to be a Christian. By *grace* (*unmerited favor*), a person is accepted into the family of God. A Christian is entitled to many free gifts – all because of his/her faith in Jesus. However, upon accepting Jesus as Savior, a person is expected to obey His commands. Jesus stated, “**If you love Me, you will obey what I command.**”
John 14:15

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II: The God(s) of each religion

Hinduism:

The concept of God in the Hindu religion is varied as noted earlier. Even after reading six different articles concerning the identity and concept of their God, it is difficult to distill the Hindu God into one “neat” definition... actually, it is impossible. Some Hindus believe in one God, others believe in polytheism of a sort, others believe that God is in everything. The following is an attempt to summarize the information from the various articles I reviewed:

- ❖ The early Hindu period (1400-800 BC), the “Vedic” period, was dominated by a more polytheistic conception of gods than in later centuries. The Vedic “scriptures” or hymns address many gods, many with characteristics of nature like those seen in Greek mythology. For example, they note the gods Agni (fire), Vayu (wind), and Indra (who controls thunder). Interestingly, there was the tendency to give supremacy to the particular God that one was worshipping at any given time (henotheism).
- ❖ In the Upanishads, Brahman was introduced as the power that sustained the cosmos. “Brahman is the unchanging, infinite, immanent, and transcendent reality which is the Divine Ground of all matter, energy, time, space, being, and everything beyond in this Universe. The nature of Brahman is described as transpersonal, personal and impersonal by different philosophical schools”. (The Encyclopedia of Philosophy) The Hindu religion then goes on to note that the eternal element within man, the “Self”, is identical with Brahman! In this period, the existence of many gods is not denied, they are just given inferior status to this concept of Brahman.
- ❖ Several centuries after the Upanishads dominated Hindu thought, a very famous Hindu epic, the Bhagavad Gita, was written. This tells the story of Khrisna, an incarnation of Visnu, helping the hero of the book, Arjuno, in battle. Khrisna also appears in all of his godly glory in a later scene in the epic. Another god is also mentioned in this story... that is the god Siva. Both Khrisna and Siva are linked with Brahman in some nebulous way. Visnu also is noted to have nine other avators (incarnations) besides Khrisna – even including the Buddha (that brings in a rival religion’s god into Hinduism, approximately 200-300 years after the Buddhist religion was founded. Some Hindus believe that Jesus was also an avatar of Visnu.
- ❖ Hindus believe that there is a universal god, Brahman, as already stated. However, Brahman is often personified as they speak of many manifestations as other gods. For example, Brahma is the *creator god*, Vishnu is the *preserver god*, and Shiva is the *destroyer god*. These gods also have come to earth at times in a variety of incarnations (ex. Buddha, Khrisna, etc.) Depending on where one reads, there may be as few as thirty-three of these Hindu gods, or as many as thousands.

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- ❖ Modern Hinduism has no specific conception of God. Depending on the sect, the deity could include: monism (all existence is one substance), pantheism (all is god), panentheism (God is in creation as a soul is in a body), animism (God lives in inanimate objects), polytheism (there are many gods), henotheism (there is one God to worship among the many gods that exist), monotheism (there is only one God). In America today, generally Hindu theology states that god is an impersonal divine essence called Brahman. Everything is God or part of God (pantheism). Below are quotes from some of the writings concerning Brahman in the Hindu literature:
 - The idea of a personal God is not a true generalization. We have to go beyond to the *impersonal god*. The personal God... is not absolute.
 - *God in his absolute is not to be worshipped*. Worshipping such a God would be nonsense. It would be a sin to worship that God.
 - *Brahman is an impersonal, omnipresent being who cannot be called a knowing being ... He cannot be called a thinking being because that is a process of the weak only. He cannot be called a reasoning being, because reasoning is a sign of weakness. He cannot be called a creative being because none creates except in bondage.* Swami Vivekananda
- ❖ In summation, the major god of Hinduism, Brahman, is impersonal, pantheistic, non-thinking, and unknowable. It cannot demonstrate attributes such as love, mercy or grace.

Buddhism:

Buddhists do not believe in an Absolute Creator God (who created the universe *ex nihilo* and to whom worship and adoration are due). The universe keeps going through its cyclical existence without the help of their God. It does not have the concept of a Savior, nor of heaven and hell in the typical sense. There is no such thing as sin against the God of Buddhism. Buddha's last words were: "Be lamps unto yourselves".

As he left us, he did not ask people to pray to him or believe in him as a messiah. He clearly told his followers that he was not a god. He was not to be worshipped. Yet, after his death, there are those Buddhists who do worship him. This veneration would not be acceptable to Buddha.

Buddhism does not believe in the existence of souls. This is one difference between Hinduism as that religion does believe in the existence of atman, that is, the individual soul. Hindus also, of course, believe in Brahman, the Supreme Creator.

Since Buddhism in general does not believe in a personal God or divine being, it does not have worship, praying, or praising of any God. It offers no form of redemption, forgiveness, heavenly hope, or final judgment. Buddhism is, therefore, more of a moral philosophy, an ethical way of life.

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The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints:

The following quotes will reveal the Mormon's conception of God:

- ❖ In the beginning, the head of the “Gods” called a council of the “Gods” and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and the people in it. (Joseph Smith)
- ❖ God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man. (Joseph Smith)
- ❖ The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's: the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. (Doctrine of Covenants)
- ❖ “Gods” exist and we had better strive to be prepared to be one with them. (Brigham Young)
- ❖ As man is, God once was: as God is, man may become. (Prophet Lorenzo Snow)
- ❖ Mormon prophets have continuously taught the sublime truth that God the Eternal Father was once a mortal man who passed through a school of earth life similar to that through which we are now passing. He became God – an exalted being – to the same eternal gospel truths that we are given the opportunity today to obey. (The Gospel Through the Ages, by Milton Hunter)
- ❖ When our father Adam came into the Garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is MICHAEL the Archangel, the ANCIENT OF DAYS, about whom holy men have written and spoken – He is our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do. (Brigham Young) [This teaching is now not accepted by the Mormon Church]
- ❖ In heaven, where our spirits were born, there are many “Gods”, each one of whom has his own wife or wives, which were given to him previous to his redemption, while yet in his mortal state. (Owen Pratt, Apostle)

Joseph Smith, in The King Follet Discourse, notes, “God was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens... I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in a form like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form of a man.” He goes on to refute the idea that God was a God from all eternity. “He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ did. Here then is eternal life – to know the only true and wise God; and you have got to learn to be “Gods” yourself, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all the “Gods” before you.”

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Islam:

Allah is the only true God. He is not a triune God. Allah is unapproachable by sinful mankind. Allah typically is not looked upon as a loving and forgiving God except in one or two verses of the Koran: Sura verse 11:90 "Ask forgiveness of your Lord, then repent to Him; surely my Lord is all-compassionate, all-loving." And 85:13 states, "He is the all-forgiving, the all-loving." Having noted these two verses, the actual perception of Allah is a God of judgment and power, not mercy and love. Muslims do not expect to meet a god of love when they enter into paradise. Allah is not a personal god.

Interestingly, the Koran does say that "If you love Allah, Allah will love you." Koran 3:31 This is contrasted to the Holy Bible which notes that God loved people even while they were sinners and rejected (even hated) Him.

The Muslim "God" has no likeness (Sura 42:11), is transcendent (Sura 4:171), is unknowable (apart from revelation), and is wholly other and totally different. He is neither physical nor spirit – he is totally different from anything we know.

In Islam, God is the only real Supreme Being, the transcendent, all-powerful and all knowing Creator, Sustainer, Ordainer, and Judge of the universe. Islam puts a heavy emphasis on the conceptualization of God as strictly singular. He is unique, inherently one and omnipotent.

According to the Islamic teachings, God is present everywhere. Allah is the author of evil deeds as well as good deeds. For example... *Verily Allah has fixed the very portion of adultery which a man will indulge in, and which he of necessity must commit* (or there would be no escape from it)." *Sahih Muslim* #6421, 6422

Allah swears by other than himself whereas the God of the Bible will swear only to Himself as there is none higher than He.

The Koran explicitly notes that Jesus is not God:

- The Quran's Surah 17 111 says: "Praise be to Allah, who begets no son, and has no partner in (His) domain. . ."
- Surah 4 171 says: "O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor, say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of Allah and His Word. . ."

Jehovah Witness:

The Jehovah Witnesses use their own translation of the Bible – which they say is the only correct one. They interpret several key verses differently than orthodox Christianity, especially where the verses have to do with Jesus Christ. By doing this, they are able to support their belief that Jehovah God is a single Supreme Being, not, in any sense, a Trinity. God must be identified as Jehovah. Jehovah is not omnipresent. (At one

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point, the WBTS proclaimed that God ruled the universe from somewhere in the Pleiades star system. They no longer teach this). There appears to be a difference of opinion as to whether He is all-knowing. He did create the universe and mankind.

First, God created Michael the Archangel, through whom God later created all "other things," such as the earth, the universe, and all mankind. This process took place over exactly 42,000 years. When it was time for the birth of a savior, Michael became a man, in the form of Jesus Christ at the direction of Jehovah. He was without sin and kept every law of God. According to Jehovah Witness theology, Jesus was put to death on a "torture stake." It is here that He bore the sins of all mankind that were imputed to us because of the "original sin" of Adam. However, in addition to Christ's sacrificial death on the "stake", as we shall see in the next section, many and varied *good works* will be required for an individual's ultimate salvation. Later, Jesus rose from death in spirit, but did not rise in physical form. The Holy Spirit is not considered a part of the triune Godhead as He is in Christianity. The Holy Spirit is considered a powerful *invisible force* of some kind.

Christian Science:

From the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry:

1. **God is infinite...and there is no other power or source**
2. **God is Universal Principle not a personal God**
3. **God cannot indwell a person**
4. **God is the only intelligence in the universe, including man**
5. **God is Mind**
6. God is the **Father-Mother**
7. **The Trinity is Life, Truth, and Love**
8. Belief in the traditional doctrine of the Trinity is polytheism
9. Christ is the spiritual idea of sonship
10. **Jesus was not the Christ, but the son of God**

All of the above come from Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*

God is actually all that exists to the Christian Scientist who follows Eddy's teachings. Matter is an illusion... including man. God is an impersonal principal of life, truth and love. God is all in all. (*Science in Health*) Man is spiritual, not material. Man only appears to exist in a material body. There is no reality to the physical world.

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Scientology:

In *The Scientology Catechism*, it says, “What is the Scientology concept of God? We have no dogma in Scientology and each person’s concept is different. Each person attains his own certainty as to who God is and exactly what God means to him. The author of the universe exists. How this is symbolized is dictated by your early training and conscience.” They further teach, “although the existence of the Supreme Being is affirmed in Scientology, His precise nature is not delineated, since the Church holds that each person must seek and know the Divine Nature in and for himself.” Founder Hubbard, at times, also allowed for many gods. As *The Scientology Catechism* states, any concept of God will apparently do – whatever a person wants to believe concerning God is fine with them.

New Age Religion:

New Age religion promotes the development of the person's own power or divinity. When referring to God, a believer in the New Age movement is not talking about a transcendent, personal God who created the universe, but is referring to a higher consciousness within themselves. This person would see themselves as God, the cosmos, the universe. In fact, everything that the person sees, hears, feels or imagines is to be considered divine.

God is an impersonal force pervading all creation. New Agers believe in monism – all is one and one is all. All reality may be reduced to a single, unifying principle partaking of the same essence and reality. The diversity we see in the world is an illusion. Actually, everything is only ONE thing. There is no separate you and I – we are all one thing. Also, everything is God (Pantheism). There certainly is no personal God... no loving God... no moral God.

God is not a Supreme Being distinct from creation -- He is creation. In developing a worldview about the material and immaterial world, New Agers reach an unusual conclusion. To them there is only one essence in the universe, and everything and everyone is part of that essence. This is known as "monism". Indeed, every person is part of God.

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Judaism:

There is one true God, creator of the Universe and all that is in it. He existed outside of His Creation from eternity past. He has always existed. He is the only entity never created – that is, without a cause. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. God is all loving and totally just. He is a personal God, very interested in His Creation.

He has set down a set of Laws that He wants His people to follow for their own good. If they fail to follow these Laws, they will have sinned and need then sacrifice for the atonement of those sins. This sacrifice involves the shedding of blood of a “perfect” lamb (or other adequate animal sacrifice). Although the Jews were and are His *chosen people*, anyone can follow God simply by trusting in Him and following His Laws. At some time in the future, Jews look forward to God sending a Messiah to lead them, His *chosen people*, to their rightful place in this world... with this Messiah, their King, reigning over the entire world – in peace. To the Jews, this coming Messiah is not God, however.

Christianity:

The God of the Jews in the Torah is the same God that Christians worship with one very important caveat. Christians believe that the Jews did not actually understand the true nature of the God of Abraham. It is the Christian belief that God is a triune God - the Father (that portion of the Trinity that the Jews recognize), the Son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. This fact was a “mystery” revealed approximately 2,000 years ago with the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

In fact, Jesus was the Messiah that was predicted in the Jewish (and Christian) scriptures – the Old Testament also known as the Jewish Torah and writings of the Prophets. Jesus is wholly God and wholly human – another “mystery”, yet fact. God as Jesus came to earth to reveal Himself to mankind and to give us a perfect example of how to live our lives. The ultimate reason for Jesus’ incarnation was to provide the only necessary and sufficient sacrifice for mankind’s salvation – His own tortuous death on the cross. This was followed by His resurrection and later ascension into heaven!

The attributes of God include His personal nature, His omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence. God has existed from eternity past and will exist forever. He exists outside of creation and is the Creator of all things. He is also a God of love. In fact, God is Love.

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III: Eternity and Salvation:

Hinduism:

The Hindus believe in a cyclical existence of the universe and everything within it. They have the ‘law of cycles’. The whole of this universe expands outwards as it enlarges, then it contracts and becomes smaller, then subsides; then the whole thing is again projected forth, only again to become smaller and smaller, until the whole thing collapses. Thus it goes on forwards and backwards with a wave-like motion throughout eternity. Time, space and causation all behave in this fashion. There is no beginning or end. Therefore, wherever in the Hindu scriptures the words “beginning” and “end” are used, they refer to the beginning and the end of one particular cycle; no more than that.

Salvation is not really a term that applies to the Hindu as it does in some other religions. Although there are differences of opinion among the various sects of Hinduism concerning the human soul, there are certain points of agreement as well. Souls are without beginning and without end, and are immortal by their very nature. Also, all powers, including purity, omnipresence and omniscience are buried within each soul. In every man and in every animal, however weak or wicked, great or small, resides the same omnipresent, omniscient soul. The difference is not in the soul, but in the manifestation. This is the idea that Hindus preach – that is, the brotherhood of all creation. The Sanskrit word for soul is atman. The atman is separate from the mind. This atman goes through birth and death, accompanied by the mind, the Sukshma Sharira. When the time comes that the atman has attained to all knowledge and manifested itself to perfection, then this cycle from birth to death ceases for it. Re-incarnation will cease. Moksha has been attained.

So what is heaven to the Hindu? They do have their own concept of heaven, or the heavens. But, these are not infinite. They are just repetitions of this world, with a little more happiness and a little more enjoyment. There are many of these heavens. Certain people who do good works here on earth, upon death, are born again as gods in one of these heavens. Indra (one of the many gods in the Hindu pantheon) is typically considered the ruler of heaven. A person may enjoy some time in heaven (based on how well they did in their last life on earth) until it is time to get back to the task of trying to attain moksha. Gods also may be found in these heavens. They also had once been men, and by good works they have become gods. The human body is the highest form of all. It is this earth (which is the Karma Bhumi, the place of work) from which we attain to liberation. Even the gods have to be born as men to become liberated.

The goal of all humans is to become liberated. So long as time and space works on a person, he/she is a slave. The idea is to be free of external and internal nature. Nature must fall at your feet, and you must be free. No more is there life; therefore no more is there death. No more enjoyment; therefore no more misery. It is bliss unspeakable, indestructible, beyond everything. This eternal “bliss” is the goal.

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An individual's goal in life may be expressed in other ways as well: the realization of one's union with God; the realization of one's eternal relationship with God; the realization of the unity of all existence; perfect unselfishness and knowledge of the "self"; attainment of perfect mental peace; or as detachment from worldly desires. Such a realization liberates one from *samsara* (re-incarnation) and ends the cycle of rebirth. The exact conceptualization of what happens then (moksha) differs among the various Hindu schools of thought. For example, Advaita Vedanta holds that after attaining moksha the atman (the soul of the person in question) no longer identifies itself with an individual but as *identical with Brahman* in all respects. The followers of Dvaita (dualistic) schools identify themselves as part of Brahman and after attaining moksha expect to spend eternity in a loka (heaven), *in the company of* their chosen form of *Ishvara* (the efficient and material cause of the universe and mankind - God). Thus, it is said, the followers of *dvaita* wish to "taste sugar," while the followers of Advaita wish to "become sugar." (Wikipedia) It should be pointed out, however, that the prevailing belief among Hindu believers is that upon reaching their moksha, their atman will become a permanent part of Brahman.

The bottom line is that the eternal goal of the Hindu is not to spend it in some place such as heaven, but to finally stop their cycle of rebirth and in some way "blend" into Brahman. This is a very nebulous concept, but most Hindus do not believe that they will have any consciousness of this event when it finally does happen.

Buddhism:

The Buddhists look at the universe and eternity in a manner analogous to the Hindus. Literally, the universe and everything in it are undergoing endless cycles and "sentient beings" are spread out over a number of "parallel" planes – this world is only one of them. The Buddha, Gautama, confirmed these worlds, including heaven. In fact, Buddha had intermittently met with some of the gods while still here on earth. They tend to live a different sort of existence than the typical human, but they also are searching for nirvana. Buddhists do not have a Savior as do Christians. They do have the Buddha, however. Buddha, the Enlightened One, *shows* them the "Way" (i.e. the path they need to take to someday reach nirvana).

