

Why all religions do not lead to God

The various religions of the world contradict each other in every way.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to show, as concisely as possible, that the chief propositions of the various world religions are utterly contradictory to each other. It is impossible to say that all religions lead to God since they are so completely different. If the scriptures of one religion are condemned by the scriptures of another, then those two religions cannot be united. If God is denied in one religion but millions of gods are affirmed in a different religion, then those two religions are incompatible. If the purpose of life in one religion is completely different from the purpose in another, they are heading in different directions. If the after-life of one religion is eternal, unconscious absorption into the universe but the after-life of another is annihilation, then those two religions are irreconcilable.

In fact, the world's main religions vary in every respect, from the conception of God to the goal of life. As world religions developed from the original false religion established by Nimrod in Sumeria, the further they travelled from its original base the more they diverged as they took on the cultural forms of new lands after Babel. Over thousands of years these forms diverged more and more (just look at the changes in Hinduism alone within one sub-continent). Therefore, it is impossible to say that all religions are essentially the same and lead to the same goal. Only ignorance can make such a claim.

Christian sects are not taken into account in this survey; that is Roman Catholicism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Christadelphians, Unitarians, Christian Science and so forth. A separate paper would be needed to enumerate these differences. Mormonism is included since it is not even faintly Christian but pure idolatry. Confucianism is left out because it is essentially a secular philosophy; it is practical wisdom to live uprightly.

The descriptions of the following religions, under certain headings, are made as simple as possible; though some sections are given in more detail. This is because a discussion of the religions in full would occupy many books. Some of the religions are extremely complicated, not to say self-contradictory and confusing. We cannot delve into such detail here. For further information see the bibliography, or see web blogs on various questions involving devotees answering questions.

A word must be mentioned about contradictions. One can read a description of an item in a religion by one author only to find a completely different depiction in another book. This is due to the following reasons. Firstly, many religions evolved over thousands of years (like Hinduism) and whole sections of the religion changed; gods may be replaced and practices may be abolished. Thus a religion may have had several creation myths until one gradually became dominant. Secondly, some religions (such as Shinto and Zen) do not have authoritative scriptures to determine practice and belief, and so variations occur with different gurus. Thirdly, there may be a complete reformulation of the religion during a reform movement (as in Zoroastrianism). So if one writer uses a foundation of a certain text for examination of a religion, but another uses a later scripture, there may well be quite significant differences.

Summary of the religions in view

Christianity

The religion of those who submit to Jesus Christ as Lord, Saviour and God and admit no other Mediator between God and men. Christians follow the Bible as their source of knowledge of God and seek to obey all that it teaches. Their God is triune; that is a Trinity of one God subsisting in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Conversion follows a revelation of God, resulting in divinely given faith and repentance – a changed life. The radical feature of Christianity is that it claims that Christians directly meet with God, and become actual sons of God, through a direct, personal revelation of the resurrected Christ, by the Spirit.

Various sources estimate there are 2.1 billion Christians worldwide, about a third of the planet. However this figure is volatile. Many people consider themselves as Christian but have no regular commitment to church or Biblical doctrines. Of that figure only a fraction are evangelical (Bible-believing). The World Evangelical Alliance estimates that there are over 600 million evangelical Christians of which the majority would be Pentecostal / Charismatic.

Judaism

Modern Judaism is a monotheistic religion, being a product of the Pharisaic reforms of historic Judaism after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Its chief source of authority is the Talmud (mainly the Babylonian Talmud¹) and it is known as ‘rabbinic Judaism’. There are, however, some sects within it, such as the Orthodox, Conservative, Zionist, Karaite, Reform, Reconstructionist, Humanist, Kabbalah etc. All Jews believe that a divine covenant made with Abraham sets them apart as the ‘Chosen People’. They await a messiah who will unite all Jews into a promised land in Israel and defeat their enemies.

The worldwide Jewish population is 13.3 million. In 2001, 8.3 million Jews lived in the Diaspora (outside Israel) and 4.9 million lived in Israel, with about 46% in North America.

Hinduism

This requires some detail, as it is not really a single religion but a composite of many traditions; hence it is a very complex series of religious and social beliefs, centred in India, which developed over 5,000 years.² Its variety and complexity embraces pantheism, polytheism, monotheism, and monism.³ Therefore, two Hindus living near each other could believe a completely different set of religious beliefs, and yet both be Hindus. It arose from the primitive sacrificial religion of the Aryans, who invaded India in about 2,000-1500 BC, and their writings which became Sanskrit.

In simple terms, its religion depends upon the key concepts of a) *dharma*, the law underlying existence (duty); b) *karma*, the law of cause and effect resulting in reincarnation; and *moksha*, liberation from this chain of birth, death, and rebirth.

The social impact is prescribed by a) *varna*, the division of mankind into four classes or types, the fore-runner of the caste system; b) *ashrama*, the four stages of life; and personal

¹ There is also a Jerusalem Talmud.

² It is also unusual in that it has no founder, is not prophetic, has no organisation, has no set creed and no essential doctrine, no single moral code and the concept of God is not vital to it.

³ ‘All is one.’ The philosophical belief that the universe consists of a single substance. It is opposed to the dualism of mind and body. The most obvious forms of monism claim that the world is entirely material (materialism) or that it is entirely mental (idealism). Monism explains differences between things as subjective, resulting from our different or partial ways of understanding them.

dharma, according to which one's religious duty is defined by birth and circumstance. There are an estimated 705 million Hindus in the world.

Hindu history, as the oldest current religion, is summarised as:⁴

- *The Indus Valley Civilisation or Harappan culture* (from Harappa, a chief city) [4000-2000 BC]. A developed urban culture similar to the civilisations of Mesopotamia with city developments like those found in Ur. The language is unknown. Religion involved temple rituals, goddess worship, washings and sacrifices.
- *The Vedic period, Vedism* [1500-500 BC]. Origin theory 1: As the Aryan people from Europe (possibly the Balkans) invaded India they brought their language and customs but did not remove earlier, primitive, animistic religion. Origin theory 2: Aryan culture is a development of the Indus Valley culture; there were no Aryan migrations (or invasion) and the Indus valley culture was an Aryan or Vedic culture. The language developed into Sanskrit and their pantheon was similar to Greek mythology. The older Indus Valley religion already had yoga, reincarnation, priesthood (Brahmins) and rituals while the Aryans added a sacrificial system, a focus on fire and nature religion, complex rituals and sharing a sacrificial meal. The Vedic texts are the key source for this period. The chief gods at this time are Indra (creator, sky-god, warrior), Agni (sacrificial fire, life force of nature), Varuna (= the Greek Uranus, the chief god upholder of the cosmos) presiding over the earth, atmosphere and sky.⁵ The Vedas distinguish between the world soul and material substance. There are three divisions of this period:
 - The writing of the *Rig-Veda*, a collection of hymns to gods or divine powers (devas). Complex rituals, officiated by priests, centred on fire sacrifices and using the sacred plant (*Soma*) to make a drink to heighten spiritual awareness. Later the *Sama-veda* and the *Yajur-veda* were added to the sacred vedic texts. There was also a cult devoted to the householder for which the *Atharva-veda* was written, containing spells and charms.
 - The writing of the *Brahmanas*; prose commentaries containing practical and mythological details about the sacrifice; the development of priestly ritualism. The power of the devas was weakened and more focus placed on the cosmic power behind them, personified as Prajapati or Purusha, but eventually centred on Brahman, a single impersonal power. Asceticism and meditation also developed. This subset of Hinduism is also called Brahminism.
 - The writing of the *Upanishads*; this took the emphasis away from ritual towards the personal, mystical experience of god (hence its popularity in the west). As the world is renounced, the soul (*atman*) becomes united with Brahman. The doctrines of *samsara* also first appears (the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth until *moksha* – liberation into Brahman). The conditions of rebirth are determined by past *karma*.
- *The Epic, Puranic and Classical Age* [500 BC–500 AD]. This period saw the decline of the Vedic cult, the proliferation of a merchant class, the loss of influence of Brahmins and the arrival of new breakaway sects (Buddhism and Jainism) leading to an emphasis on living in the world. A new poetic literature appeared in Sanskrit and thus the composition of new sacred texts, the *Dharma Sutras* (domestic rituals, purification etc.) and *Shastras*; the Epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*; and the *Puranas*, containing many stories still popular today. [The *Bhagavad Gita* is part of the *Mahabharata*.] Also new religious doctrines developed. First, the idea of *dharma* (law,

⁴ With thanks to thoughts from Professor Gavin Flood; *History of Hinduism*, BBC Religion, last updated 2009-08-24 and the *Handbook of Living Religions*.