However, all heavenly beings are regarded as inferior in status to the Arhats – those who have attained nirvana. The gods were also from the lower worlds originally, but slowly and gradually graduated themselves into higher worlds by virtue of their past deeds and cultivation of virtuous qualities. Since there are many heavens and higher worlds of Brahma, these gods may evolve progressively from one heaven to another through their merit or descend into lower worlds due to some misfortune. The gods of Buddhism are therefore not immortal. Their position in the heavens is also temporary. They may however live for longer durations of time than humans. In Buddhism, there are several heavens, all of which are still part of *samsara* (illusionary reality). Those who

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accumulate good karma will be reborn in one of them. However, their stay in the heaven is not eternal—eventually they will use up their good karma and will undergo a different rebirth into another realm, as humans, animals, or other beings. Because heaven is temporary and part of samsara, Buddhists focus more on escaping the cycle of rebirth and reaching enlightenment (*bodhi*). The concept of bodhi is similar, if not identical, to that of nirvana... the term was introduced at a later time. Some branches of Buddhism believe bodhi and nirvana are synonymous. However, “according to Mahayana Buddhism, the arhat has attained only nirvana, thus still being subject to delusion, while the bodhisattva not only achieves nirvana but full liberation from delusion as well” (Wikipedia)

Salvation, therefore, is not related to their temporary and intermittent trips to heaven. Instead, for the Buddhist, the concept of salvation would more properly relate to their attainment of bodhi or nirvana. Then they will be released from their cycle of rebirth. Nirvana actually means "the blowing out" of existence. Nirvana is very different from the Christian concept of heaven. Nirvana is not a place like heaven but rather a state of being. What exactly it is, Buddha never really said.

Nirvana is an eternal state of being. It is the state in which the law of karma, and the rebirth cycle come to an end. It is the end of suffering, a state where there are no desires and the *individual consciousness comes to an end*.

Eventually, all people will work their way to nirvana. Yet, when the Buddhist gets there they will find an eternity that is very poorly conceptualized. There will be no consciousness, so no one will know that they have reached nirvana upon their death. It would seem that the Buddhist's nirvana is cold, sterile, alone, and simply the end to repeated life on earth... life with all of its pleasures and pain.

Here is a description of nirvana from Harvard Professor Donald Swearer, an expert on Buddhism:

- “Literally, it means the “blowing out” of the flame of desire, the negation of suffering. This implies that nirvana is not to be thought of as a place but as a total reorientation or state of being realized as a consequence of the extinction of blinding and binding attachment. Thus, at least, nirvana implies that the kind of existence one has achieved is inconceivable in the ordinary terms of the world.”

I believe that this fits nicely with what Buddha was looking for during his lifetime. Remember, he wished that he had never been born. He spent years looking for a mental and emotional state that would be free of any kind of “feelings”. In nirvana, it would appear that he found this place... a place, I suggest, that he invented in his mind.

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The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints:

Salvation for the Mormons is a very important topic. Salvation to the Mormon involves “not only faith in Christ, but baptism by immersion, obedience to the teaching of the Mormon Church, good works, and ‘keeping the commandments of God which will cleanse away the stain of sin’ (Journal of Discourses 2:4). Brigham Young, the second prophet of the Mormon Church, noted, “Some of our old traditions teach us that a man guilty of atrocious and murderous acts may savingly repent on the scaffold. This is all nonsense. Such a character will never see heaven.” (Journal of Discourses 8:61)

Mormons believe in the pre-existence of the human soul. They believe that bodies are provided in order for mankind to enjoy the joy and power that only bodies can provide. . . for now and eternity. Polygamy, in fact, allowed for the rapid entrance of many souls into their bodies on this earth. The *Book of Abraham* revealed that life on this earth was provided to discipline the spirit children and also to provide for reproduction so that other souls could enter this world from their pre-existent form. Jesus was appointed by the gods to become the redeemer of the human race on this earth. . . those that fell due to Adam’s sin. He is the god of this world. Jesus is not the second person of the Christian trinity, but instead is a pre-existent spirit, a spirit brother of Lucifer, in fact (noted in the Pearl of Great Price and, later, by Brigham Young). Jesus celebrated his own marriage to “Mary and Martha and the other Mary,” whereby he could see his own seed, before he was crucified.” (Journal of Discourses, Apostle Orson Hyde)

Brigham Young has much to say on the topic of salvation. “There is not a man or woman who violates the covenants made with their God that will not be required to pay the debt. The blood of Christ will never wipe that out, your own blood must atone for it; and the judgments of the Almighty will come, sooner or later and every man and woman will have to atone for breaking the covenants.” (Journal of Discourses). In other words, Young noted that what Christ’s sacrifice was not able to cleanse, a man’s own blood could effect.

In later times, Mormons have stated the following, “we know that by grace we are saved *after all we can do.*” They go on to say Jesus states, “My blood shall not cleanse them if they hear me not.” Salvation in the kingdom of God is available because of the atoning blood of Christ. *But* it is received only on condition of *faith, repentance, baptism, and enduring to the end in keeping the commandments of God.*” (*What the Mormons think of Christ* – an official Mormon publication). A person also must be a member in good standing in the Mormon Church in order to attain to the *highest* heaven (see below).

Mormons teach that every child is born as a son of God. From that starting point, it is up to each individual to do with this situation as he or she sees fit. There are three basic choices:

- ❖ The general masses of people-will someday inhabit the *telestial* kingdom of heaven
- ❖ Christians who reject the Mormon beliefs – go to the *terrestrial* kingdom of heaven

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- ❖ Mormons who lived an acceptable life on earth – go to the *celestial* kingdom of heaven (and there are three levels of this kingdom as well) – eventually the goal is to be a god who will, with his family, rule and populate a planet of his own)

The ideal life situation is to live an “exalted life” after resurrection. Exaltation is a life spent in great glory, where one is in possession of all knowledge and wisdom. These beings will become gods and goddesses as they live in a celestial marriage to their spouse. This union can be created while on earth or by *proxy* after death in a Mormon Temple..

The Mormons, therefore, have adopted the concept of *universal salvation*. “Mormons believe in *universal salvation* that all men will be saved, but each one in his own order.” (as noted above) (*A Guide to the Religions of America* – Rosten)

The Mormons also believe that they can pray for their dead friends and relatives and help them to obtain eternal blessings including salvation.

There are so many tenants in this religion that have the “scent” of being man-made. Ideas such as universal salvation, praying one’s dead relatives into heaven, polygamy for men, the potential for becoming a god, having one’s own planet to rule over, and many other similar concepts are likely candidates to be included in any man-made religion. The question is whether there is any reason why people should believe in this religion. The evidence for or against this religion will be discussed in the last section of this treatise.

Eternity Past:

The Mormons teach that matter and the universe are co-eternal with God. Therefore, the universe was not created and will never be destroyed. Although there is no scientific or philosophical problem with an eternally lasting (i.e. everlasting) universe, there is strong evidence as we have shown, that the universe has not always existed. Science and logic reveal that the Creator must exist outside of His creation. Therefore, the beliefs of the Mormons are contrary to these tenants of modern day science. There is no doubt that science has been wrong in the past (and will be in the future). However, in this case, the evidence is overwhelming. Also, it is very difficult to accept a belief (such as the Mormons’ belief that God and the universe are co-eternal) that is contrary to logic.

Islam:

Salvation:

Salvation is obtained only by submission to the teachings of Islam. As Jesus states that there is no way to heaven but through Him, the Muslim states that there is no way to heaven but through the acceptance and practice of Islam.

How does a Muslim gain entrance into heaven? He must practice good works (including fulfilling the *Five Pillars of the Faith*) and also have *Allah choose him for*

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salvation. On the day of judgment, one's good deeds will be stacked up against one's bad deeds... if the balance favors the good, he will achieve entrance into heaven... if not, he will go to hell forever. The Koran points out that the performance of good works is the way to salvation: Surah 23 102, "Then those whose balance (of good deeds) is heavy -- they will attain salvation."

There is no guarantee of heaven in a typical life, yet hope is that if one accepts Allah and his prophet Muhammad, rigorously adheres to the Koran and is pre-destined to Allah's good favor (this is an unknown), he/she will have a good chance at making it to heaven. However, there is a much more sure way into heaven, albeit a tough one. All one has to do is die a martyr's death (i.e. suicide bomber) in the service of Allah, and ... BINGO!... that fellow is in heaven with his 70 beautiful virgins and great food and wine!

In the early times of this religion, Holy War (jihad) was also included as part of one's work toward salvation. The vast majority of Muslims today (moderate Islam) no longer teach this. As we now also know, sadly, there is a small, militant faction, (fundamentalist Islam) that do still believe that if an infidel (a non-Muslim) does not accept the offer to repent and turn to Islam, then they should die.

By the way, Muslims do not believe that Christ died on the cross, and therefore certainly do not believe in His resurrection, or the fact that he gave His life for mankind.

Eternity:

Muslims do believe in an eternal existence determined by what the individual accomplishes while here on earth. Some will live on in heaven, others in hell. Eternity past is not something written about by the Muslims (at least that I could find).

Apparently, they accept the Biblical concept of an Infinite God (they call their "God", Allah) who created everything and who, Himself, exists eternally and outside of His created universe. The Koran contains many references to an afterlife in Eden for those who do good deeds. heaven itself is described in the Koran in verse 35 of Surah Al-Ra'd: "The parable of the Garden which the righteous are promised! Beneath it flow rivers. Perpetual is the fruits thereof and the shade therein. Such is the End of the Righteous; and the end of the unbelievers is the Fire, wherein a person dwells forever."

Jehovah Witness:

Salvation:

Although the Jehovah Witnesses do not believe that Jesus was God, they do believe that His death on the cross was necessary for salvation. "They must be recovered from blindness as well as from death, that they, each for himself, may have a full chance to prove, by obedience or disobedience, their worthiness of life eternal." (Charles Russell)

A select 144,000 anointed Christians (Jehovah Witnesses) will receive immortal life in heaven as co-rulers with Christ (1 Corinthians 6:2,3, Luke 12:32, Revelation

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20:2,3,6, Luke 22:28–30), ruling over the rest of mankind (Revelation 7:9, John 10:16) during the Millennial Reign (a thousand year rule after Armageddon). I noted the verses that they base this teaching on... their interpretation of these scriptures is totally at odds with the Christian teaching.

“Born Again” to the Jehovah Witnesses – Under the section "Born Again" the Jehovah's Witness book, **Reasoning from the Scriptures**, gives this definition: "Being born again involves being baptized in water... and begotten by God's spirit..., thus becoming a son of God with the prospect of sharing in the Kingdom of God. "Jesus had this experience, as do the 144,000 who are heirs with him of the heavenly kingdom". As you may recall, only 144,000 people will be able to make it to heaven. This is a very old tenant of this religion, adopted when the total number of members was small. Therefore, in the 1930's, as this religion grew, a suitable place for remaining good “Witnesses” was announced... they will live in the future eternal *Paradise of Earth*.

How do devoted members who are not part of the select 144,000 gain their measure of salvation?

At this time, the "great crowd" (aka “other sheep”) of Jehovah's Witnesses numbers over 3.6 million. To gain salvation, they have to be loyal to their "Father" (Christ) and their "Mother" the "anointed class of 144,000" or "Bride of Christ" which represent God's Kingdom. The August 1, 1981 *Watchtower* stated that "Your attitude toward the wheatlike anointed `brothers' of Christ (*the 144,000*) and the treatment you accord them will be the determining factor as to whether you go into `everlasting cutting-off' or receive `everlasting life'" (p. 26). The attributes required for the mainstream member of the Jehovah Witness Church to gain entrance to the future Paradise on Earth are spelled out in a book titled ***You can live Forever in Paradise on Earth***. In the chapter, "Becoming a Subject of God's Government", the requirements for "other sheep" are listed:

- 1) Knowledge needed including Kingdom history and a new "language" in order to be able to call on Jehovah and to serve "shoulder to shoulder" (pp. 127-28).
- 2) Righteous conduct by keeping the laws of Jehovah which may call for "...hard changes to make in order to keep God's requirements" (pp. 131-33).
- 3) Loyalty to God's government [represented on earth by the anointed Governing Body of the *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society* headquartered in Brooklyn, New York] (p. 133).

Note that members are required to pledge and demonstrate allegiance to the governing body of the *Watchtower and Bible Tract Society*.

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Further work must be done for salvation:

Along with those *requirements* noted above, members are also required to:

- ❖ Be loyal spokesman for God's kingdom (door-to-door witnessing)
- ❖ Magazine distribution

A person cannot have eternal life without participation in the door-to-door witnessing. The Society makes this very clear saying, "God's will is that, to make good his salvation to everlasting life, the believer must be a preacher in this world." (**This Means Everlasting Life**, p. 137). "We have to do more than merely accept the Kingdom message in order to be saved.... we must also publicly declare that Kingdom message to others...." (**From Paradise Lost of Paradise Regained**, p. 249). The Watchtower Society even keeps careful records on the number of hours members spend on these various duties. In 1988, over 785 million hours were spent doing these various forms of witnessing around the world... 243 million in the United States alone. (Watchtower, January 1, 1989, p.7)

Even those of the 144,000 cannot become complacent. The *Watchtower Society* warns the "anointed" not to become, "...overconfident of our position. We need to keep examining ourselves to be sure that we are really doing what God and Christ require of us (**Reasoning from the Scriptures**, p. 80).

In summary then, there will be 144,000 people from out of the Jehovah Witnesses believers that will someday reside in heaven with Jesus. With an appropriate amount of hard work and dedication to certain tasks (like door-to-door witnessing), another few million Witnesses will be able to live on after Armageddon on the earth in the Millennial Kingdom and then for eternity if they stay *appropriately* faithful during these 1000 years.

According to the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, when you die [assuming you are not a Jehovah's Witness], you cease to exist: *Let God be True*, p. 59, 60, 67. On Judgment Day, only faithful Jehovah's Witnesses will be resurrected to life eternal on Paradise Earth. The rest of all mankind will be annihilated, wiped out, just cease to exist after their death with no eternal punishment in a fiery hell.

Christian Science:

A comment on the resurrection:

Eddy explains, "When Jesus reproduced his body after its burial, he revealed the myth or material falsity of evil; its powerlessness to destroy good and the omnipotence of the Mind that knows this: he also showed forth the error of nothingness of supposed life in matter, and the great somethingness of the good we possess, which is of Spirit, and immortal" (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 201). The resurrection of Jesus was thus the manifestation of the error of evil. He demonstrated that *sin and death are illusions* and

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that *if one wishes to rid themselves of these illusions, they only need to deny their reality* (that is, the reality of sin and death).

In other words, Eddy explains away the miracle of the resurrection with her typical gobbledygook. Jesus, according to Eddy, was not resurrected. He simply refused to succumb to the illusions of matter, evil, sin, death, etc.

Sin: Christian Science denies the existence of all matter, including man's physical body. They say that man is "incapable of sin, sickness, and death." They claim sin, sickness, and death are the "effects of error," thereby denying the reality of sin. To Christian Science, there is no sin (*Science and Health*, p. 447). The basic fundamental principle of the Christian Science system -- God is all and God is good, and since the real man has never departed from his original state of perfection, he is not in need of salvation. He is saved now and reposing in the bosom of the Father. He has always been saved -- that is, as God's idea of the expression of the mind, man is forever held in the divine consciousness. And since sin and evil have no reality, *all ideas of sin and evil are illusions*. They are the product of the mortal mind. Hence, it is a sense of sin which is sinful because of the illusory product of the mortal mind. They say that man's real problem is the *belief* of sin, and that "Christ came to destroy the belief of sin." [Eddy writes in *Miscellaneous Writings* in the question and answer section: "If there is no sin, why did Jesus come to save sinners?" She answers, "Jesus came to seek and to save such as believe in the reality of the unreal; to save them from this false belief; that they might lay hold of eternal life ..." (p. 63). In other words, Jesus came to save mankind from the false belief that sin is real! Jesus saving work was to exemplify the fact that death is unreal, that sin is only an illusion or false belief, and that to deny its existence is the ultimate task of each person.] [*What They Believe* by Harold J. Berry]

Salvation: Since Christian Scientists do not believe that sin is real, they, therefore, see no need for salvation in Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding, Christian Scientists still teach a salvation based on works -- and contrary to even their own teachings, a salvation through victory over *suffering* and *temptation*. [*WhatTheyBelieve-WTB*]

Heaven: "Heaven is not a locality, but a divine state of Mind in which all the manifestations of Mind are harmonious and immortal, because sin is not there and man is found having no righteousness of his own, but in possession of 'the mind of the Lord,' as the Scriptures says" (**Science and Health, With Keys to the Scriptures**, p. 291)

Hell: Christian Science denies the existence of hell and eternal punishment, and, therefore, there is no devil (*Science and Health*, p. 469). Hell is defined as "mortal belief; error; lust; remorse; hatred; revenge; sin; sickness; death." They believe that hell is a self-imposed "mental anguish," emanating from the guilt of one's *imagined* sin. [WTB]

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Man's Destiny. Christian Science teaches that since God is all good and nothing that is real exists outside God, then sin, sickness, and death are mortal error or an illusion. Christ, as the Truth, therefore came to set man free from these false beliefs by His teachings and example (*Science and Health*, pp. 473, 475, 108). Christian Science denies the penal, substitutionary atonement of Christ, saying, "The material blood of Jesus was no more efficacious to cleanse from sin when it was shed on 'the accursed tree,' than when it was flowing in his veins as he went daily about His Father's business" (*Science and Health*, p.25). "Jesus taught the way of Life by demonstration. There is but one way to heaven, harmony, and Christ in Divine Science shows us this way" (*Science and Health*, p. 242). Eddy taught, Man already has everlasting salvation; there is no final judgment. We save ourselves; no one else can. "Universal salvation rests on progression and probation ... No final judgment awaits mortals ..." (*Science and Health*, p. 291) "Instead, the only hope of pardon and salvation for any person lies in that person eliminating all sin (false beliefs and the behavior they spawn) from his/her life" (*Science and Health*, 40:8-16. 38:21-24).

Disease and Death. Christian Scientists claim that since organic disease does not exist, "the cause of all so-called disease is mental" [i.e., 'the belief in sin is thereby the cause of it'] (*Science and Health*, p. 377). They say that since our physical bodies do not exist, disease and death are only illusions (*Science and Health*, pp. 348,386).