⁵ Earth contains the plant god Soma, the fire god Agni, and the god of priestly power, Brhaspati. The Atmosphere contains the warrior Indra, the wind Vayu, the storm gods or Maruts and the terrible Rudra. The Sky contains the sky god Dyaus (from the same root as Zeus), the Lord of cosmic law (or *rta*) Varuna, his friend the god of night Mitra, the nourisher Pushan, and the pervader Vishnu.

duty, truth), now central to Hinduism and Buddhism, was expressed in the *Dharma Sutras* and *Shastras*, recognising three sources of *dharma*: 1) revelation (i.e. the Veda), 2) tradition (*smṛti*), and 3) good custom. *The Laws of Manu* adds 'what is pleasing to oneself'. Essential was *varnashrama dharma*: the right way of living in each of the four classes of society (*varnas*) in each of the four stages of life (*ashramas*); i.e. *dharma* (righteousness) varies according to your station in life. Secondly, the vedic fire sacrifice diminished, overtaken by devotional worship (*puja*) to images of deities in temples. In the Gupta Empire (320-500 AD) the traditions of 1) Vaishnavism (focus on Vishnu), 2) Shaivism (focus on Shiva) and 3) Shaktism (focus on Devi⁶ [= Shakti], the Divine Mother, the female aspect of the Divine) developed. In this time we see the features of present day Hinduism, such as *bhakti* (devotion) and temple worship, plus the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. Also we see the focus of devotion on Krishna and Rama (and his consort Sita), two incarnations of Vishnu. With Krishna, the element of *bhakti* (devotion) became prominent and influential to this day. At the end of this period temple building began in earnest.

- *Medieval Period* [500–1500 AD] Sees the rise of devotion (*bhakti*) to the major deities, particularly Vishnu, Shiva and Devi and the construction of great temples. New religious texts developed in Sanskrit and local languages, particularly Tamil. Sages (*rishis*) arose promoting new ideas and creating new theological schools. Hinduism thus fragmented further. Shankara (780–820) was particularly successful and re-established the authority of the Vedic canon, propagated *advaita* (monism) and laid foundations for the further development of the tradition known as the Vedanta. The *Tantras* (alternative revelation to the Veda arising from Shaktism) challenged the authority of the Vedas and developed its own form of yoga and worship. Some of these texts advocated ritually polluting practices such as offering alcohol, meat and ritualised sex to ferocious deities but most of these texts are simply concerned with daily and occasional rituals, temple building, cosmology etc.

Further development continued through the centuries with various leaders reforming traditions. In the late 19th century Hinduism morphed into a western framework that was attractive to many in America and Britain, notably the Vedanta Society led by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). Since then many Indian gurus have adapted Hinduism to westerners promoting various sects, such as Sri Chinmoy, Guru Maharaj Ji, Maharishi Mahesh Yoga etc.

Jainism

A non-theistic religion founded in India in the 6th century BC by Vardhamana Mahavira as a reaction against Brahminism. Its central doctrine is non-injury to living creatures. Numbering some 3.6 million adherents, its followers in India are mostly found in Gujarat and Maharashtra states. There are two major sects: the white-robed *Shvetambaras* and the naked *Digambaras*. It is estimated that there are about 3.9 million Jains worldwide, with 3.7 million in India alone with 30,000 living in Britain in 2000 (in fact the first Jain temple in the western world was built in Leicester in 1988).

Sikhism

A monotheistic religion founded in the Punjab in the 15th century by Guru Nanak. It combines elements of Hinduism and Islam, accepting the Hindu concepts of karma and reincarnation but rejecting the caste system ('*There is no Hindu; there is no Muslim*' – Nanak). The tenth and last of the series of gurus, Gobind Singh, prescribed the distinctive outward forms (the so-called five Ks) – long hair (to be covered by a turban,) and uncut beard (*kes*, *kesa*), comb (*kangha*), short sword (*kirpan*), steel bangle (*kara*, *kachu*), and short trousers for horse-riding (*kacha*). Originating as a religion, Sikhism became a militant political movement in the Punjab, where most of the world's 18 million Sikhs live.

⁶ The female form of Deva, 'god'. Devi is also called Prakriti.

Islam

The monotheistic religion of Muslims (Moslems), founded by the 'Prophet' Muhammad [or Mohammed; 570-632] in 7th century Arabia; who succeeded in destroying the inherent idolatry in the Arab world and welding the various warring tribes into a single community. After Mohammed's death, conquests by Muslims led to a great empire spreading from the Middle East into Africa, north India and Spain. It only failed to conquer Europe when Charles Martel defeated the Muslim (Saracen) army at Poitiers in 732.