What about the Bible in all that Eddy says? It states quite different things than the tenants Eddy proposes. This is no problem for her as she states that there are hundreds of errors in our copies of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. That is how Christians have come up with their strange theology.

Scientology:

Salvation: Scientology holds that man is basically good, and that his spiritual salvation depends upon himself, his relationships with his fellows and his attainment of brotherhood with the universe. Scientology is a religious philosophy concerned with the full rehabilitation of man's innate spiritual self—his capabilities, his awareness, and his certainty of his own immortality.

With the publishing of *Dianetics*, Hubbard described the method that he had found to obtain "salvation" for mankind. In this book, he notes the discovery of a previously unknown and harmful part of the mind that contains recordings (*engrams*) of past painful experiences - experiences of loss that remain in this portion of our unconscious mind. These incidents of spiritual trauma are recorded on a *time track* in our mind. Collectively, over time, this track accumulates harmful information that make up our *reactive mind*. This portion of our mind is the source of all our emotional pain and psychosomatic illnesses. We need to rid our mind of this time track. A second area of

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our mind, the *analytical mind*, is that portion that thinks, observes things, remembers and is able to use this information to solve problems. The goal of Scientology is to teach methods for its followers to use their analytic mind to learn to erase the ‘garbage’ in their reactive mind and attain the *clear*. Then, a person’s fundamental spirituality, artistry, character, goodness and peace will be restored.

It is easy to see the analogy between the *clear* and the state of enlightenment described in Hinduism and Buddhism. Hubbard states that the *clear* is a permanent level of spiritual awareness never before attainable without the methods one will learn through his instructional programs of Scientology. Through hard work and much time, anyone can and will someday in some lifetime reach this *clear* and then their essence, their *thetan*, will have attained its fulfillment. At this time, they will live out their remaining lifetime on earth with a *clear* mind and then die and not be re-cycled anymore! What they will experience after that death is not explained other than suggesting that it will be like reaching nirvana... which was also never explained. So, the ultimate “resting place” for the Scientologist is a mystery.

Creation – Eternity past: Before the beginning was a Cause and the entire purpose of the Cause was the creation of effect. (L. Ron Hubbard writing in *The Factors – Appendix 1 - 1954*) This quote from Hubbard shows that at least early on in his development of his Scientology religion, he had a similar concept of eternity past and its creation by a First Cause as do the Jews and Christians. Of course, his ideas about this First Cause (i.e. God) are not at all consistent with Christianity.

New Age Religion:

Salvation: Because New Agers believe that each person is God, they don't believe in sin as the Bible defines it. Any lack a person has, they say, is only a lack of enlightenment. Once that person's consciousness is altered so he will think properly about his oneness with the *Force*, or the *Impersonal Presence*, any problems they might have will be resolved. Because they explain away sin, they have no need for salvation in the biblical sense. In their minds, any salvation would simply be a more complete unification with the One (i.e. God). Once they have adequately used the many consciousness-changing techniques necessary to achieve “enlightenment”, their quest for salvation is over. Every person will eventually become aware of his/her true identity (recognizing his/her godhead). In the meantime, through a series of reincarnations based on the time honored concept of karma, people will work toward this end. At some point, everyone will be absorbed into the great *all* from which we emanated. This is very analogous to the Hindu concept of Brahman and the Buddhist conception of nirvana.

Heaven and Eternity: New Age proponents believe that someday there will be enough New Age consciousness to bring this world into a New World Order and a New Age.

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This idea really began to pick up steam in the late 1960's. Songs such as "This is the Dawning of the Age of Aquarius" and "Imagine" (by John Lennon) spoke of this quest. New Agers have tried, on occasion, to pray worldwide at a certain given time in an attempt to muster the needed power to alter the world for good. For example, on 3/3/2003, a world-wide prayer vigil took place in response to advertisements on the Internet and in magazines and newspapers read by New Agers. One such site noted in asking people to pray at that time... "We believe it is possible that concentrated thought can play a major role in facilitating positive changes across the earth." I wonder just who are what is the recipient of their prayers?

Some day in the future, it is believed, a New Age of worldwide enlightenment will be ushered in... either by human effort or, some say, people from another planet will rescue our planet and lead us into this New World Order. Anyway, people will all someday be "saved" by realizing their own godhood and the world itself will someday enter into a New Age of enlightenment.

Judaism:

It seems most appropriate to write about the orthodox Jewish beliefs concerning salvation, eternity and heaven as these Jews are those that best follow the tenants of their Holy Book.

Heaven: This is the place where God and his angels reside. It is also the place where saved people will spend their eternity if they follow God's commandments. It is a wonderful place, indescribably beautiful and peaceful.

Salvation: A saved person will spend eternity with God in heaven. An unsaved person will spend eternity separated from God in hell. One must follow God's commandments in order to obtain salvation... at least as well as one can do this with his/her knowledge of the one true God... the God of Abraham. God had instituted a sacrificial system to enable the Jews to have their sins forgiven as needed. There are certain days set aside each year to perform these sacrifices in the Temple of God (such as the Day of Atonement – Yom Kippur). Since there has not been this Temple in Jerusalem since A.D. 70, most rabbis have adopted the attitude that a contrite heart, repentance and sincere prayer for forgiveness will temporarily supplant the sacrificial ceremony... until the re-building of the Temple. The Orthodox Jew believes the Temple will be built once the Messiah comes.

Eternity: God created the universe ex nihilo. God always existed and intervened at a point in time to create the universe in which we live. God, therefore, exists outside of our universe in time and all other dimensions of space. This universe and all people ever born will live eternally in either heaven or hell. The place where a person will spend eternity depends on how he/she performed while on earth including their belief with respect to God (also based on their knowledge of God).

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Christianity:

Heaven: A wonderful, beautiful actual place somewhere not defined. It may even involve other dimensions since we know that there are many more than the four dimensions we can experience at this time. God, his angels and all Christians will live there through eternity – Christians will also spend time in places such as the New Earth as well.

Salvation: Christians are saved by the Grace of God, not by any works. Anyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation will be saved. This faith is evidenced by their recognition that they are sinners and not able to save themselves. They must believe in faith: Jesus is God incarnate, He gave His life and shed His blood on the cross to pay the penalty for mankind's sins, and that He rose again and now sits at the right hand of God in heaven. God gives salvation to anyone who accepts this free gift... but, one must believe the gospel and accept the gift in order to possess it. Those people who reject the gift of Jesus will spend eternity separated from God in a place called hell.

Eternity: The Christian view parallels that of the Orthodox Jew as far as creation is concerned. The future, however, is a little different as follows: after Jesus (who is fully God) returns to earth at the Battle of Armageddon, He will easily defeat Satan and his evil forces. The saved in heaven (i.e. the Christians) will come with him from heaven at that time. For one thousand years, Jesus will rule and reign with *help* from his 'brothers' and 'sisters' (Christian saints – i.e. saved people). After this millennium, God will banish Satan and his demons to eternal damnation. God will re-form the heavens and Earth into a New heaven and New Earth where all the angels, Christians and the Holy Trinity (God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit) will live in perfect peace, joy and harmony forevermore!

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IV: The evidence for and against each religion

Up to this point, the groundwork has been laid with respect to how each religion came into being, their respective holy book(s) and their concepts of God(s), salvation and eternity. In most cases, many of the basic tenants of each religion were also addressed to some degree. So where does that leave us? Importantly, it should now be clear that not every one of these religions is compatible. For example, Christianity says that there is only one God and that God is a triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). Yet, Muslims and the Jehovah Witnesses say that there absolutely is only one God and that God is certainly not triune in nature. Furthermore, the Scientologist says it makes no difference what a person's conception of God is... yet, the Hindus and Buddhist believe that God is actually in everything, including you and the kitchen sink. Obviously, someone is wrong! So, let us attempt to evaluate the most important facets of each religion to see if any of them will stand up to careful scrutiny. Certainly all cannot be true... maybe none are true. However, maybe one is true.

There are certain areas of a religious belief system that need be evaluated to assess its veracity. Let me list those that will be discussed in the pages that follow:

- **Scientific and philosophic compatibility:**

Twenty-first century **secular science** states, fairly strongly, that our universe began at some point in the distant past – about 14 billion years ago, it is believed. Although the exact time of the beginning is not certain, cosmologists are virtually universally agreed on certain points: the beginning came at an instant of time (referred to at the Big Bang), the universe has been expanding ever since, and there is excellent evidence that this expansion will continue unabated forever.

Logic also tells us certain things about God and creation that should be understood before proceeding. Let me review an important concept of philosophy (and logic). This universe in which we live is made up of a virtually unending series of *causes* and *effects*. For every *effect* there must be a *cause*. I think this idea is fairly easy for people to accept. Interestingly, if one thinks about it for a moment, everything in this universe is an *effect* of some previously existent *cause*. Even the Big Bang is an effect of some other cause. Yet, before the Big Bang we did not have a universe. In other words, **our universe is also an effect of some antecedent cause**. Well, how can this be?

Before the Big Bang, there was nothing! Ah hah! That is not true. There obviously had to be something before the universe in order to *cause* the Big Bang. Obviously this “thing” had to have some unique characteristics. **First** of all, it obviously had to *exist outside of the universe* since the universe was not even here yet! **Second**, it had to have *enormous power to create* the massive event known as the Big Bang with all of the characteristics that enabled the series of events that

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followed this creation event. **Third**, it could not have been an effect of anything in this universe itself. In fact, the *ultimate Cause, cannot be an effect* of anything. Also, *there is nothing that can cause itself to come into existence – that is, no thing can create itself*. Now here is the truism that may require some contemplation to understand: *While it is logically true that every effect has to have an antecedent cause, it is certainly possible to have an Uncaused Cause – typically, this Ultimate Cause is referred to as God. An Uncaused Cause simply always existed... therefore it does not require a cause. In other words, God has always existed.* This Creative Force, God, must have been the Creator of the universe... something or someone had to *Cause* this incredible *effect* called the Universe!

Let's look at this idea another way. The great theologian and philosopher, Thomas Aquinas had a very nice and succinct way of describing this concept: It is called "The Argument from Contingency". Aquinas' form of the argument, also known as the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God, comes from his observation that, in nature, there were things with contingent existences. That is, they certainly existed, but they did not have to exist. At some point in time, these things did not exist. There must have been a time when nothing existed. If this is so, there would be nothing around to bring anything into existence. Therefore, it is obvious that contingent beings are not sufficient to account for the existence of all contingent beings ... which would include this universe. There must be a Necessary Being (a Being that has always existed) that caused the contingent beings to exist. His argument is stated as follows:

1. Every finite and contingent being has a cause
2. Nothing finite and contingent can cause itself
3. A causal chain cannot be of infinite length
4. Therefore a First Cause (or something that is not an effect) must exist

The Universe requires an explanation. The creation of the universe by a First Cause, usually called God, is that explanation. One other way of stating it:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause
2. The universe began to exist
3. Therefore, the universe had a cause
4. This Cause had to always exist...this Cause is usually called God

- **Historical accuracy**

Any religion that is worthy to be trusted and followed must be one that always states the truth about everything, including historical events. Certainly God would not make mistakes, nor could we know how to follow a religion properly if we could never be sure what portions of its scriptures we could trust as

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being true when compared to those verses (or sections) that would later prove to be in error.

- **Personal “character” of those men (or woman) that introduced the religion**

It makes no common sense to follow an individual who is corrupt of moral character. Why would anyone believe a person or persons who lie, cheat, steal, etc. That would be ridiculous, would it not?

- **External evidence for supernatural aspects of the religion**

Some religions claim to be a religion wherein miracles can and do at times happen. Some religions predict certain future events. If these predictions actually subsequently come true, this would lend impressive weight to the claims of that religion.

- **A religion’s effect on the world when followed properly.**

The true world’s religion should lead mankind to lead excellent lives, simply put. Also, society should be affected positively if people live by the precepts of that religion.

In the following discussion, each of the ten religions covered in this lecture series will be examined in the following manner. First, we will take a *scientific and philosophic look at each religion’s concept of God, eternity and morality*. The goal in doing this will be to see if their viewpoint on these topics is what one would expect in the religion that actually “speaks” for the God of our Universe... the “Truth”. Following this, will be an analysis in brief of *the historicity of each religion* to see if their scriptures and “holy men” speak the truth at all times... what one must demand from the *true* religion of God. Third, it will be worthwhile to *evaluate the character of those people who founded and developed the various religions* under consideration. Obviously, it will be difficult to give much, if any, credence to the words of men and women with less than impeccable ethics and morals – given that they are trying to convince all of mankind to follow them and their new found belief system... at the risk of one’s eternal life! Next, is there any external evidence that any of these religions represent a *God with supernatural abilities*. And finally, it will also be of some value to take a brief look at how some of these religions, when practiced as prescribed, have affected the world. Now let us begin.

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Hinduism:

Science and Philosophy: The Hindus believe that everything always existed. There was no beginning of time or space or matter. If this is true, then our current scientific belief that the universe came into existence at some time in the past, is not true. Of course, it may be that the Hindus believe something that is false... and this “information” was given to them by their “God” or gods over 3.5 millennia ago. The Hindus also have another interesting concept of the universe. They believe that it is cyclical in nature. That is, they believe that the universe is in an infinite series of expansion and contraction... kind of like a yo-yo. At one point, the universe is expanding outward, then it collapses into itself only to begin the next expansion. There have been a few cosmologists who have considered this as the actual way our universe works. However, in the last twenty or so years research has shown that the universe will never begin to collapse from its current expansion outward. It will just keep expanding. In other words, if our scientists are correct, the Hindus are not.

Recall also that the Hindus have an unusual conception of God (or gods). Simply put, most Hindus believe that all is God and God is all. That is, God is within the universe, not separated from it in any way. Since Hindus believe that everything has always existed, they have no need to have a concept of God as a creator. Unfortunately for the Hindus, as we are now considering the veracity of their religion, we have excellent scientific and philosophical evidence that there was indeed an actual beginning! In summary then, the Hindus concept of God and the universe is not consistent with our current scientific evidence... nor logic as it relates to cause and effect (Cosmological Argument for God and Creation). But, of course, science may be wrong and it is remotely possible that our logical arguments may be incorrect. Therefore, let us continue to consider other aspects of Hinduism.

Historicity: As was discussed at the onset of this lecture series, the Hindu religion began over 3,500 years ago. It is a very diverse religion as noted – some Hindus believe in polytheism, others monism, and others monotheism... many more concepts of God exist to different Hindu people. Is it possible that they are all right? Of course not.

It is worth remembering that the early formative years of Hindu theology was dominated by a belief in many, many gods. Will Durant, in his *History of Civilization*, points out that in some cases, “these gods are human in figure, in motive, almost in ignorance.” Then he goes on to give examples of the stupidity of one of these gods. Another question pondered by the originators of this religion was which one of their gods created the world. They tossed this around between Agni, Indra, Soma then Prajapati. Another position adopted later was the Brahman had laid an egg and sat on it until it hatched... hence the earth was born! The question needed to be considered is whether this religion sounds like the one true religion. Although the basic tenants of Hinduism have changed over time, and now may be more palatable to certain people, one would

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expect the actual true religion of God would not need several *mulligans* before presenting itself to the world in an acceptable form.

The most common form of Hinduism in America today is called Vedanta. They say Brahman is the one true God and is real... everything else is an “illusion”. All mankind’s goal is to go inward and recognize that one’s atman (soul) is synonymous with Brahman. When this is accomplished, we will have discovered the secret to merging into this Brahman and never have to be re-cycled again via reincarnation. Brahman is an impersonal god unconcerned with what goes on in the world. Good and evil don’t exist as everything is an illusion... as you recall.

So what does the practice of Hinduism lead a person to experience? Let me quote from the great Hindu saint, Ramakrishna as he describes an enlightened soul, “But the man who always sees Brahman and talks to him intimately has an altogether different nature. He acts sometimes like an inert thing, sometimes like a ghoul, sometimes like a child, and sometimes like a madman... He is not conscious of the holy and the unholy. He does not observe any formal purity. To him everything is Brahman. People notice his actions and think of him as insane.” (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna-1977)

The faith of the Indian worshippers is very sincere as noted by a former ambassador to India, Paul Claudel. But what is the result of this sincere worship? Claudel states, “The objects of the worship are brutal, inhuman deities who know how to scare, punish, avenge, mock and cheat, not to elevate and forgive. The environment surrounding the worshippers repels rather than attracts: horrid, grimacing idols with cunning or cruel stares, incredibly gaudy vulgarity, copulating monkeys, defecating cows, mud, stench, garbage. What attracts and keeps them here is the degradation of: reason, of self-esteem, of vital forces, of faith in God and man. Here they find innumerable gods and none at all; everybody may do his thing just like the monkeys and the cows, sinking slowly into nirvana. **Intelligence and purposefulness dissolve on the trash heap, the body rots until it becomes one with the road, the grass, the dung. The great nothingness envelops all, and the ashes go into the river.** (National Review, 1985) That is the conclusion that Ambassador Claudel arrived at after observing the practice of Hinduism over a period of many years.

Another important factor in evaluating Hinduism in the modern world is its marked dependence upon practicing various methods of achieving “altered states of consciousness”. Yoga, transcendental meditation, astral projection, etc. can result in some serious problems. Let me just quote from their own literature. Yoga authority Hans-Ulrich Rieker notes, “Yoga is not a trifling jest if we consider that misunderstanding in the practice of yoga can mean death or insanity”. Sri Chinmoy, another Yoga master states, “To practice yoga breath control without guidance is very dangerous. I know of three persons who have died from it...” Do you really think that a true religion would have a God that would allow His disciples to go insane or die simply by attempting to get closer to Him? I surely do not.

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So what are some other viewpoints of modern day Hindu gurus? Here are some of their comments on a variety of religious topics and on their position of authority.

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh:

“You are nobody to judge what is right and wrong...”

This is none of your business... Whatsoever I decide is absolute.”

“I am for the death of the mind.”

“What I am doing here is absurd, it is not logical.”

“Many times you will find my statements contradictory, they are absurd because I will say one thing one moment and I will contradict it another moment... I am only consistent in one thing... my inconsistencies.”

“Good and evil are one and the same.”

“To me the person does not exist... The person is non-existent, a nonentity.”

“To emphasize morality is mean, degrading; it is inhuman.”

Mejer Baba:

“I am for the select few who... surrender their all, body, mind and possessions to me. Those who have today willingly chosen to become my slaves will become true masters tomorrow.”

“You must achieve elimination of the mind.”

“As long as the mind is there, the real ‘I am God’ state cannot be experienced. The mind has to die in this body.”

Dr. Free John:

“You must yield everything to me. You must yield yourself in every function.”

“You are not going to heaven from here. You are to die, literally and absolutely.”

“People were screaming and howling and weeping, emitting strange grunts and snarls, writhing, and assuming yogic mudra...” (Free John talking about his group experiences during yoga exercises)

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi:

“Thinking can never be a profound basis of living. Thinking is only imaginary.”

Swami Muktananda:

“Our concepts of sin and virtue.. alienate us from our true self... That which you see as impure is pure... You imagine ideas of sin and virtue through ignorance.”

“It seemed that I was being controlled by some power that made me do all these things. I no longer had a will of my own. My madness was growing all the time.” (This was Muktananda reflecting on his yoga experiences)

What has this religion accomplished?

Women are looked upon as lovely, but inferior in the Hindu religion (especially in the past). An early Hindu code, called the Code of Manu stated, “The source of dishonor is woman; the source of strife is woman; the source of earthly existence is woman; therefore avoid woman.” Also, a faithful wife must serve her husband... her lord as if he

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were a god. A wife who disobeyed her husband would become a jackal in her next incarnation.

Hindus through the centuries have tended to be very passive, in great part due to their theology. They do not care much who ruled their land or exploited them since all that matters is the soul and the seemingly endless lives needed to be lived to eventually reach enlightenment. What happened to the body while on earth was entirely meaningless to a true believer. One of their major gods, Shiva, is a three-headed god of cruelty and destruction... the personification of that cosmic force which destroys all things, one after another. Until the twentieth century much of their worship was a bloody ritual, sometimes involving human sacrifice. There are over a million gods in the Hindu pantheon, men and animals, of course, are basically the same thing, just passing from one to another in any given re-incarnation. The fact that this belief has led to many environmental problems goes without saying. It has been said that cows are treated much better than many a woman in their society... unfortunately, this is another result of Hinduism.

The Caste System: Recall that it was the Hindu religion over 2500 years ago that instituted the Caste System. This system is primarily responsible for the society that currently exists in India today. This certainly is not an endorsement of the Caste System. Life in that country is very difficult for the vast majority of its citizens. Hinduism cultivates the notion that people should be satisfied with the status and position in life to which they are born. No one should strive toward higher education or a career in the arts or politics if they were born into the lower class. Maybe in their next life, they would be born as a noble or priest... but, for this current life, stay put. This Hindu teaching fosters a nihilistic attitude towards life and stifles any personal drive that a person might have. People cannot reach their true potential in this form of society... and that is sad.

The Sacred Cow: The fact that the Hindu religion values the life of a cow just as much as that of a man (and maybe more than the life of a woman to some), is responsible for much of the cultural and social ills of Indian society. For one thing, this results in a very unsanitary country and problems with disease. This concept also has to effect how an individual thinks of himself and those humans around him. In Christianity, there is a very special relationship between God and humanity. In fact, the Bible states that humans are made in the image of God. In Hinduism, since everything is god and this god, Brahman, is impersonal, there really is no reason to give any special consideration to any person. Much about the country of India reflects this belief.

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Buddhism:

Like Hindus, the Buddhists believe in the cyclical nature of man and the universe. Buddhists also do not believe in an absolute Creator God. Therefore, as with the Hindus, their conception of God and of the universe is not consistent with what we know is the case if what science and logic tells us is true. As mentioned earlier, there is a mass of evidence to show that our universe did actually begin at one specific point in time in the past, thus requiring a Creator.

As we continue with the discussion of the ten religions under consideration, let us next review the history of Buddhism. What is there in that history that would make an open-minded and intelligent person decide that the Buddha actually discovered the true religion of this universe? Or was he wrong?

Historicity:

Siddhartha Gautama was the founder of Buddhism. His entrance into the world in 563 B.C. was unpredicted and unannounced. He never claimed to be God. In fact, he made it clear in his teachings that he was not God. The history of his life and teachings was not well documented for several hundred years after his death. By that time, many myths and legends had surfaced concerning his life (and death) that make it very difficult to separate fact from fiction. There are some things that are fairly well agreed upon, however:

- Buddha (the title given Siddhartha after he reached enlightenment) felt that it would have been better to have never been born since the pain in a person's lifetime far outweighs the pleasure
- His belief system was an outgrowth of Hinduism – not really a new concept
- Buddha teachings, called the dharma, were *not inspired* by the gods (or God) according to Buddha himself
- He did not believe in praying to God as he felt that *God would not become involved* in the life of a human
- Buddha's goal was to escape this world of pain. His conception of karma and re-incarnation was basic Hinduism... nothing really new. He finally reached an epiphany one day when he realized that by following his four Noble Truths, he could reach nirvana – the end of this miserable cycle of life. His proof of this? That is the question. When he reached 80 years old, he died of dysentery... and that is all anyone has heard from him since. According to his teachings, Buddha at that time would have had his individual consciousness “annihilated” as it came into its final union with God.
- Upon death, our individual personality will not survive. That is, we will never actually recognize this portion of the cycle of life that is spoken of in Hinduism and Buddhism.

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- There are literally tens of thousands of writings in the collection of dharma (writings) of the various subsets of Buddhism. Different sects follow various combinations of the Sutras, the Tripitaka, the Tibetan book of the dead and many other sacred writings. *All of these scriptures are written by men – none come from God. None claim to be from God. Most of them seem to be essentially commentaries on (or an expansion of) the ideas put forth by” the Buddha”.* *There are many contradictions from one writing to another.*
- Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana are the three major sects of Buddhism today. They all believe in the same basic idea of samsara (the cycle of rebirths) and eventual goal of nirvana. Yet, the details vary. For example, in Theravada (the “Lesser Vehicle”), it is thought to be highly unlikely, even impossible, that a layperson can achieve liberation. Because Mahayana disagrees, it regards itself as providing a "Greater Vehicle" to liberation, in which more people can participate.

The question becomes whether a person wants to put their faith in any particular belief system. Buddhism is just such a religious system, started by a young man over two thousand years ago, based on another ancient religion, Hinduism. This man, was unhappy with life, wanted a permanent escape from its pain. After many years of thought, he believed he found a way to get out of this world of pain forever. The proof or evidence that he supplied that his “way” is the true “way”, is absolutely ZERO. Yet, he invites anyone to follow him toward the stated goal of nirvana ... leading upon subsequent death to... some form of total “annihilation”.

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons):

Mormons have quite the unique picture of God. In their religion, even God, the “Father” was not always a god. At some point in the past, every current god was a man that was working his way toward his current godhood. Jesus is the god of this world now... yet, at one time he was not a god. God the Father also had to work his way to his current status. Some day the obedient Mormon can and will achieve godhood of some planet. Interesting ideas.

Intriguingly, there apparently never was an absolute Creator God with ultimate power that existed outside this universe before time began and therefore was in a position to create this world we live in. As we noted earlier, Mormons believe that the “elements” that make up the universe are co-eternal with God... in this area, not different than the Eastern Religions (Hindus and Buddhists). Without the Creator God, it is very difficult to figure how anything came into being. It is very easy to say that all gods were once men that worked their way to godhood status... but how did these “man-gods” get here in the first place? Who created them? Even Mormons do not say that they created themselves. That is a big problem.

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Historicity:

There are a myriad of historical facts concerning the Mormon religion that shed doubt upon its veracity. The following is an abbreviated list of just some of these:

- The *Book of Mormon* has been changed on more than one occasion. In 1920 there was a major revision. In 1981, there were 100 verses changed (without consulting any golden plates). If this book was from God, no change would ever be needed. Here are some of the reasons for the edits:
 1. There was need to change a King's name from Mosiah to Benjamin as either God or Joseph Smith had gotten it wrong in the first place
 2. They changed one verse from, "Behold, the virgin which thou seest is the mother of God" to "Behold, the virgin which thou seest is the mother of the Son of God." You see, the fact is that Joseph Smith had slipped into Roman Catholic theology a bit when he wrote this down
 3. There are over 4,000 word changes from the original Book of Mormon to its current wording
 4. In the opening of the *Book of Mormon*, there are three witnesses who state that "An angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engraving thereon..." These three were Martin Harris, David Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery. Wow! What a special honor and glorious time that meeting would have been! Yet, later, all three left the religion! Martin said later that he had not actually seen the plates, except with his "spiritual eye". David Whitmer and Cowdery also later recanted on their testimony concerning the angel visitation. Why would anyone leave a religion that they knew was the one true religion and face the apostasy that they all did receive? The only reasonable answer is that they knew this religion had been built on a terrible lie by Joseph Smith... who has led untold thousands away from the truth.
- The *Book of Mormon* portrays the rise and existence of two great civilizations in the Americas – beginning about 4,000 years ago. Where is the evidence of any of these two? There is absolutely none! Yet in this "holy book" there is mention of land covered with great buildings, great machinery, millions of people, temples, great ships, swords, shields, and great cities throughout the land. Never has any evidence been found of these civilizations that has been accepted by any reputable source.

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- Iron, steel and glass were not used in the New World until after 1492 – yet these and certain other objects and metals discovered much later than the times described in the Book of Mormon are often mentioned in that book.
- There is zero evidence of contact with Egyptians or Hebrews in the New World until relatively recent times... certainly not thousands of years ago.
- No forms of Old World writing (eg. Hebrew) have been found in the Americas prior to 1492 except a few Norse rune stones.
- Present evidence shows only that Norsemen reached the New World about 1,000 years ago... no other Old World peoples came to the Americas until Columbus.
- The body characteristics seem to show that the American Indian is basically of Mongoloid type, certainly not a relative of the Jew!
- Elephants are mentioned as being in the New World by the Mormons... certainly there is no evidence that they existed in the New World until recently
- Thomas Ferguson, a Brigham Young professor for decades had assiduously searched for any evidence of these two civilizations. After twenty-five years of research he found nothing to back up the *Book of Mormon's* assertions concerning the flora, fauna, the topography, geography, peoples, coins, cities, etc. He called the geography mentioned in the book “fictional”
- Geneticists and anthropologist have proven that the American Indian is not of Semitic extraction thereby completely falsifying the *Book of Mormon*.
- When it became obvious that the government was going to go after them for their practice of polygamy, the Mormons decided that this lifestyle was no longer appropriate
- Almost humorously, Joseph Smith outfoxed himself when he plagiarized a section out of the King James Bible (1 John 5:7 became 3 Nephi 11:27) in that all major early manuscripts did not have this verse in them... The King James authors had added this and thus so did Smith.
- Smith uses portions of Peter's first sermon at Pentecost when he has Jesus speaking to the Nephites right after His resurrection. The problem is, why would Jesus use Peter's sermon, especially given Peter did not give it until over 45 days after Jesus had risen... and therefore weeks after Jesus supposedly spoke to the Nephites.
- Smith at one time identified the messenger angel as Moroni, later he said it was Nephi
- There are many examples of where Smith has plagiarized the King James Bible. How is this known for certain? As it turns out, although that version of the Bible is excellent in my opinion, it has been determined that

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there are several verses that have been mistranslated – usually one word errors. Smith always makes the same error. Coincidence? Of course not! Remember, Joseph had the incredible help of the Golden Plates and the special glasses, etc., etc.

- In the *Book of Mormon*, people had access to things that had not been invented or available at that time. For example, there were supposed to be glass windows in the boats, a compasses, and steel swords
- Jesus was to be born in Jerusalem in the Book of Mormon
- The *Book of Mormon* notes that believers were called Christians in 73 B.C.- how is that possible?
- Also, it quotes John 5:29 as a source... yet, that verse in the Book of Mormon was supposedly written in 6 B.C.
- In 1842, Smith published his translation of some ancient Egyptian papyrus acquired by Michael Chandler. He called the translation “The Book of Abraham”. Over one hundred years later, these papyrus writings turned up in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Actual Egyptologists have since read and translated these documents. There is no resemblance to even one word of what Smith had written.

Frankly, there are many, many other errors in the Mormon scriptures that would take up many additional pages if listed. But, the point has been made. There are simply too many errors in these scriptures to have been from God. In fact, even one mistake would have been one too many.

Character of founding father:

Joseph Smith:

- Claimed that his *Pearl of Great Price* plates were authenticated by a Columbia University professor, Charles Anthon – Prof. Anthon denounced this assertion in writing as “part of a scheme to cheat the farmer of his money.” Anthon certainly noted that these purported hieroglyphic writings “had evidently been prepared by some person who had before him at the time a book containing various alphabets, Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses and nourishes, Roman letters, inverted or placed side-ways... and evidently copied after the Mexican calendar...”
- Smith and his father were famous for their interest in treasure hunting and peep-stone divination and got into trouble with the law and neighbors due to their exploits. In fact, Smith had to pay a fine for his peep-stone gazing in 1826
- Smith was run out of town via an old fashioned “tar and feathering” in 1830 as he made his way to Missouri.

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- Smith left New York because so many of the people there knew him well and were certainly not interested in joining in his new religion. They regarded the whole thing as a big sham. So Smith had a “revelation from God” to move the few new converts he had to more fertile ground... Kirtland, Ohio. There he instituted the practice of polygamy which was confirmed by “divine revelation” as well. He had over 100 more divine revelations before he finally was killed by an unruly, angry mob.
- Sixty-two New Yorkers signed a statement attesting to Smith’s lack of moral character and that he was addicted to “vicious habits”.

Conclusion:

As can be seen, the Mormon religion was founded by a man that had great problems telling the truth. He teamed up with several scoundrels and was able to convince many to accept his new religion. God only knows what all of these men’s motives were... let us just say that they could not have been noble. The evidence that this religion is bogus is massive. Hopefully, those who have been hoodwinked into joining this religion, will open their eyes, see the truth, and turn to the true God.

Islam:

Muslims believe in a God that is transcendent and creator of the universe. In this sense, their concept of god is very similar to the Jew and Christian. They also are monotheistic (although they do not believe in the trinity as do the Christians). One other difference between the God of the Jews and Christians is that Allah is the author of everything that happens on earth, the good *and* the bad. The Christian God, allows for evil to exist as a consequence of mankind’s free will and subsequent sin, but He certainly is not the author of this rebellion from God’s Laws... that is, sin.

Historicity:

The Islam religion was founded by a young man named Muhammad. He had a difficult early life as his father died before he was born and his mother died when he was a small child. He then lived for a few years with his grandfather (who soon died himself) before finally moving in with his uncle at the age of eight. As an adult, he became very religious and spent a great deal of time praying and meditating in secluded places... such as caves. At the age of forty, he claimed to hear voices telling him various things that would eventually become the basis for his newfound religion, Islam. The following are some facts to consider when evaluating his claim to have found the true religion of Allah:

- ❖ No mention of Muhammad was made prior to his appearing on the world scene... in other words, there was no supernatural predictions of this man’s ministry
- ❖ At first, Muhammad did not know where the “voices” were coming from... he thought that they might be from demons

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- ❖ At one point early on, his foster mother thought he was demon possessed as he claimed to have been attacked by two men who cut his belly open ... yet, she found him standing in front of her without so much as a scratch. Later, he said that he had been attacked by angels who had cleansed his heart in the attack
- ❖ His wife convinced him that the voices he was hearing were from a divine source. From this time on, the voices heard were purported to be from the angel Gabriel
- ❖ His message was rejected by the townsfolk in Mecca for years. At first, the town elders thought he was just daffy... later, they began to become somewhat angry with his message and method. Finally, he left that area because he was feeling unsafe in the town – he ended up in Medina twelve years after he began his ministry
- ❖ He found a group of people willing to listen to his preaching in Medina. He won many converts to Islam and throughout the rest of his life, he used coercion, including military might, to convert much of the surrounding area, including his old hometown of Mecca
- ❖ Muhammad changed his message depending on the situation at the time. For example:
 - at first he issued an edict that all believers should pray facing Jerusalem. After he began to have problems with the Jews due to his rather atypical interpretation of the Torah, he changed this practice
 - In the early years of Islam, he stated that there should be “no compulsion” to believe in any given religion. (Sura 2:256) Later, he changed this to “Fight and slay the idolaters wherever you find them.” (Sura 9:5)
 - Although he referred to Christians and Jews as “people of the book”, he also stated that they are people “who will listen to any lie.” Christians are enemies (Sura 5:14) and Muslims were not to have Christians nor Jews as friends. (Sura 5:51)
 - The Koran is subject to **abrogation**. This term denotes the fact that whatever is stated in the Koran, at any point in time, may be changed at a later date... even to the complete opposite. There is therefore *nothing that can be taken as absolute truth* for the Muslim, because on any given day Allah may abrogate his previously given revelation. This is not *progressive revelation* as is revealed in the Bible by the God of the Jews and Christians. Instead, this is a situation where Allah has in the past, and can in the future, simply *contradict* his earlier revelation. The question must be asked. Why would Allah change his mind about something? Did Allah not know of future events that would cause him to change his mind? In any event, Allah is not consistent in his revelation as it has changed in the past and may change in the future. In other words, one might say, *Allah is not the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow* as is the Christian God.
- ❖ When Muhammad died, nothing of note happened to evidence his power from Allah
- ❖ Allah is the author of all things... good and evil

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- ❖ Allah is portrayed in many places in the Koran as a deceiver and conniver. He is said to use deceit and schemes against his opponents in order to arrive at his goals
- ❖ Salvation is by works – no one can be sure of making it to heaven unless they give their life in jihad. Then, it is off to a meeting with 72 beautiful virgins and great wine! In the Hadith it states, “The lowliest of the inhabitants of paradise will be he who has eighty thousand servants, seventy-two wives...” The Koran speaks of virgin maidens who will be enjoyed by men with enhanced sexual stamina.
- ❖ Women are treated poorly in the Islam religion... does this make good theological sense? It is virtually impossible to get a conviction in a rape case. A woman’s vote typically counts as 50% of a man’s vote in court. A man can divorce a Muslim woman with relative ease... not so, the other way around. There are a multitude of other examples of the low place women are given in this religion... suggesting it is man-made.
- ❖ Heaven to the Muslim is a sensual place. Consider whether it makes sense that the ultimate goal that the true God has set for man is to reach heaven and be greeted with 72 virgins and all the great wine one can consume. Does this sound like something a man might dream up, or the God of the universe?
- ❖ Muhammad had between nine and 29 wives.
- ❖ It is also clear that Muhammad, on at least one occasion, spoke in the names of false gods. Yet, according to Deuteronomy 18:18-20, a true prophet cannot speak false messages nor speak in the name of false gods.
- ❖ Muhammad was a man of war with great sensual appetites. He was not your prototypical prophet of God.