The professed religion of nearly 1,000 million people. Islam involves adherence to religious beliefs and inclusion in a social community.

The constituents of Islam were revealed to Muhammad and codified in the Koran, which builds upon teachings of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Islam is considered as the last of the revealed religions (after Judaism and Christianity) and Muhammad is the last of the Prophets.

Islam teaches complete submission to Allah. Worship and social good works are prescribed by the *Five Pillars of Islam*: 1) profession of faith (*Shahada*), 2) observance of ritual prayer (including five obligatory set prayers every day – *Salat* or worship), 3) giving alms to the poor (*Zakat*), 4) fasting during the month of Ramadan (*saum*), and 5) performing the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once (*Hajj*). Islam also emphasises belonging to the community of Islam, both locally and world-wide, with a common cultural legacy and commitment to a future ideal global Muslim community. Historically, warfare has often been utilised to support this notion.

There are two main sects: the majority Sunni (85-90%), holding that the first three caliphs were all Mohammed's legitimate successors, and Shi'ite or Shia, who believe that Ali was Mohammed's first true successor. Holy teachers have a greater authority in Shia. Other sects include: Alawite (as per the ruling family in Syria), Ismaili (headed by the Aga Khan), and Sufism (a mystical group beginning in the 6th century but taking a hold in 17th century Iran). Militant Islam became a political feature in the 1980s in Iran after Ayatollah Khomeini took power in Iran and Islamic fundamentalism spread to Algeria, Egypt, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Buddhism

More a philosophy than a religion, it is widespread throughout Asia. It was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, in north-east India in the 5th century BC to counter the sacrificial religion of orthodox Brahminism. In the 3rd century BC Buddhism was made the national religion of India by the emperor Asoka, where it spread over Asia. However, there are now few Buddhists in India, after being overcome by the Muslim invasions in the 13th century.

There are two major traditions, namely: the original Theravada (often called *Hinayana*), and the more moderate *Mahayana*. Emerging from the latter is *Vajrayana*. There are also a large number of smaller sects; many of these introduced the very Brahministic, sacerdotal,⁷ idol worship that Siddhartha Gautama rebelled against.

It has no god. *Karma*, the law of cause and effect, is emphasised. Religious duty involves are the doctrine of 'no self' (*anatta*) and meditation.

Essential teachings are:

- The 'Three Jewels' (or Threefold Refuge) of Buddhism, i.e. 1) belief in Buddha, 2) following Buddha's doctrine (*dharma*), and 3) commitment to the *sangha* (the

⁷ Led by a sacrificing priest.

Buddhist religious community), the Buddhist monastic order, including monks, nuns, and novices.

- The Buddhist *dharma*: Firstly, the ‘four noble truths’: 1) all existence is suffering; 2) the cause of suffering is desire; 3) freedom from suffering is *nirvana*; and 4) the means of attaining *nirvana* is prescribed in the ‘eightfold path’ that combines ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom.
- The Buddhist *dharma*: Secondly, the Noble Eightfold Path (right knowledge; right purpose; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right thought; right concentration).

In 2004, there was an estimated 376 million Buddhists worldwide, however, it is difficult to determine numbers since many individuals may have Buddhist beliefs but engage in some other religion, such as Shinto, Taoism or Hinduism.

Zen Buddhism

A Buddhist sect popular in Japan and in some western people. It originated in China in the 7th century, where it was influenced by Daoism, spreading to Japan (12th century). It seeks salvation through enlightenment. This is not achieved through scriptural texts or ritual worship, but through *satori*, a sudden enlightenment experience, which is usually achieved under the guidance of a teacher. Meditation under a master, intellectual exercises, and physical endurance are emphasised.

There are different branches of Zen which teach different methods of achieving enlightenment, such as meditation on paradoxical statements (*kōans*), and seating posture (*zazen*). Its strict discipline appealed to the samurai and it flowered under the Ashikaga, where the emphasis of harmony with nature influenced aesthetics. There are an estimated 3.32 million followers of Zen, amounting to about 1% of the Buddhist population.

Shinto

‘Shinto’ (*Shin tao*) means, ‘the way of the gods’. A Japanese religion dating from the early 8th century, some say from 500 BC. It incorporates the worship of ancestors and nature spirits and a belief in sacred power (*kami*) in both animate and inanimate things (animism⁸). Shinto consists mainly of an informally structured priesthood. It lacks a founder, any religious laws, and authorised holy scriptures. It was the state religion of Japan until 1945. There are 2.7 million followers of Shinto today.

Taoism / Daoism

One of the three main Chinese religious and philosophical traditions, the others being Confucianism and Buddhism. Daoism is also found in Vietnam, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Like Confucianism, it has a philosophical and a religious expression. However, it is notably different from the practical teachings of Confucianism in its emphasis on inner contemplation, mystical forms of knowledge, and spontaneous, non-active union with the nature of being.

A religious Daoism also developed and was officially recognised in the 3rd century AD; it incorporated certain Buddhist features and developed its own monastic system and cultic practices. Popular Daoism borrowed the concept of reincarnation from the Buddhists, but the final goal was not *nirvana* but becoming an immortal. Religious Daoism has also tended to be close to certain folk religious practices, and has borrowed elements such as the worship of different local gods. Today it has about 225 million adherents.

⁸ Animism: the attribution of a living soul to all creatures, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena. The belief that the world is animated by spirits who are capable of harming or helping a person's interests.

Baha'i

The name means 'splendour' and it is an offshoot from Islam, but despised by Moslems. A monotheistic religion founded in 1844 as a development of Babism.⁹ It teaches the oneness of mankind and all unity of religions in order to seek world peace. The Baha'i faith was founded by the Persian Baha'u'llah (Mirza Hoseyn Ali Nuri, 1817–92), claiming to be the awaited Mahdi foretold by the Bab to reform Islam, and his son Abdul Baha (1844–1921).

The first missionary to America arrived in 1893 and now there are more followers in the US than in any other region. Baha'i began to be popular in the west in the 1960s, hitching on the back of the hippie fascination with eastern religions; by 1994 there were over 5 million members world-wide, many of whom are students.

Mormonism

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, a polytheistic religion founded in the US in 1830 by Joseph Smith Jr, based upon Christianity. After the Mormons came into conflict with the US government over their practice of polygamy (officially abandoned in 1890) they moved their headquarters from Illinois to Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1847 under Smith's successor, Brigham Young. They are ardent in proselytising. In 2010 their number hit 14.1 million.

Zoroastrianism

A monotheistic Persian religion founded by Zarathustra (or the Greek form, Zoroaster) in the 6th century BC (though some now date him as far back as 1500 BC, making him the first of the great prophets of the world's religions). Zoroastrianism is found today in parts of Iran and India, where followers are known as Parsees (Parsis); there are approximately 100,000. These have been very influenced by contact with the west and one reform movement was inspired by Theosophy (Ilm-I Kshoom).

New Age Occultism

A hotchpotch of numerous mystical groups, cults and religions that have become predominant in the west after postmodernism and increasing interest in eastern religions during the 20th century. Initial founding elements were Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Anthroposophy, the rise of Spiritualism, renewed interest in the occult and astrology and the faith-healing movement. Essentially it is a flowering of paganism, mysticism, Gnosticism and the occult all mixed up. Since the New Age is not a formal organised religion but a collection of disparate groups, it is impossible to speculate on numbers of devotees. However, we can say that paganism is the fastest growing religion in the UK and the worldwide population of New Agers could be guessed as many millions.

Scripture

Christianity

The Bible alone is the authority of the Christian church. This is the 66 books of the Old Testament (in common with Judaism) and the New Testament.

Judaism

Originally the source of authority was the Old Testament (the law, the prophets and the writings); principally *the Torah* (the five books of Moses). However, modern Judaism has *the Babylonian Talmud* as its main authority, superseding the OT.¹⁰

⁹ A religion founded in 1844 by the Persian Mirza Ali Muhammad of Shiraz (1819–50), known as 'the Bab' (= 'the gate'), who taught that a new prophet would follow Muhammad. He was killed by the Turks.

¹⁰ Without question, the Talmud is the source of authority for modern Judaism not the Old Testament. The Talmud itself teaches this: '*be more careful in the observance of the words of the Scribes than in the words*

Hinduism

The Vedas ('revealed wisdom'; 2,000 BC); *the Brahmanas* (describing elaborate rituals); *the Upanishads* (teaching reincarnation etc. 800-300 BC). Later (post-Buddhism) form of Hinduism produced *the Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *the Puranas* (erotic stories about the gods) and *the Bhagavad-Gita* ('Song of the gods'). The differing texts brought doctrinal changes and developments (sometimes conflicting) throughout history.