Scripture discrepancies:

The Koran holds the Holy Bible in high value. It is true that the Koran states that Jews and Christians misinterpret the Bible, but, the actual Bible is noted to be Allah’s word. Let us take a closer look at that concept for a moment. If the Bible is true, then comments concerning it and its content should be consistent in the Koran. Are they? Let me mention a few errors:

- Sura 11:42 says that Noah had a son that died... not so
- Sura 3:41 contradicts Luke 1:18-20 as the Koran says Zechariah was speechless for three days. In fact he was mute for months.
- Sura 61:6 notes that Muhammad fulfilled prophecies noted in the Torah and the gospels. There were certainly no prophecies of him in the Bible. The Muslims state that Muhammad is the “helper” mentioned by Jesus in John 14:16 “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever.” The problem with this? Well, Muhammad certainly did not abide with anyone forever. Secondly, Muhammad never was a Helper to those to whom Jesus was

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speaking to that day. Jesus was obviously speaking of the Holy Spirit who would come and live within each Christian upon their conversion.

Islam Apologetics:

There is very little done by the Muslims to show the world that they have found the true religion of God. One area that I found on searching the internet for sources on this topic of Islam Apologetics was the purported *Gospel of Barnabas*. Here are some claims by this so-called “lost gospel”:

Jesus denied that he was the Son of God

Judas was crucified in place of Jesus

Jesus predicted the coming of Muhammad by name

What about this book that they reference to support their religion? Well, it has many problems.

First of all, it mentions that the “year of jubilee” comes every 100 years. Yet, the Bible always states that this event occurs every 50 years. Only when the Pope in the late Middle Ages changed this to 100 years, was the jubilee ever referenced as being of this frequency. Yet, the *Gospel of Barnabas*, supposedly written around the time of Christ, claims it is 100 years.

“And then through all the world will God be worshipped, and mercy received, insomuch that the year of jubilee, which now cometh every hundred years, shall by the Messiah be reduced to every year in every place.” *Gospel of Barnabas*, para 82

Secondly, there is a verse that is amazingly similar to the description that Dante uses in his *Inferno*... certainly, not seen in the Holy Bible. Obviously, both of these quotes are evidence for a writing of this gospel after 1200 A.D.

“Know ye therefore that hell is one, yet hath seven centers one below another. Hence, even as sin is of seven kinds, for as seven gates of hell hath Satan generated it: so there are seven punishments therein.” *Gospel of Barnabas*, para 135

Likewise the *Gospel of Barnabas* speaks of storing wine in **wooden wine-casks** (para 152), a common practice in medieval Europe but not in first-century Palestine where wine was stored in **skins** (Matthew 9:17). Further proof of the author’s ignorance of the geography of Palestine is found in this statement:

“Having arrived at the city of Nazareth the seamen spread through the city all that Jesus had wrought.” *Gospel of Barnabas*, para 20

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In this passage, Nazareth is represented as a harbor on the Lake of Galilee. After this Jesus is said to have gone "up to Capernaum". Every disciple of Jesus would have known that **Capernaum** was the city on the shores of the lake while **Nazareth** is up in the hills. Jesus would have gone up from Capernaum to Nazareth, not the other way around as noted in the *Gospel of Barnabas*.

“Jesus confessed and said the truth: ‘I am not the Messiah ... I am indeed sent to the house of Israel as a prophet of salvation; but after me shall come the Messiah’.” *Gospel of Barnabas*, paras 42, 82

Who was to be the coming Messiah, then? Elsewhere, this *Gospel* makes Jesus say "The name of the Messiah is Admirable ... God said: Wait Muhammad; for thy sake I will create paradise ... Muhammad is his blessed name" (para 97). Here the author of the *Gospel of Barnabas* goes way too far as the Koran clearly states, no less than *eleven* times, that Jesus alone is the Messiah. The Bible confirms this too on many occasions (*John 4.26, Matthew 16.20*). Here is one quotation from the Koran to prove the point:

O Mary! Lo! Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the hereafter. *Surah 3.45*

The title here is **Al-Masih**, "the Messiah", and Jesus himself is called **Al-Masih Isa**, "the Messiah Jesus", elsewhere in the book (*Surah 4.171*). So the *Gospel of Barnabas* incontrovertibly *contradicts* the Koran when it declares that Muhammad was to be the Messiah. No Muslim can be true to his own holy book while at the same time trying to defend the *Gospel of Barnabas* as an authentic gospel.

What is very interesting here is the discovery that this "gospel" not only contradicts the Koran but also *itself*. In the prologue to the book it speaks of "Jesus the Nazarene, called Christ" and states that it is the "true Gospel of Jesus, called Christ". The author does not seem to have been aware that Messiah and Christ are interchangeable terms, meaning the same thing. The latter derives from the Greek word *Christos* which is a translation of the original Hebrew word *Mashiah*. So in one portion of this book the writer calls Jesus the Christ (Messiah) while in another section he refutes this.

The point to the preceding discussion is to show that this weak attempt at proving the veracity of the Islam religion actually does a good job of showing it to be a lie! I am sure that this is why virtually all religions stay away from apologetics as they cannot show themselves to be true... instead, they rely on convincing their prey by other means... smooth talking, force, trickery, etc.

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Jehovah Witness:

Jesus is not God – i.e. the third person of the Trinity

There is one God Almighty - a Spirit Being with a body but not a human body. There is one God and no Trinity. God created the heavens and the Earth. Christ is Lord and Savior, but not God (Jehovah) incarnate, not a God-man but inferior to God, not part of a Godhead. He was a created spirit being, God's only begotten son, sent to Earth as a perfect human. So, it appears that the Jehovah Witness theology does allow for a creative God who existed outside of this universe. They do not allow for the trinity. Jesus was and is certainly not God in this belief system. They do believe in a beginning for our universe, but no end... consistent with current day science.

Historicity:

A review of the history of this religion reveals a truly amazing amount of errors and a poor attempt by their founder, when you really evaluate his “theology” in creating this false religion. There are so many problems it would take a book to discuss them all. Let me just list a large “handful” below (assuming that the reader has a reasonable knowledge of history, the errors will be obvious):

- 1907: Jesus will take His throne in heaven in the year 1914
- 1917: In 1918, God would begin to destroy churches “wholesale” and members by the millions
- 1922-1923: The resurrection of the dead would commence in 1925. The Watchtower Society purchased land and built a mansion on it in preparation for people such as Moses, Abraham and David
- 1938: In 1938, Armageddon was too close for marriage or child bearing
- 1941: In 1941, Armageddon was “immediately before us”
- 1969: Human existence would not last long enough for young people to grow old. Young people were counseled not to pursue graduate degrees for this reason
- 1969: Christ's thousand-year reign would begin in 1975. There was a considerable amount of related speculation in Watchtower publications in the years leading up to 1975.
- 1984: There were "many indications" that "the end" was closer than the end of the 20th century.

Here are a few more prophecies and statements of fact:

- 1914: It was taught that Armageddon would take place before the death of those who were alive in 1914. This teaching was abandoned in 1996; Jehovah's Witnesses currently believe that no certain year can be established for Armageddon to occur.

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- the “Watchtower Society” has also made statements asserting their predictions to be definite. “The date of the close of that 'battle' [Armageddon] is definitely marked in Scripture as October, 1914. It is already in progress, its beginning dating from October, 1874.”
- "The blood in any person is in reality the person himself. ... poisons due to personal living, eating and drinking habits ... the poisons that produce the impulse to commit suicide, murder, or steal are in the blood. Moral insanity, sexual perversions, repression, inferiority complexes, petty crimes - these often follow in the wake of blood transfusion”.
- "The constellation of the Pleiades is a small one compared with others which scientific instruments disclose to the wondering eyes of man. But the greatness in size of other stars or planets is small when compared with the Pleiades in importance, because the Pleiades is the place of the eternal throne of God." 1928
- “The heart is a marvelously designed muscular pump, but, more significantly, our emotional and motivating capacities are built within it. Love, hate, desire (good and bad), preference for one thing over another, ambition, fear-in effect, all that serves to motivate us in relationship to our affections and desires springs from the heart.” 1928
- “But if each of us were left to himself just because he has a copy of the Bible and were to direct his movements independently as he thought he understood the Word, then what? It is likely, or possible, that there would be a great deal of confusion or working in competition among us. Hence, besides individually possessing God's Word, we need a theocratic organization. Yes, besides having God's spirit of illumination, a Christian needs Jehovah's theocratic organization in order to understand the Bible.” (The Watchtower; 6/15/1951)
- "In the coming 26 years, all present governments will be overthrown and dissolved." (C.T. Russell, Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. 2, p. 98-99, 1889)
- "In view of this strong Bible evidence concerning the Times of the Gentiles, we consider it an established truth that the final end of the kingdoms of this world, and the full establishment of the kingdom of God, will be accomplished near the end of A.D. 1915. (The Time Is At Hand, 1915 edition, p. 99)

The following are a few facts that certainly lead to serious questions about this religious organization:

- If a member of Jehovah's Witnesses does not comply with the organization's interpretations, they can be excommunicated, termed disfellowshipping. This involves being shunned by all members of the religion, including any family members that do not live under the same roof. Due to the social nature of the religion, being shunned can isolate a member in a very powerful way and can be devastating if everyone in a member's social circle participates in the shunning.

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- Some victims of sexual abuse also assert that when reporting abuse they have been directed to maintain silence to avoid embarrassment to both the accused and the organization.
- Their doctrine of Theocratic War Strategy justifies deceit if this is necessary to protect their religion's activities/secrets... since these are deemed as "God's Will"
- Members of this religion are very strongly told not to study the Bible on their own, not to read about any other religion, nor to interpret anything in the Bible on their own. They will be told what to think and believe by their superiors.

Character of person who was the founder of this religion:

- Charles Taze Russell:
 1. As a young man, Russell was a manager of a men's furnishing store. Soon after starting his bible class, he was elected as pastor and his career as the founder of the Jehovah Witness religion was about to begin. He began to write on religion and soon was publishing the forerunner to the *Watchtower* magazine.
 2. Russell was a 99% partner in a company that collected money meant for his new found religious organization. In other words, he controlled the flow of large amounts of money that was raised ostensibly for the new religious society... later called the Jehovah's Witnesses.
 3. He was involved in many scams used to dupe people into giving money to his church. These scams included the "Miracle Wheat" seed sale mentioned earlier.
 4. Another nefarious method he used to raise money was to pretend to go on a world-wide tour where he would preach his new message to Hawaii, China, etc. He arranged for newspaper articles to run in stateside newspapers describing the great messages he preached and the big receptions he was given in these various foreign venues. The problem was, however, he did not give any talks, typically only stopping over for a few hours in some of these countries. He received financial support for this tour.
 5. One of his biggest fiascos was the lawsuit brought by him against the Rev. J. J. Ross. The court records showed Russell to be a poorly educated (left school at 14 years old), ignorant, liar. Russell's great claim had been his special ability to understand Greek and Hebrew and, therefore, he was able to interpret the Bible correctly while no one else had apparently ever done so... since all Bibles other than his translation were incorrect. The problem, though, was he did not even know the Hebrew or Greek alphabet, let alone could he read these languages! This came out in the trial.

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6. He also lied about his divorce... this came out in the trial. Several other embarrassing lies were revealed in this suit. Of course, Russell lost the case.
7. He flatly stated and wrote that it was far more important to read his writings than the Bible.

Conclusion:

As the years went by and it became apparent that vast numbers of their prophecies were not coming true, plus their founding father, Russell, was shown to be a scam artist and a liar, the remaining leaders did their best to carry on. Attempts have been made to distance themselves from Russell. This is very difficult to do as he, singlehandedly, defined virtually all of their theology. Next, they have, in recent decades, decided that their previous prophecies were only best guesses and not actually God's message for mankind... given through them. Their best guesses surely proved to be terrible, indeed. Yet, their publishing company and their door-to-door proselytizing has proven to still be a very effective way to provide "comfort" (aka wealth) for many leaders within the organization. Sadly, very many nice, trusting (albeit very gullible) people are being led astray by this deceitful cult.

Christian Science:

Mary Baker Eddy had quite an interesting conception of God. She said that God was to be understood as the all-loving, omnipotent Father-Mother. Eddy argued that given the absolute goodness and perfection of God, sin, disease, and death were not created by Him. That specific concept is shared by adherents of the Christian faith. But, then she concludes, oddly, that they (sin, disease and death) cannot be truly real. Rather than being actually real, in Christian Science evil and its manifestations are instead terrible lies about God and His creation... basically, figments of our imagination which we need to work to remove from our minds. So, if you see a car coming right at you, the key is not to jump out of the way, but it is to erase the car from your minds-eye. That will work.

Historicity:

- There are several points worth mentioning concerning the history of this religion:
- In 1991, a book written over fifty years ago was published so that the governing body of the Christian Science Church could receive \$97 million from a donor. They went along with this request in order to get the money, even though they had long ago rejected the book which had deified Eddy.
 - Mary was married three times. Her last marriage was to a Dr. Asa Eddy. After he died, she contested the autopsy report that stated he died of a heart attack. The physician she brought in to do the second autopsy confirmed Mary Eddy's

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contention that her husband had died of “arsenic poisoning mentally administered”. This ludicrous report prompted the evaluation of this “quack”. He was found to running an abortion “mill” and sentenced to ten years in prison! Mary Eddy accused some of her former students of mesmerizing her husband and mentally poisoning him with arsenic through this mind control.

- Eddy’s seminal work, *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures* is replete with plagiarized writings from Phineas Quimby who she spent time with in the early 1860’s. She waited until his death, then completed and released her religious book.
- Eddy would frequently re-write her *Science and Health* “scripture book”. Why? She told the “faithful” that they must buy the latest edition and study it in order to be a member in good standing in the Christian Science Church. If a member “shall fail to obey this injunction, it will render him liable to lose his membership in this church.” This proved to be a great technique to bring in money. Mary Eddy died a multi-millionaire.
- Amazingly, one other scheme of Eddy was to ask her faithful to please send in money toward the purchase of three jackets for “Mother” (she was “Mother”). She did not want the jackets themselves, but if enough people would send in money... probably resulting in tens of thousands of dollars, she could buy three jackets ... and keep the change.
- Certainly it should not be forgotten that many people of this religion have died by refusing straightforward medical treatment for readily curable diseases as this religion denied them the opportunity to seek treatment other than *prayer* and *exercising their ability to recognize that their perceived disease is all an “illusion”!* Remember, as Walter Martin states “whenever they encounter evil they deny its reality; whenever they behold misery, they affirm its non-existence.” What I would suggest for any of their church members the next time they perceive themselves, or especially their children to be sick, just go to a hospital and let a doctor get rid of this fictitious illness... Eddy has already stated that our physical body is an illusion, so just figure that the doctor is an illusion and no theological problem should exist. There was no doctor, no illness, so what was the issue after all?
- A big problem exists as we try to make some sense of this religion. Eddy states that everything is an illusion except God. If that is true, how can we ever know what is true? What we see and hear is an illusion, so how do we get the truth? Death is an illusion, sickness is an illusion, but we see sick people often and see people dying, not to be seen again... what are we to make of this? If this religion is true, there would be no way of finding anything out for sure at all. In fact, since Mary Baker Eddy is an illusion, why listen to her?

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Character of Mary Baker Eddy:

- Mrs. Eddy created her “scripture” by largely plagiarizing an old country doctor from Maine, Phineas Quimby. There is no doubt about this as a comparison of his writings and hers clearly demonstrates (he was already dead when she was writing her *Science and Health*).
- She frequently wrote very small addendums to her spiritual instructional books and essentially required her devoted followers to purchase them (for their own good, of course). By doing this and keeping the majority of the profits, she became a wealthy woman.
- Mary Eddy was involved in a very convoluted lie concerning the death of her husband and she falsely accused several former students of complicity in his death.

Conclusion:

This religion was started by a total charlatan. She was a first class liar and plagiarizer. She proved by her actions to be motivated almost exclusively by the pursuit of money. Truth did not matter to her at all. Christian Science has absolutely no evidence to suggest that it is true. It is strange to think that there are still many people who accept this religion even to the point of allowing their children to die because of their false beliefs!

Scientology:

Scientologists have an untenable explanation as to the nature of God. Anything that an individual wants to believe concerning what God means to him/her is perfectly fine with this religion. Remember that in their catechism it states, “We have no dogma in Scientology (*concerning God*) and each person’s concept is different.” So if Aunt Molly believes that God is her new Afghan and Aunt Agnes counters that God exists and rules the world out of her left night slipper, those statements should be accepted as truth. Both are correct. This is analogous to some of the New Math taught in some of our schools that will not mark a child’s answer wrong in arithmetic when they note that $2+2=23$... instead, the teacher is supposed to say that that child has some unusually imaginative insight that the rest of the world lacks... or some such nonsense. I think most people in this world see the fallacy in this thinking. I surely hope so.