Jainism

Earliest texts were composed in various Prakrits (early Indian languages). By the 5th century the Shvetambara Jains collected a canon of 45 texts, called *the Siddhanta*. This canon's oldest, most esteemed, texts are the *angas*. However, not all Jains accept these as authoritative. In the 16th century a reform movement called the Sthanakavasis produced a canon containing only 32 of the 45 texts of the Siddhanta.

The Digambara Jains, while not repudiating the tenor of *the Siddhanta*, teach that its form is not authentic. They also preserved two very old Prakrit texts: *the Shatkhandagama* ('Scripture in six parts') and *the Kashayaprabhrta* ('Treatise on the stain of passion'). These plus some commentaries give the Digambaras the scriptures, called *the Anuyoga* ('Expositions').

There are further texts written in Sanskrit in the 8th century onwards, which are commentaries on the older texts and new philosophical writings, narratives on origins, plus religious and social instructions. There are also some modern texts written in Gujarati, Marathi and English.

Sikhism

The Adi Granth (Punjabi, 'first book'; also called *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*). The original compilation was made under the direction of Guru Arjan (1563–1606), the fifth Sikh guru. Written in the Gurmukhi script, *the Adi Granth* consists of the preaching of the first five Gurus, but also includes Muslim and Hindu hymns. The work was completed by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, who declared that hence-forward there would be no more Gurus: his successor would be *the Adi Granth*, now given the honorific title *Guru Granth Sahib* ('Holy Book Guru'). For this reason, it is treated with great respect: the throne holding the book forms the focus of worship in a Sikh temple.

In Sikhism all are entitled to read the scriptures; they are not for the privileged classes only, as in Hinduism where only the elite castes can do this.

Islam

The Koran (Qur'an), written by Muhammad. The prime basis for Islam's ideas are Judaism and Nestorianism. The Koran's 'revelations' appear in 114 chapters called '*suras*'. Muhammad was charismatic but illiterate and his piecemeal original writings were re-worked, collated and edited by scholarly disciples into the *Koran* 20 years after Muhammad died. It was issued by the third Caliph, 'Uthman. There were seven versions of this made in the 10th century and one became the standard text in most of the Muslim world. In 1924 an edition with signs for recitation was issued in Cairo, and is now widely accepted, but other texts are still used. There is no critical edition of the Koran a no standard English translation; the most popular is that by AJ Arberry (1955).

The Old Testament is revered as inspired but not a sacred text. Other sources for Islamic law and custom are *the Hadith* ('tradition') teaching what Muhammad allegedly said and

of the Torah. [Erubin, 21b] So do authoritative modern Jews: [The Talmud] '*is still the supreme authority in religion*'. [The Jewish Encyclopaedia, Vol 12, p26.] '*The modern Jew is the product of the Talmud*'. [Dr. Isaac H Wise, *Commentary on the Talmud*.]

did, compiled in the 9th century. Some Muslim modernists reject the *Hadith* altogether. There is also *the Sunnah*, rules and regulations of Muslim life.

Buddhism

The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha [c.563–c.480 BC]. These were passed down orally for centuries until the first century BC on Ceylon when the first scriptures were written down. The basic collection is the '*Pali Canon*' (in the Pali language, also called the *Tripitaka* – 'triple basket'). This is the sacred writing for the conservative Theravada Buddhists; other sects have many additional texts.

Zen Buddhism

Truth is not objective but is inward revelation or radical intuition. The essential authority is the self. There are no texts, creeds or dogmas.

Shinto

Much teaching is amorphous, arising from misty past traditions but *the Nihongi* (or *Nihonshoki*, 720) and the earlier *Kojiki* (712) are considered important, but are not memorised or studied.

Taoism

Philosophical Daoism developed from the 5th to the 3rd centuries BC; its tenets are found in the *Daodejing* [the *Tao Te Ching*], traditionally attributed to Laozi, and in the text known as *the Zhuangzi* after its author.

Baha'i

The teachings of Baha-ullah. These are found in the *Kitab al-Aqdas*, the Most Holy Book. Also important are: *Ketab e Iqan*, the Book of Certitude; *the Hidden Words* (a collection of sayings) and *the Seven Valleys* (a mystical treatise).

Mormonism

The Book of Mormon. Smith claimed to have found and translated *The Book of Mormon* by divine revelation. It tells the story of a group of Hebrews who migrated to America c.600 BC and is taken as scriptural alongside the Bible. Smith's writings are also treated as divinely inspired additions to the Bible.

Zoroastrianism

The Zendavesta (or just *Avesta*) are the sacred scriptures. Only fragments survive of Zoroaster's revelation, parts were initially contained in 17 hymns called *the Gathas*, still recited.

In the 10th century a number of commentaries and tracts appeared to instruct the faithful; they are known as the Middle Persian texts written in Pahlavi, because only a few priests could read the language of *the Avesta*. These texts codified the teachings of traditional Zoroastrianism for the Parsis who had settled in India to avoid persecution in Persia from Muslims. The scriptures elaborated and systematised Zoroaster's teachings.

New Age Occultism

A multiplicity of scripture texts; or no text at all.

Summary

- Christianity: The Bible.
- Judaism: chiefly, *the Talmud*, also the OT.
- Hinduism: *The Vedas*; *the Brahmanas*; *the Upanishads*; *the Ramayana*; *the Mahabharata*, *the Puranas* and others.
- Jainism: *the Siddhanta*; *the angas*; *the Anuyoga*.

- Sikhism: *The Adi Granth*.
- Islam: *The Koran* (Quran); *the Hadith* and *the Sunnah*.
- Buddhism: chiefly, the '*Pali Canon*' also called the *Tripitaka*.
- Zen Buddhism: no texts.
- Shinto: informally - *the Nihongi* (or *Nihonshoki*) and the *Kojiki*.
- Taoism / Daoism: *Daodejing* [the *Tao Te Ching*] and *the Zhuangzi*.
- Baha'i: the *Kitab al-Aqdas*; the *Ketab e Iqan*, and others.
- Mormonism: *The Book of Mormon*.
- Zoroastrianism: *The Zendavesta* (or just *Avesta*); *the Gathas*.
- New Age Occultism: multiple texts.

God

Christianity

There is one God but he is manifested in three Persons (the Trinity); these are not modes of one God (modalism) but distinct, individual personalities. The Godhead consists of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who are equally God but having different functions. Matt 3:13-17, 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14. God is eternal, holy, perfect, self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent (among other attributes). Job 42:2; Ps 115:3; Matt 19:26.

Judaism

God is one. This is the creator God as revealed in the OT.

Hinduism

The chief divine element in Hinduism from the start is Brahman, the absolute reality; but manifestations of him varied over time. The earliest Hindu gods, in the Vedic period, were Agni (the life force, god of fire); Indra (god of the sky and war) and Varuna (upholder of the cosmos and justice). In the Vedic hymns, god is not really seen in human terms but as manifestations of natural forces, as expressions of Brahman. However, the Vedic pantheon gave way to a non-Aryan hierarchy; the later development is more common today.

The Supreme Mind, divine, absolute reality is Brahman, a formless, abstract, eternal being without attributes; some call him Ishvara – the one supreme god who symbolises Brahman. He is manifested, or personified, in a triad (*Trimurti*) as Brahma¹¹ (the creator god) with Vishnu [the preserver], also manifest as Rama and Krishna, plus Shiva [the destroyer] but also millions of other, lesser gods. Thus the functions of creation, preservation and destruction are the manifestation of the Supreme Mind and are designated in the mystic word *A. U. M.* [pronounced O'm] which is often chanted.

At the end of the day, man is god since men who find salvation become one with god (the world-soul).

Some Hindus are pantheists, identifying god with the universe and all things (monism), thus not believing in god at all; this was especially true of primitive Hinduism. Some Hindus are monotheists, worshipping one particular god, such as Vishnu or Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu, one of ten). Many are polytheists worshipping multiple gods. Devotion to a particular god is called *Bhakti*.

¹¹ Brahma (originally a minor Vedic god) became the personification of the Supreme principle (Brahman). Some works differentiate between Brahm or Brahme (the invisible world soul) and Brahma, the chief deity who burst forth from the Supreme Mind.

Jainism

Rejects a personal god.

Sikhism

God is the true guru (teacher). His word emanated through ten gurus on earth, beginning with Guru Nanak. Sikhism is monotheistic; God is one, possessing human-like attributes. Sikhs see god as merciful and loving, worthy to be worshipped.

Islam

There is no god but Allah.

Buddhism

Denies the existence of a personal god.

Zen Buddhism

Denies the existence of a transcendent god.

Shinto

The principal deity is Amaterasu, the sun goddess and ancestor of Jimmu, founder of the imperial dynasty. However, there are very many gods and ancestors and emperors are also worshipped.

Taoism / Daoism

The ultimate reality is the Dao, in which being and not-being, life and death, are merely aspects of the same reality. There is no personal god. The Dao, as the origin of all creation and life force, is unknowable in its essence but observable in its manifestations. It is the power that envelops, surrounds and flows through all things, regulating natural processes, nourishes balance and harmonises opposites (yin/yang). In essence, Dao is an impersonal god/ruling force. Yin and yang stem from *T'ai Chi* (the 'absolutely transcendent'), the ultimate source and limit of reality, from which also springs all of creation.¹²

Baha'i

The great religious teachers of history are manifestations of god. God is known through these manifestations, the latest being Baha'u'llah. Other manifestations have been Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Zoroaster, Siddartha Gautama (Buddha) and Mohammed.

Mormonism

Mormonism is self-contradictory. God is now expressed as being one; he is the Father of Christ and also the Spirit. The Book of Mormon¹³ describes God as one, revealed in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (i.e. modalism). However, Smith earlier stated, unequivocally, that God is plural: '*I will preach a plurality of Gods ... the doctrine of the plurality of gods is as prominent in the Bible as any other doctrine*'; he also declared that the Trinity was '*a strange God anyhow*'.¹⁴

God is a material being who was once a man. All men can achieve godhood; therefore, there are many gods, who were all once mortal men. The Father God of the Bible is the God of earth but there are multiple gods throughout the universe with different realms.

Mormonism, being polytheistic, has no connection with Christianity, despite revering the Bible.

¹² This concept also gave rise to the Chinese martial art and system of callisthenics, consisting of sequences of very slow controlled movements.

¹³ Alma 11:44.

¹⁴ Smith; sermon, *The Christian Godhead – Plurality Godheads* (16 June 1844).

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism replaced an ancient polytheism in Persia with a pragmatic monotheism. The supreme god, Ahura Mazda, (originally Zarvana Akarana) rules over lesser deities but there is a cosmic dualism between Mazda and the evil spirit, Angra Mainyu.

Mazda, created twin spirits, one of which chose truth and light, the other untruth and darkness. Later formulations (Middle Persian) pit Ahura Mazda (now called Ormazd, Ohrmazd or Hormuzd) against his evil twin (Ahriman).

New Age Occultism

Acceptance of all gods and no gods. A common feature is the claim that men can become god, can realise their god within. New Agers tend to be monists and pantheists. God is with the universe and the human self, waiting to be discovered by mystical methods.

Summary

- Christianity: one sovereign, all-powerful God who subsists in a Trinity of three Persons.
- Judaism: one God.
- Hinduism: millions of gods.
- Jainism: no god.
- Sikhism: one god.
- Islam: Allah.
- Buddhism: no god.
- Zen Buddhism: no god.
- Shinto: Amaterasu, the principal god over many gods and ancestors.
- Taoism / Daoism:
- Baha'i: one god manifested through prophets.
- Mormonism: many gods.
- Zoroastrianism: Ahura Mazda.
- New Age Occultism: monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, panentheism and atheism.

Christ

Christianity

Jesus is the Son of God, one with the Father, sent from heaven to be man's saviour. He is the awaited Messiah of the faithful OT Jews. In Jesus God and man are combined; Jesus Christ is the God-man, and thus able to save men. He is the redeemer, the Saviour from sin. Though Jesus is both God and man he is one person, but with two natures. After dying on the cross to remit sin, he was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven at God's right hand. At the end of time he will come back to earth in glory to redeem the earth and institute judgment. Matt 14:33, 16:16; Jn 1:34, 9:35-37; Rm 5:6-8; 1 Cor 15:3-8.

Judaism

Jesus is not accepted as the Messiah. Indeed. The Talmud ridicules, condemns and insults Jesus over and over again in blasphemous ways. The Jewish messiah is expected to be a conquering figure who will rid Jews of their enemies and bring lasting peace. He is not focused on saving individuals from sin.

Hinduism

Christ is just one of the many incarnations of Brahman. He is not THE Son of God. He was no more divine than other men and did not die for sins.

Jainism

No mention.

Sikhism

No mention.

Islam

Jesus Christ was only a man; a prophet like Adam, Noah, Moses and Abraham. All these are subservient to Mohammed in authority. Christ did not die for the sin of men; Judas died on the cross.

Buddhism

Jesus is a good teacher but less important than Gautama Buddha.

Zen Buddhism

Not relevant.

Shinto

Not relevant.

Taoism / Daoism

No mention.

Baha'i

Jesus is just one of the many good teachers found in various religions. God cannot be manifested in the flesh of a man; Jesus is not God incarnate.

Mormonism

Though calling Jesus 'the