Historicity:

- There are over two dozen allegations that Scientology has held individuals against their will. These illegal acts were not committed by rogue Scientologists - they were in accordance with Scientology policy
- Scientology also “extorts” money from its members, telling them it's scientifically proven that their lives will become worse if they don't pay for expensive auditing

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- Scientology says that "public statements against Scientology or Scientologists," "writing anti-Scientology letters to the press," and "testifying as a hostile witness against Scientology in public" are all "Suppressive Acts" - high crimes, according to "Introduction to Scientology Ethics." The book goes on to say that people who do such things "cannot be granted the rights and beingness ordinarily accorded rational beings." (www.scientology-lies.com)
- Scientology is the most litigious religion in United States history
- (a report from a former Scientologist on www.xeno.net) "Scientologists invest a lot of their life and almost all their money in pursuit of the Scientology total freedom. I want you to understand that. Take myself as an example. Almost all my friends were Scientologists. Almost all my money went to Scientology. Up to 20 hours a week were spent at the church studying or getting counseling, even when I had a full time job. My whole life centered around Scientology and I wasn't even a staff member. For a staff member it becomes all consuming."

So I am coming to believe that almost everything that occurs in Scientology that a Scientologist experiences and believes in comes about as the self-suggested result of a kind of auto-hypnosis. Everything that seems to work or be positive is attributed to Scientology, and everything negative is assigned to personal failure or lack of understanding of Scientology. After which there is a long bout of study to correct the matter, which again is a kind of auto-hypnosis. And any outside challenge to that carefully maintained trance will result in greater and greater resistance."

This individual goes on to ask the question...So how do you talk to a Scientologist? How might one help the member see the error of his/her ways?

- "Get them to explain about the powers of an operating thetan, the higher levels in Scientology. And then ask them if they knew of people on those levels getting sick or getting cancer or dying or just leaving the church. Get them to think how the reality they observe differs from what is promised. Even for people who have been in Scientology for years. Tell them you are confused; if these magnificent powers existed, how then could critics of the church continue to write or even to exist? Couldn't a top level Scientologist just wish them away? "
- Find out what they think about Hubbard's writings being revised over 15 years after his death. Does this make sense to them?
- See if they will talk about their feelings that it is "just them" having trouble, but that Scientology really is good. It is very common for people to go for decades wondering privately why they are not getting the promised gains from Scientology while outwardly defending it to the death (www.xeno.net)

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- Scientology, as per L. Ron Hubbard, is capable, via reaching the *clear*, of:
 - Improving eyesight
 - Increase IQ
 - Curing the common cold
 - Speed thinking by 120 times

The problem with these claims is that they are simply not true!
- Scientologists were involved in a massive covert illegal operation against the U.S. Government in the mid 1970's. Eleven high ranking Scientology officers, including Hubbard's wife, were indicted. Five were given 5-years prison terms (including Mary Hubbard)
- All of L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology writings are considered scripture. He notes that the Hindu Veda writings are used in his scripture writings. He says his work is an "extension of Gautama Siddhartha, begun about 2,500 years ago.

Character of Founder:

- High-ranking Scientology executives were convicted of extremely serious crimes in the United States for breaking into government offices and stealing documents. Founder L. Ron Hubbard was named as an unindicted co-conspirator in that case, and the defendants stated in their stipulation of evidence that, at all times, he acted as supervisor of the illegal activities.
- Scientology itself was convicted of similar crimes in Canada. When Scientology then tried to destroy the reputation of the prosecutor in the case, they were hit with the biggest libel fine in Canadian history.
- L. Ron Hubbard was convicted of fraud in France.
- L. Ron Hubbard (1951) – "If a man really wanted to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion." One year later, he did.
- Hubbard was married three times. At one time, he was a bigamist.
- Hubbard was very knowledgeable of black magic rituals.
- Hubbard claimed many things concerning his education and war record... that were false. He claimed that he was blinded, crippled and even died in World War 2... only to come back to life, of course. There is no record of any of this.
- He claimed to be a Nuclear Physicist... and made many other academic claims. In fact, he attended George Washington University for two years, then was placed on academic probation.
- His college degree from Sequoia turned out to be a diploma mill located in a house in Los Angeles.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, L. Ron Hubbard stated that Scientology was basically Hinduism or Buddhism updated. However, with his flair for science fiction, he was able to give it a

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modern day scientific appeal, and provide himself with a fine source of income! Instead of turning to meditation and practices of that nature, Hubbard developed many varied courses to theoretically accomplish the same basic thing (the term used in Scientology is ... to reach the *clear*). However, his courses were a much better way for him to make money! Simply to call the whole thing Hinduism or Buddhism wouldn't have worked. That had been done before, and would be done again in a big way in the United States in the 1960's (the New Age Movement).

New Age Religion:

Recall that New Agers believe in monism – all is one and one is all. Everything is only ONE thing. There is no separate you and I – we are all one thing. Also, everything is God (Pantheism). There certainly is no personal God... no loving God... no moral God. God is not a Supreme Being distinct from creation -- He is creation. In developing a worldview about the material and immaterial world, New Agers reach the following conclusion. To them there is only one essence in the universe, and everything and everyone is part of that essence. This is known as "monism". Indeed, every person to them is part of God.

This is in conflict with the scientific and philosophic teaching that this universe had a beginning that required some entity that had ultimate power over the universe... in fact, power so great that everything we see in the universe was created by this power! Again, this entity (usually called God) had to exist before the universe existed and, in fact, had to always have existed. However, these are not the views of the New Age movement. Therefore, they are at odds with logic and science (as are the Hindus and Buddhists).

Historicity:

So what is the evidence for the New Age belief system... for and against?

- ❖ New Age religion is a modern form of ancient religions (such as Hinduism) as noted earlier
- ❖ Re-incarnation is an important concept in the movement – how is it that the world does not seem to be evolving toward a better place with better people as time passes? How come there are now billions of supposedly reincarnated people who presumably came from just millions of people a couple of millennia ago?
- ❖ Many of the things that New Agers put their faith in are very non-scientific: the power of crystals, astrology, tarot cards, etc.
- ❖ Many New Age adherents are involved in attempts at communication with the dead... often in the form of spirit guides. These guides apparently give them information on life and how it should be lived. There is no evidence whatsoever that these spirits, if they exist, provide information from God. In fact, in a search of the internet, which

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has a lot of information and web sites relating to spirit guides and channeling, it becomes apparent that most of these “guides” seem to provide general information such as can be found via the telephone psychic hotlines that were so popular in the 1980’s – until the government shut down the majority of these scams. For those folks who actually communicate with a spirit guide, there is no evidence whatsoever that this communication is coming from a Godly source. If a source is from the true God of the universe, it can never be wrong. Take a look at the following suggestion found on a typical web site warning New Agers to be careful when communicating with a spirit guide.

“With a little common sense it is easy to discern true guidance from false. Check out the nature and feel of the guidance. Are you being ‘ordered’, dominated or scolded? Are you being told or urged to do something you feel is morally wrong or against your ethics? Do you feel you are you being judged? A true guide will not work with you in this way. Most importantly you will know true guidance by the quality of love and caring inherent. If the messages you are receiving do not carry a loving, nurturing quality tell their source very firmly to go away and refuse to continue communication.” It is obvious by this and other warnings given in books and on the internet, that communication through spirit guides is a dangerous proposition. God certainly would not communicate in a way that would ever put his followers at risk... so spirit guides cannot be from God!

New Age Apologetics:

I could not find any book or articles that attempted to show why the New Age movement was the proper way of understanding the universe. As with virtually all non-Judeo-Christian religions, this religion presents itself to the world and simply asks people to follow their lead... they give no logical reasons why one should actually believe their religion is true.

Conclusion:

Since the New Age movement is just a re-hashing of ancient Hinduism or Buddhism, the same reasons that were discussed that suggest strongly that those religions are very likely false apply to this New Age Religion as well.

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Judaism:

The orthodox Jews (the most zealous adherents to their scriptures of the Jewish sects) believe in a monotheistic God. Their God certainly is consistent with current scientific and philosophical understanding of our universe. That is, God exists outside this universe, he has power over this universe (in fact, He is the Creative force behind it). God did not have a cause Himself... He has always existed. All of these beliefs are perfectly consistent with those of science today. By the way, even if they were not, it would not necessarily make these beliefs untrue. Please always keep in mind how often mankind's scientific beliefs have changed over the centuries. On the other hand, it is somewhat more difficult for any religious system to hold tenants that go against the principles of human logic. In the case of the Jews beliefs concerning God, they all line up nicely scientifically and logically.

Historicity:

There is a great deal of history written about in the Jewish scriptures. Of course, their scriptures are equivalent to the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. Both of these religions are united in their belief that these writings are from God Himself. The evidence given for the veracity of the Torah and the writings of the Jewish prophets is the same for the Jew and Christian. The difference relates primarily in the interpretation of certain prophetic passages relating to a Special Individual, the Messiah. The details of that issue will be broached later. In this section, evidence will be given to support the general truthfulness of the Jewish scriptures – not being concerned, as yet, with certain points of interpretation. The Torah was purported to be written by Moses through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If this is true, they had to be written around 1400 B.C. (it may have been written a little later as the exact date of the Exodus from Egypt is unknown). Is there evidence that the writings of the Torah came from a date so long ago? Yes, most certainly. Let me just mention a few pieces of evidence discovered in recent times that show how the Jewish writings are not only true but evidence that they were written when the Bible says they were:

- ❖ Archaeology has established that the cradle of civilization is the lower Tigris-Euphrates valley – where the Garden of Eden was according to Genesis.
- ❖ Farming and cattle raising have been shown to be the earliest form of mankind's livelihood – just as shown in Genesis.
- ❖ The story of a worldwide flood is noted in ancient Sumerian and Babylonian writings – even mentioning the sending out of birds at the tail end of the flood. Apparently, this incredible flood was a well known event among all nations. Stories of this amazing event would certainly have been passed down from generation to generation – regardless of one's heritage or religious beliefs.
- ❖ Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham's birthplace, is a well known city in ancient Babylon – unearthed in recent archaeological digs (1920's – 1930's).

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- ❖ Ancient names of cities noted in Genesis have been confirmed in data unearthed in 1975 (ex. Megiddo, Jerusalem, Gaza, Hazor, Sodom and Gomorrah, and others). Also, names of people are found that are similar to names in Genesis – these writings are consistent with the time frame of the Torah (circa 2000 B.C.).
- ❖ The remains of a burnt out Sodom and Gomorrah have been found – evidence shows that it came to an abrupt end in an earthquake and fire some 4,000 years ago. This is exactly as reported in the Bible.
- ❖ Evidence has been uncovered that corroborates the route taken by Abraham in his travels. Shechem, Canaan, Gerar, Dothan and Bethel all existed as noted in Genesis.
- ❖ Evidence has been found that corroborates the exile of Israel in Egypt at the time noted in the Torah. This includes the time period from 1900 B.C. to the time of Moses. Hebrew names and titles have been unearthed in Egypt from this time period.
- ❖ Importantly, Hebrew customs concerning marriage, adoption, rights of the firstborn and many other customs of the day have been uncovered in secular sources. These secular discoveries correspond to the time period of Abraham and were written about in Genesis. If this portion of the Bible had been written at a later date (say, 600-900 B.C.), the author would have had no way of knowing about these customs as they were no longer were in force. There are two ways that a person could have written this correct information found in the Torah... either they lived at or near the time period in question... or they were directed to write it down by God. Moses did not live that close in time to Abraham... but he did have God's direction when writing the Torah.
- ❖ There have been tablets discovered – the Ebla tablets – in northern Syria. The Kingdom of Ebla was destroyed in 2250 B.C. Their importance lies in the fact that they show very similar types of law, customs and names of the cities of that time. For years, many doubters had stated that the cities named in Genesis 14 were not actually in existence at the time of Abraham and had therefore been added at a later date. Yet, the Ebla tablets mention every one of the cities (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar)
- ❖ The Mari tablets (found in 1936) also demonstrates that the Genesis biblical account is perfectly consistent with the names, culture, and traditions of that day. For example, when Abraham haggled with Ephron concerning his purchase of the Cave of Machpelah, the reason for the argument is understood when one understands the customs of that time as described in the Mari tablets (these tablets are also from that time period)
- ❖ Pictures of visiting Semites can be seen on the walls of a tomb at Beni Hasan in Egypt from the time of Abraham.
- ❖ There is secular evidence that two other foreigners (one a Jew and the other a Canaanite) were given prominent official positions by the Pharaoh at the time the Bible says the Jews were in Egypt (as was done with Joseph).

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- ❖ Joseph was given a gold chain and ring by the Pharaoh. Joseph was buried back in Palestine as per his request. His purported burial place in Shechem was opened a while back. The body in the tomb was mummified and a sword worn by Egyptian officials was found.
- ❖ There is really intriguing evidence that the place of the Red Sea crossing may well have been identified. Many artifacts that appear to be chariot wheels have been photographed at the bottom of this sea exactly in a place likely to have been crossed... after God “peeled” back the waters.
- ❖ Further archaeological evidence exists of the time of Joshua’s conquests, the time of the Judges and the battles between the Philistines and Israel.
- ❖ King Solomon’s vast empire has been confirmed in recent excavations.
- ❖ Many of the enemies of the divided kingdoms (and the gods of these countries) have been confirmed.
- ❖ Details of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign and conquest of Judah have been unearthed.
- ❖ There is archaeological evidence that Cyrus did indeed give the decree for the Jews to return to Israel.
- ❖ Many of the smallest details noted in the Torah and books of the Prophets have been confirmed via archaeology. Many books have been written to cover the amazing accuracy of the Bible in its description of historical events, cities, customs, names of people, etc. The Bible always is shown to be accurate when evidence is unearthed in the search for information concerning ancient civilizations. Frankly, many dozens more detailed examples could be listed detailing the accuracy of the Jewish scriptures. Let me instead quote a few of the experts of archaeology:
 - William Albright (famous archaeologist) “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantive accuracy of the Old Testament”. Also, “discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details”
 - Merrill Unger writes, “Old Testament archaeology has rediscovered whole nations, resurrected important peoples, and in a most astonishing manner has filled in the gaps, adding immeasurably to the knowledge of biblical backgrounds.”
 - Yale professor, Millar Burrows, states, “archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence of the scriptural record.”
 - Sir Frederick Kenyon says, “the results (of archaeology) already achieved confirm what faith would suggest, that the Bible can do nothing but gain from an increase in knowledge.”

The point is that the Torah, the prophets and the rest of the Jewish scriptures have been amazingly accurate. This does not necessarily prove that they were divinely inspired, but it does point one in that direction. Especially when one compares these scriptures to the other religious writings previously discussed. For example, the *Book of*

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Mormon has absolutely no corroborating archaeological evidence as was noted earlier. All of the evidence is totally against the truthfulness of this purported holy book of the Mormons.

Amazing unity of the Jewish scriptures:

One very important aspect of the Jewish scriptures relates to the authors that wrote them. A completely unique situation exists when we look at how the Old Testament came into existence as compared to all other religious writings (excluding Christianity). Most other “Holy Books” are written by one man or woman. That should make it easy to be consistent with the message. Even given this, there tended to be many contradictions and historical errors in all of the religions whose scriptures were written by one individual (Islam, Scientology, Jehovah Witnesses, the Mormons, Christian Science). For example, when we look at the Muslim religion, Muhammad is solely responsible for their scriptures. Joseph Smith wrote the holy books of the Mormon religion (not including the Bible) – if he was wrong, the religion is false. On one man, that religion rests. The same could be said for Christian Science, Scientology, Buddhism, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The New Age movement is a very nebulous movement with no purported divinely inspired scriptures.

On the other end of the spectrum is the ancient religion of Hinduism. The Hindu religion has a massive amount of scriptures written by many people over the millennia since approximately 1500 B.C. Even in Buddhism, after Buddha’s death, a vast quantity of new scripture material has been written. Much of this material is different than the earlier writings of Buddhism. Consistency is missing. The same is definitely true with respect to the Hindu scriptures. . . . That brings us to the Jewish Holy Book... the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings – the Old Testament. Most of it was written in Hebrew. A small amount was written in Aramaic. Job was probably the oldest book written. This may have been written as far back as 2100 B.C. The Torah, written by Moses, was written around 1400 B.C. The last book, Malachi, was completed in 432 B.C.

Approximately thirty people wrote these books over approximately 1000 years or longer. These writers differed in station markedly... some were kings, others were priests, still others were farmers, scribes, soldiers, etc. Yet, the story line was remarkably consistent. The story reads like a beautifully edited history of mankind. There is a cohesive theme that runs through each chapter. The theme is of a loving God who tells his beloved creation how they must live to achieve everything He has in mind for them. He shows them how to do this, gives them perfect guidelines to follow. As they follow these instructions, everything goes beautifully. Yet, they always eventually turn away from Him and His instructions. This always eventually results in painful loss. When they ask for forgiveness, it is granted. When they need another chance, they are given one. The method for forgiveness of their sins is given... the turning away from

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their sins, asking for forgiveness and the blood sacrifice of a “perfect lamb”. This theme runs through the entire Old Testament... even though it was written by thirty different people over a thousand years or longer. This is truly remarkable. In addition, there is always the message that someday a Messiah will come to rescue His chosen people (the Jews) from their oppression and rule benevolently over the entire world – where everything will be perfect as it was in the beginning of the world... the beginning of Genesis. In the meantime, the message runs throughout the Old Testament that this same God will eventually turn His back on His people because they will continue to reject His Law and reject God Himself. That does happen as the scriptures come to a close. The Assyrians have conquered the northern ten tribes of Israel; the Babylonians have captured the southern two tribes. Although some of the Jews did return to Jerusalem, the twelve Jewish tribes had been dispersed throughout the world as the Jewish Scriptures came to a close.

The fact that these scriptures were written over such a long period of time and by so many different authors is certainly unique when compared to other religions (although the Christian religion shares this trait with the Jewish religion). Incredibly, as one reads and studies from Genesis to Malachi, there is a beautiful continuous thread running throughout from one book to the next. There are no contradictions. There are the same important themes that run throughout the entire text. As will be shown later, there are many evidences of a Divine force behind these thirty-nine different books that show the obvious reason for their continuity and truthfulness – they were God “breathed”. It is highly unlikely that this would have happened without the direction of God Himself.

Supernatural aspects of the Jewish religion:

There are many miracles noted in the Old Testament. Unfortunately, none of these are readily verifiable in our times. Therefore, the writings about these supernatural events are not blatant evidence that can be used to verify that the God of this religion is the one true God.

However, it is important to point out the fact that many of Jewish people of this time in history were very strong believers in their God... Yahweh. Keeping this in mind, it also follows that the history of their people and their scriptures was passed down very carefully through the ages. We have excellent, documented evidence that the Jewish scriptures were painstakingly copied and passed from one generation to the next without error. It was incredible the time and effort expended to make sure that God’s message was not altered from the original. So what you ask?

Keep in mind that these scriptures did not exist in a vacuum. Year after year, decade after decade, and century after century, the Jewish people were studying and reading these holy words... the history lessons of how their ancestors lived and worshipped. They also were learning just how God led and dealt with their people through the ages. The fact is that there not only was the Torah and the remainder of the

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Old Testament to teach them of their past, but they had elder relatives that were very willing to pass on the history of their ancestors, from one generation to the next. The fact that there is no evidence in secular history books (for example, the writings of Josephus) that the Jews took any of the miraculous events described in their most Holy Scriptures as myth, does lend credence to their veracity. Look at it this way, what if you began reading in history texts that amazing supernatural miracles occurred in the United States back in the 18th or 19th century. You, hopefully, simply would not believe these stories even if you felt miracles were possible. The reason for your unbelief would be that this information had not been passed down via reliable sources from one generation to the next until it got to you. Since the Jews did believe so adamantly in these miracles, these accounts must have been part of their heritage... passed down from one generation to the next. Therefore a likely reason for these miracles to be accepted as fact would be that they did indeed happen!

Fulfilled prophesy:

There is one type of miraculous event that can be verified even all these years later... that is the fulfillment of prophesy! Only an omniscient God of the universe can predict with perfect accuracy future events... contrary to the beliefs of folks like Jeanne Dixon. There are hundreds of future events predicted with perfect accuracy in the Jewish scriptures. Just a relative few will be listed below to prove this important point:

- Approximately 2500 years ago, Moses wrote, “[The Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’](#)” (Gen 12:7) A little later, God continued, “[To your descendents I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, Euphrates.](#)” (Gen . 15:18) Later Isaac was promised that this blessing was to pass to him and his heirs. Here we are, in 2008, and Israel is back in their land, **the only nation** to re-constitute back into their original homeland after so many years of dispersion.
- “[The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until He comes to whom it belongs ...](#)” (Gen. 49:10) This verse points out that the future Messiah will come out of the tribe of Judah... one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus did come out of this tribe.
- Isaiah wrote scores of prophesies in his book. Certainly, one of the most amazing is the following: “[Who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, “You shall be built,” and to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.”](#)” This is truly an incredible prediction. Isaiah was given the knowledge by God that 150 years after he penned these words, a ruler named Cyrus would be used by God to return his people to Jerusalem and to give the order to re-build their temple. At the time of this writing the Jews still lived and ruled in

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Jerusalem, worshipped in Solomon's temple and certainly did not need a foreign ruler to give them permission to *return* to their homeland... and Cyrus was obviously not even alive yet!

- “For thus saith the Lord, after seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.” (Jeremiah 29:10) Here Jeremiah predicts that the captivity of the Jews in Babylon will last for seventy years before the Lord will arrange for their return. This he did via Cyrus' decree. By the way, this writing of Jeremiah was completed at least 40-50 years before the return began.
- Isaiah predicted the fall of Judah one hundred years in advance, “Behold the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated, until this day, shall be carried to Babylon, nothing shall be left.” (Isaiah 39:6) Here Isaiah tells the day will come when Judah will fall to Babylon and that Jerusalem will be leveled (the walls and the temple were indeed destroyed and the city was burned)
- “The remnant of the Philistines will perish” (Amos 1:8) (there are no remaining remnants of the Philistines)
- “For I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country, planting places for a vineyard. I will pour her stones down into the valley, and will lay bare her foundations.” (Micah 1:6) Samaria was destroyed by Alexander the Great in 322 B.C and in 120 B.C. by Hyrcanus. Now what remains is a heap of rubbish and stones thrown down into the valley as predicted. There are some olive gardens and corn fields remaining.
- Ezekiel predicted that Babylon would destroy Tyre and specific things would follow:
 - ◆ the remnants of Tyre would be flat like a bare rock (26:4)
 - ◆ Fisherman would spread nets over the site (26:5)
 - ◆ The remnants of the city structures would be dumped in the sea (26:12)
 - ◆ Tyre would never be rebuilt (26:14)

All of this came true and remains true to this day... even the prophecy that nets would be cast over the site!

There are literally **hundreds of additional fulfilled prophecies in the Old Testament**... hundreds. No other religion, with the exception of the Christian religion, gets involved with prophecy. The vast majority have none. Certain other religions have at times taken a shot at prophecy but always to their detriment... their predictions fail to materialize. Now, why would a religion not venture to predict upcoming events? If that religion cannot do so. Why would a

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religion deal so much in prophesy? Such as the Jewish and Christian religion? There is no quicker way to show that your God is a fake than to have His predictions turn out to be false. So why feature them in your scriptures? Simply because the God of that religion is omniscient and wants to prove that fact. He wants everyone to know Him and follow Him. That is why He gives us so much evidence to believe.

Conclusion:

The Jewish scriptures end with the Book of Malachi. This was completed a little approximately four hundred years before the birth of Christ. Ever since that time, the Jews have lived in dispersion throughout the world... as predicted by many of the prophets would be the case. Also, as predicted, there would come a time when many good things would happen to the “House of Israel” – for example, let me mention just four of them...

- They would be gathered together from all around the world by the power of God and brought back into their homeland – Israel became a nation once again in 1948!
- They would all once again speak their own language – Hebrew has successfully been introduced as the national language of Israel!
- Their land would become a great producer of crops and flowers... beautiful to behold. After centuries of desert landscape, the Jews have cultivated their land with great ability (and the help of God) so that it is one of the leading exporters of food and flowers in the world today!
- Some day their Messiah will be coming! If the Jews are correct, He will be coming for the first time... if the Christians are correct, this will be His second visit!

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Christianity:

Now we arrive at the last of the ten religions under consideration. The Christian God is the same God as the Jewish God with some important additional aspects to His nature. Christians believe in a monotheistic God, just one that manifests Himself in a mysterious triune way. That is, God is one God with three manifestations, the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Ghost. This is known as the Trinity. One should look at this concept by simply recognizing that the *essence* of this triune God is the same. Although it is a poor example to use to attempt to explain this idea, one might think of the substance *water*. At times it appears as ice, others as liquid and others as steam... yet, it is always the same thing--- water. Another example would be to note that one person may be a father, a son and a brother... yet still the same individual person. These are certainly not perfectly analogous situations, but just something to suggest the basic idea. Frankly, no person can totally understand the concept of Trinity.

The fact is that the Christian conception of God as an all-powerful, all-knowing, omnipresent Creative force that has existed since eternity past, and the Creator of our universe, is perfectly consistent with modern day science and philosophy.

Historicity:

Since the Christian religion began *only* two thousand years ago, the *secular* history of the time of its inception is much more complete and available than that of the Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish religions. Therefore, we can draw on some of that history to either confirm or deny the truthfulness of the Christian claims.

The evidence for Christianity can be found on several different fronts. First of all, we shall show that if their scriptures are true, their concept of God and eternity should also be true. Then, the evidence for the veracity of their scriptures will be given. If that evidence is convincing, we will have found the one true religion of the world!

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem a little over 2,000 years ago. It is claimed that He was born of a virgin, Mary. His true Father is God in heaven. His earthly father was a man named Joseph. When Jesus reached about 30 years of age, He began to minister to His people, the Jews. For approximately three to four years, He preached a message of love and forgiveness. His message was and is “**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.**” (John 3:16) This was and still is a totally unique message in the world’s religions. There is nothing said about working one’s way to salvation. There is, in fact, no way a person could possibly work to become good enough, or complete enough, to make it to heaven. Also, there is only one life per customer... no mention of reincarnation. Our soul, spirit and body enter into this world at birth... which is not as the Mormons believe, by the way. When we die, one of two things happen. We either go to heaven or we go to hell. We do not cease to exist. We do not return for another try at

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this world. We do not come back as a cow. We do not become part of God. Our spirit lives on and should we go to heaven, we will someday have a *glorified body* that will never thirst, hunger, experience pain or want. These are some of the differences between Christian beliefs and all other religions (although there are some things that are the same as the Jewish beliefs).

No other religion believes that people will gain entrance into heaven via the sacrificial death of God (i.e. Jesus Christ). That is quite a unique concept! Christians believe that no one can enter into heaven unless that person is perfect (without sin) or pays the penalty for their sins. Well, no person will ever live without committing sin. Since God's penalty for sin is death and subsequent punishment for that sin, it would seem impossible for any human to gain entrance into heaven. Yet, God devised a plan for the redemption of His creation. God allows one other way to salvation. God, Himself, came into this world as Jesus Christ, to live a perfect (sinless) life as a human. Yet, Jesus also retained His deity. He lived a perfect life. Then, Jesus gave His life on the cross and suffered the penalty for all of mankind's sins. *He paid our penalty*. His gift to all people is eternal life with Him in heaven. It is God's beautiful gift to us. Only one thing is required by anyone who wants this gift. We do have to accept it. We do have to recognize by faith that Jesus did die for us, and that He was raised from the dead as the "first fruits" of our salvation. This is the gospel... the good news.

Since within the Holy Bible there are hundreds of predictions and scores of miracles described, it is quite obvious to a logical thinking reader that if it can be shown that these scriptures can stand the test of careful scrutiny, the God, the heaven and the eternity described in the Bible must be true. If not, it is false. There is excellent evidence that the gospel, and the entire Bible is completely true! Let us discuss just some of that evidence now.

External Evidence for the reliability of the New Testament:

Historian **Eusebius** notes, "The elder apostle John used to say this also: 'Mark, having been the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that Peter mentioned, whether sayings or doings of Christ, not however, in order. For he was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord; but afterward, as I have said, he accompanied Peter, who adapted his teachings as necessity required, not as though he were making compilation of the sayings of the Lord. So then Mark made no mistake, writing down in this way some of the things as he (Peter) mentioned them.'" (A.D.130)

Ireneus, in 180 A.D., a student of Polycarp (who was a disciple of John), wrote, "Matthew published his gospel among the Hebrews in their own tongue, when Peter and Paul were preaching their gospel in Rome and founding the church there. After their death, Mark, the disciple of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of

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Peter's preaching. Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who leaned on His breast, himself produced his gospel, while he was living in Ephesus."

Archaeology has confirmed the historicity of the New Testament. "For *Acts* the confirmation is overwhelming. Any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted."

(**A.N Sherwin-White**, historian)

Dr. Clark Pinnock states, "There exists no document from the ancient world witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies and offering so superb an array of historical data on which an intelligent decision can be made. An honest person cannot dismiss a source of this kind. Skepticism regarding the historical credentials of Christianity is based on an irrational bias."

Josephus: This famous Jewish historian of the first century actually writes about Jesus, "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ [Messiah]. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named for him, are not extinct at this day."

Ignatius: (died 110 A.D.) Refers to Jesus as "our God, Jesus Christ." He also wrote to Polycarp "to await Him that is above every season, the Eternal, the Invisible, who became visible for our sake... who suffered for our sake." Ignatius mentions Christ as God in multiple other writings. All of the churches accepted him and his teachings that shows that the early Church certainly believed that Jesus was indeed the Christ as is written in the gospels and the epistles.

Justin Martyr: (110-166 A.D.) He spoke of Jesus the Christ and Jesus who is also God. Many more quotes relating to his belief in Jesus as God are known

Clement (died 101 A.D.) spoke also of Jesus as "Christ, the scepter and majesty of God"... and as the Lord who Malachi expected to come to the Temple.

Cornelius Tacitus: (born 52 A.D.) "Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius." He also talked of the torture of Christians as well.

Julius Africanus (221 A.D.) He wrote, "Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun – unreasonable, as it seems to me" as a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of a full moon, and it was the season of the Paschal full moon when Christ died."

Philopon and Phlegon: (first century historians) also mentioned that an eclipse of the sun occurred during a full moon at the time of Christ's death.

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Many more secular writings exist to verify the life, death, miracles and the Christian claim of the resurrection of Christ. There is no doubt that Jesus lived and died as the Bible states that He did. The only question might be as to whether He was indeed the Messiah, the Christ, God Himself. Let us continue to look at the evidence...

The amazing unity of the Bible:

When a person studies the entire Bible, it becomes quite obvious that something in the manuscript is very special. As we have noted earlier in the review of the other religions (not including Judaism), their scriptures either have many errors in them, or many inconsistencies, or both of these problems. Many of them have blatant contradictory statements... such as some of the writings on Buddhism, Hinduism, Scientology, Jehovah Witness, Islam and even more. This is certainly not true of the Bible. What is more, there is a grand plan that becomes apparent that courses from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation. It is as if God wrote it Himself. Come to think of it... that is what the Christian religion claims!

Although there were approximately 40 different authors over 1500 years, the message ties together beautifully. For example, God introduces the idea of the need for a blood sacrifice of a spotless lamb all the way back in the early chapters of Genesis. Then throughout the rest of the Old Testament, this theme is developed. Jesus enters the picture and we begin to recognize the whole point of this concept. Yes, a sacrifice is needed for salvation. Yes, it would have to be the sacrifice of a perfect "Lamb". Yes, it would require the shedding of blood. God was showing us all the way back in the earliest times, what would be required to be reunited with Him in heaven. Yet, He kept the notion of the Messiah (who would turn out to be His Son) coming to earth to give His life for us a mystery until the appropriate time. However, upon reflection, it is readily apparent that this concept runs throughout the entire Bible... obvious evidence for God's authorship. In fact, Paul and his fellow apostles used the Old Testament to prove to the Jews and Gentiles of the early New Testament Church that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and their Savior. That method of preaching can certainly be used today to show the identity of Jesus.

Another example of God's authorship of the Bible, which I will not fully develop here, relates to the many Feasts of Israel. God gave the Jews many special days to celebrate and to remember important times and dates in their relationship with Him. These include the Passover Feast, The Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of First Fruits, Pentecost, The Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. There is excellent evidence to conclude that each of these feasts had their fulfillment in certain events in Jesus' life (or death). This is material for a separate lecture itself. But let me just point out a couple of things. Recall what the Passover was all about. Those people who "covered" themselves with the blood of a lamb, would not perish, but live. Recall that Jesus was celebrating *Passover* the night before His death on

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the cross... where He shed His blood so that those who were “under His blood” would never perish. Secondly, Jesus was sinless... *unleavened bread* was a symbol for the lack of sin. The sinless Jesus was in the grave like a kernel of wheat during the first days of this feast... waiting to burst forth on the Feast of *First Fruits*. Jesus was resurrected on this day as the “first fruit” of the righteous... those that would put on the “Righteousness of Christ”. This concept continues as the gift of the Holy Spirit coincided with *Pentecost*. Much more could be developed on this theme, but the point is that this is just one more area in the Bible that shows its unity... from the earliest portion of the Old Testament through to the completion of the New Testament.

The following is one more example of the unity of idea in the Bible. This is from a book by Dr. Harold Wilmington, *That Manuscript from Outer Space*. He points out the way that **Genesis** dovetails with **Revelation**, (i.e. the first book with the last book of the Holy Bible):

Genesis: In the beginning, God created the heaven and the Earth.

Revelation: I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

Genesis: Adam and Eve are described in the Garden of Eden reigning over the Earth

Revelation: describes the new Adam, Jesus Christ with His bride, the Church reigning over the entire Universe.

Genesis: and the gathering of the waters called the sea

Revelation: and there was no more sea

Genesis: God created the Sun, the Moon, the day and the night

Revelation: there shall be no night there. And the city had no need for the sun or the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it.

Genesis: the Tree of Life is denied to a sinful mankind

Revelation: the Tree of Life yielded her fruit every month

Genesis: cursed is the ground for your sake

Revelation: there shall be no more curse

Genesis: Satan appears to torment man

Revelation: Satan disappears in eternal torment himself

Genesis: punished by a flood

Revelation: purified via a fire

Genesis: man’s early home was beside a river

Revelation: man’s eternal home will be by a river out of the throne of God

Genesis: God destroys an earthly city, wicked Sodom

Revelation: God presents a heavenly city, new Jerusalem, from the skies

Genesis: ends with a believer lying in a coffin

Revelation: ends with all believers reigning forever in eternal bliss, in heaven

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These three examples are just a few of the many ways that one can see the hand of God in the writing of His Bible. The necessity of faith and the need for our dependence on God for all of our needs are just a couple other themes coursing throughout the entire Bible. One more excellent example relates to the topic referred to as *Types*. *A Type is an Old Testament event that has a future fulfillment in the life of Jesus*. There are an amazing array of Old Testament people and events that mimic certain important events in the life of Christ... so many examples that it is very hard to believe that they are just coincidences. . One very interesting “Type” was the episode revolving around Abraham taking his son Isaac up the mountain to be sacrificed. A study of this Old Testament episode sheds incredible light on a similar sacrifice that was to occur approximately two thousand years later... there were very many incredible similarities in this episode when compared to Jesus going to the cross. I will defer going into this in any detail as there are already so many examples given to show the unity of the Holy Bible. But, this is a very interesting study.

Prophetic statements:

There is no doubt that God wanted to leave us with a variety of proofs that He was indeed God and that the Bible was His inerrant, infallible message to us. One way that He accomplished this was to use the supernatural gift of prophesy to demonstrate that the Bible could be trusted. There are literally hundreds of prophetic statements in the Bible – all of which have either come true already or will come true in the future. No mistakes... not a Jean Dixon situation at all! Although there are literally hundreds of predicted events in the Bible that do not directly relate to Jesus, I will now concentrate only on those prophetic verses that tell of his first coming... there are scores more that tell of his second coming, by the way.

The fulfilled prophecies that were listed when discussing the Jewish religion, obviously still apply when talking about the Christian Bible... since the Old Testament of the Christian Bible is synonymous to the Jewish Scriptures. It is interesting to point out that some of these prophecies have puzzled Jewish rabbis as they seem to suggest a Messiah with different characteristics depending on the verse considered. Usually, the Messiah is pictured as a great King and Savior, but there are other times that He is pictured as a suffering servant. This is difficult for the Jew... but, it is perfectly understood by the Christian to be Jesus. The first time He came to earth, He came to teach us how to live and die and then to sacrifice Himself for all mankind. The next time He comes, He will come in all His glory, power and majesty as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

There are over three hundred references to the Messiah in the Old Testament, all of which are fulfilled by Jesus. I will reference just a handful to demonstrate just how impressive these predictions were:

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“And I will put enmity between you and the woman [*Mary*] and between your seed and her Seed [*Jesus*]; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel.” Genesis 3:15 (God talking to Satan immediately after the “fall of mankind”)

“Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” Isaiah 7:14

“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” Genesis 22:18 (God talking to Abraham)

“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse [*David’s father*], and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” Isaiah 1:10 (Jesus was in the blood line of David)

“But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting.” Micah 5:2 (of course, Jesus was born in Bethlehem)

“The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts.” Psalms 72:10 (the Wise Men)

“Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer. And the tongue of the dumb will sing for joy.” Isaiah 35:5-6 (reference to Jesus’ miracles)

“A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” Isaiah 40:3 (John the Baptist)

Then I said to them, ‘If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not refrain. ‘So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.’ Zechariah 11:12 (Judas’ payment)

“So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter.” Zechariah 11:13 (Judas did this after he had taken the money, just as prophesied)

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not his mouth.”

Isaiah 53:7 (Jesus while on trial did not defend Himself)

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” [Jesus was beaten] Isaiah 53:5

“They pierced my hands and my feet.” Psalms 22:16 (Jesus on the cross)

“They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

Psalm 22:18 (Roman soldiers did this while Jesus was on the cross)

“They also gave me gall for my food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Psalm 69:21 (Jesus was given this while on the cross)

“My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” Psalm 22:1 (Jesus cried out to God)

“Into Your hand I commit my Spirit.” Psalm 31:5 (Jesus committed His spirit to God)

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“He guards all His bones, not one of them is broken.” Psalm 34:20 (Jesus had no broken bones)

“They will look on Me whom they pierced.” Zechariah 12:10 (Jesus was pierced with a sword while on the cross)

“And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord God, ‘That I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight.’” Amos 8:9 (this took place after Jesus gave up His spirit)

(The last 8 quotes above relate to Jesus’ time on the cross)

There are scores more fulfilled prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments. Entire books have been written on these prophecies. The *Encyclopedia of Prophecy* discusses 8,352 predictions in the Bible! Wow! They found no prophetic error... not one. Of course, some are still to be fulfilled. Actually, one of my future lecture series will be concerning the many end-times prophecies that have already come true in addition to those that await fulfillment. I mentioned just four of these in my concluding paragraph concerning the Jewish religion just a few pages above. There are dozens more... many of which have already come true! I will also review the predictions by God as to what will be happening to our world as we enter these last days... there certainly is much evidence to suggest that this world may be seeing the Messiah again in the not too distant future.

Given that there have been so many fulfilled prophecies in the past, logic dictates that the predictions of future events are sure to come true. The fact that the Christian God has produced a Holy Bible with a multitude of verifiable and already verified prophecies suggests incredibly strongly that He is the God of our universe. As I stated earlier, it would make no sense whatsoever for the originator(s) of a *false* religion to produce scriptures that predict thousands of future events. That religion would be quickly shown to be bogus and disappear from the world scene. That is why all other religions avoid prophecy ... occasionally they venture out and make a prediction, always to their regret! On the other hand, Christianity certainly has not gone away as the centuries have passed. Instead, it now is the world’s largest religion and continues to grow at a rapid rate.

Christian witnesses:

Some people say... and I have heard them on several occasions, that people who believe in the Bible are somewhat weak minded... i.e. not too bright. What if we were to look through history and examine those leaders who cherished the Holy Bible, reading and studying it with reverence. What kind of leaders would we find? Let us see...

Sir Isaac Newton (considered one of the two most brilliant scientists in history... the other being Einstein): “We account the scriptures of God to be the most sublime philosophy. I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatever.”

Sir Francis Bacon: “The volume of scriptures reveal the will of God.”

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Theodore Roosevelt: “No educated man can afford to be ignorant of the Bible.”

Robert E. Lee: “The Bible is a book in comparison with which all others in my eyes are of minor importance, and in which in all my perplexities and distresses has never failed to give me light and strength.”

Oliver Cromwell: “He that was Paul’s Christ is my Christ too.”

Woodrow Wilson: “The Bible is the one supreme source of revelation of the meaning of life.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower: “In the highest sense the Bible is the unique repository of eternal spiritual truths.”

Benjamin Franklin: “Young men, my advice to you is that you cultivate an acquaintance with, and a firm belief in, the Holy Scriptures.”

Patrick Henry: “This is a Book worth more than all the others that were ever printed.”

Winston Churchill: “We rest with assurance upon the impregnable rock of the Holy Scripture.”

Daniel Webster: “I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the will and the word of God.”

John Locke: “It has God for its Author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter: it is all pure, sincere, nothing too much, nothing wanting.”

Charles Dickens: “It is the best book that ever was or will be in the world.”

Abraham Lincoln: “But for this book we could not know right from wrong. I believe that the Bible is the best gift God ever gave to man.”

Helen Keller: “In the Bible, I find a confidence mightier than the utmost evil.”

I could list dozens more quotes like these from brilliant and sincere Christians. I do feel badly, however, for those that do somehow think that it takes a dim-witted person to believe the Bible. It is not saying much for their own intellect, or more likely, their open-mindedness.

On the other hand, what about finding a misanthropic leader who loved and studied the Holy Bible? As Dr. H.L. Wilmington wrote... “It would be a difficult task to find a murderous tyrant or dictator that was a friend of the Holy Bible. It would also be difficult to find a good and wise leader that was an enemy of God’s word. None may have existed.” Obviously, in summary, those who believe, love and study the Holy Bible are in with very good company!

Jesus Christ:

Well, so far we have presented a great deal of evidence that suggests that the Christian Bible appears to be valid. The historical, archaeological and massive quantity of fulfilled prophesy certainly is a lot of evidence for its veracity. Certainly, there are a great many great men and woman of history who were convinced of this.

Since the central person of this religion is Jesus Christ, let us spend some time reviewing the evidence for the Christian’s claim that He is God and that He died for

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mankind's sins. Why? Because, if Jesus is not the Messiah and God the Son, the Christian religion is a total fabrication.

So why should we believe that Jesus is God? Jesus himself demonstrated that He was God by the miracles that He performed, by the life that He lived (sinless and unequalled), by His fulfillment of scores of Old Testament prophecies and by rising from the dead!

With respect to the miracles that Jesus performed, it is fact that all of the New Testament writers believed that they witnessed countless miracles, the apostles themselves performed many miracles through the power that they received from Jesus and the Holy Spirit and, importantly, secular historians of the first century wrote of the wonders that Jesus was recognized to have performed in His lifetime. Jesus performed these miracles to help people, of course, but also to show that He was indeed God and could perform supernatural acts (acts that countermanded the laws of nature). This He could do as He was the One who created the laws of nature, so it was a "piece of cake" for Jesus to alter them from time to time.

Another point:

Some folks state that Jesus never claimed to be God. This is absolutely not true! Note just a few of His statements concerning this topic:

- "Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.'" John 8:58 (He is saying here that He is the eternal God, I AM)
- "Then they said to Him, 'Where is Your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither Me nor my Father, If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.'" John 8:19
- "Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in Me." John 14:1
- "Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.' Jesus said to him, 'have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father...' John 14:8-9
- "Jesus answered, ... I and my Father are one" John 10:30

Another point to note is that only God is to be worshipped. ("You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve." Luke 4:8) Yet, Jesus received the worship of many people on many occasions. Why did He allow this? Because He is God and certainly Jesus knew this. (see Matthew 8:2, John 9:35-39, Matthew 14:33, etc)

Jesus left no doubt that he was indeed God, that He was our only way to salvation ("I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but through me." John 14:6) and that we must follow his example and his teachings if we are truly to be his

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disciple. These facts make the statements by many liberal scholars that Jesus was certainly a great teacher and philosopher, but certainly not God, totally untenable. In fact, statements like John 14:6 led C.S. Lewis to make his famous statement concerning whether or not Jesus could properly be considered a great moral teacher if He were not the Son of God..

C. S. Lewis puts it beautifully in his book *Mere Christianity*:
“Christ says that He is “humble and meek” and we believe Him; not noticing that, if he were merely a man, humility and meekness are the very last characteristics we could attribute to some of His sayings.” [*after all, for crying out loud, He claims to be God!*]
C. S. Lewis continues, “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice, either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Think about that quote for a moment. Could a great moral teacher in control of his mental faculties go around the world telling everyone that they needed to give their lives over to “him”, worship “him” as God and be willing to die for “him” if necessary... knowing all along that he was just a normal, albeit lying, human being? C.S. Lewis and I think not. Any person who would make the claims that Jesus made would have to be one powerful liar or one big lunatic..... or God!

It is important to note the differences between the Christian religion and all other major religions. Only the Christian religion centers around a living God (Jesus). For example, Buddhists and Hindus follow an idea... the concept that some day they can reach some kind of union with an impersonal God of the universe. Muslims follow a sinful *person* who once lived then died on this earth (Muhammad) ... not to rise again as did our Lord Jesus. People in all other major religions must work and attempt to make themselves “good enough” so that someday they may be able to gain some sort of “salvation”. But, what is good enough? Who knows? Maybe one more good deed would have been the difference between heaven and hell. Or maybe one lie too many will send someone to hell. As we have seen, many questions come up when studying the veracity of these other religions.

My major point though is that the Christian religion is centered around and is completely dependent on the living God, Jesus. Man cannot do anything to work his way toward salvation – except to trust in our Savior, Jesus. Other religions are centered on

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concepts of good and evil and good works... it is totally a man's responsibility to follow a set of rules and somehow work their way to salvation. Of course, maybe if a fundamentalist Muslim is lucky enough, he can get around the difficult task of working his way to heaven by committing suicide while killing dozens or thousands of "infidels" - such as Jews or Christians. Then he will be met by 72 virgins when he gets there... his for the taking. Now there is a loving God for you - one that would justify and reward a person for terrorist attacks! That certainly strikes one as believable, now doesn't it?

Another silly point that some atheists suggest is that Jesus was not even a man of history. Without going into details here, let me assure you that there is literally more written about Jesus and His place in history than any other figure in ancient history! There are dozens of references to Him in the secular writings of that time. And just how would those doubters think that the Christian religion was started? Did the Christians of that time get thrown to the lions for a total fabrication... a fictional character? That is one very ignorant and dim-witted theory.

The Resurrection:

Lastly, I want to discuss the foundational issue of Christianity... the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If this actually happened, Christianity is true... if it did not happen, it is not true. It is as simple as that. Jesus came to earth to show us God, to teach us how to live, to be able to empathize with our problems, fears and pain... but, ultimately to give His life for us as a spotless, sinless Sacrificial Lamb. Without this sacrifice, without His shedding of blood, we would not have the remission of our sins. The Bible says, that ["without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins](#). You will remember that at the final moments of Christ on the cross, a Roman soldier pierced him with a sword and blood and water ran out of Jesus' side... He shed His blood for you and me.

But, then what happened. This is an interesting story. Most scholars believe that Jesus went to Hades and Paradise during the days after He died on the cross and gathered up the Old Testament saints who were in Paradise (also known as Abraham's bosom), and took them to heaven when He went there. On the third day, He arose and began His life in His glorified body... He made many appearances to his apostles and friends and other people (numbering in the hundreds)! Approximately forty days after His resurrection, He went up into the clouds as He went into heaven where He now sits at the right hand of God the Father, interceding for us while He prepares a place for all those who love Him. There are many reasons we should believe that Jesus did actually rise from the dead as the Bible says. For one thing, it would make no sense at all for the Bible to be so phenomenally correct in all the other ways we just covered and then totally break down in the most important part of the entire Book. Be that as it may, there is another powerful piece of evidence that the resurrection of Jesus actually took place... just the way the Bible says it did.

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That evidence is found in the incredible change in the lives of the Apostles from before to after His resurrection. Let's take a look...

1. For three to four years Jesus had been telling these apostles that He was the Messiah... as His sacrificial death drew near, He made it even clearer that He was actually God. He made it clear to them (and everyone that would listen) that He was the only way to heaven and that His words were, literally, gospel. They must follow Him and trust in Him or be lost. And, the apostles did follow Jesus until...
2. Upon Jesus' arrest, all of the apostles scattered, some (ex. Peter) denying Him vehemently in an attempt to save themselves. None of them were emotionally strong enough to stand up for Him during this time.
3. After His death, they hid themselves away silently, obviously very depressed and very disappointed in what they *thought* had happened. Their presumed Messiah apparently was dead and gone... His message to them must have been just a lot of grandiose talk, a bunch of lies they must have thought. Whatever the case, this Jesus had been a very, very big disappointment. My word, to have spent all those years following this man, only to have it end this way... "well, at least we got away with our lives", they must have thought. "If everyone of us will just keep quiet, maybe the whole thing will soon blow over"... they must have hoped.
4. But wait, what did actually happen (historically validated) to these apostles... everyone of them? Well, they all became incredibly strong evangelists, telling everyone that they met that Jesus was God! That He rose from the dead! They did this knowing they were at marked risk of losing their lives! In fact, all but John died a martyr's death! John also suffered greatly due to his belief in Jesus as Savior including being exiled to the island of Patmos as an old man.
5. Now take a moment to think about this... Why on earth would twelve men (Judas had been replaced by Matthias), originally cowardly and depressed and angry, suddenly become stalwart missionaries for Christ and willingly die for Him? There is only one answer that makes any sense... they must have witnessed Jesus' resurrection!!! And, ultimately, his ascent into heaven... that would do it. There really is not any other reasonable answer. Sure, maybe there could have been one or two lunatics among the apostles (if we stretch our imagination) that could have decided to continue the farce (which preaching the fact that Jesus was God and had risen from the dead would certainly have been if he had not risen). Yet, it is inconceivable that twelve reasonable men (and the apostles certainly were as evidenced by their lives and writings) would plot together to honor a Liar/Lunatic that had done worse than waste the previous three or four years of their lives. Then we would have to believe that they willingly would go on and all die a hideously painful and inglorious martyr's

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death in the years to come as they preached how wonderful Jesus was and that He was God. That would be ridiculous for anyone, with an unbiased mind, to believe! Plus, there were many, many more witnesses who did the same thing as these apostles! That is, they died a martyr's death for their belief in Jesus. In fact, history tells us that tens of thousands died a martyr's death because they would not renounce their Savior, Jesus Christ. Look at Paul, for example. Here was the most oppressive Christian hater/persecutor in the years just following the crucifixion of Jesus. Suddenly, Paul became the greatest evangelist of the early Church! Thirty years later, he was one of the thousands in Rome who were martyred under the regime of the wicked Nero. How can this be explained other than what the Bible states – Paul had an incredible encounter with Jesus that changed this brilliant man's life!

Folks, that is what we all need and can have – an encounter with the risen Jesus!

Conclusion:

Ten major world religions have been examined in some detail. The origin of each religion and the individual (or individuals) who introduced each of them has been discussed. In addition, each of these religions' conception of God, eternity, and salvation has been reviewed. In the last section, the argument for and/or against each religion was studied. So what have we learned?

For one thing, let us review some of the key differences between Christianity and other religions of the world. That is, what makes Christianity unique? That is the subject of this series, after all. Let me just list some of the major differences between the Christian Church and many if not all other churches in the world:

- Christianity is the only religion requiring the sacrificial death of God Himself – in order for mankind to achieve salvation
- Christianity is the only religion we studied where good works (at least in some measure) was not required for salvation
- The Christian God is the only God that uses prophesy as a major component of His scriptures – no other god can do so without embarrassment
- The Christian religion is the only religion where its founder was resurrected from the dead and rose into heaven as an example (*the first fruits*) to His followers
- The Christian religion is one of the few religions in the world that holds a view of eternity, past and present and future that is consistent with that of science and philosophy. These religions recognize that the Creator had to exist outside of the universe we occupy. This “Creative Force” started all of nature and evidence suggests strongly that the universe will remain forever in some form (i.e. it will not “cycle” out as the Hindu's and Buddhist's believe)
- Christianity and Judaism are the only religions that are totally consistent with historical and archaeological findings

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- Christianity is the only religion based on Love and Grace and Sacrifice
- Christianity and Judaism are the only two religions we have studied that have no contradictions in their scriptures. Yes, there are difficult passages to understand completely, but no blatant contradictions as there are in all other religions..
- The Christian God is the only God that combines omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and is described as being Love, never the author of evil, only the author of Good and the dispenser of Grace
- When the Christian religion began, tens of thousands of believers were so convinced of its truthfulness that they allowed themselves to be martyred rather than renounce their faith in Jesus. This is unique in its scope among all the world's religions.

I believe that it has become quite apparent that the Christian religion is very unique when compared to the other religions in the world. More importantly, the evidence appears overwhelming that this religion was not man-made. There is a fairly famous saying that “The Bible is a book that men would not write if they could, and the Bible is a book that men could not write even if they would.” In other words, the Bible is not a religion that a typical man (or woman) would devise. On the other hand, the Mormon religion seems to be a fair effort by one man to bring a religion into the world with many of the characteristics that many would want in a religion... the ability to pray for one's dead relatives, polygamy, various tiers of heaven... yet no one goes to a hell, good works count toward one's salvation, etc.). Most of the other religions we studied have aspects of the “handprint of man” on them. On the other hand, there is no way anyone could devise scriptures with the prophesy that is in the Bible – the religion would never succeed as the predictions would fail to materialize one after another. Obviously, the Holy Bible is very unique... and true! Let no one therefore miss the main message of this Bible... Jesus says,

I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6)

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Acts 2:21)

For anyone who has not yet asked Jesus into their heart, now is the time. **Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.** (2 Cor 6:2) Tomorrow is not promised to anyone.

The Uniqueness of Christianity
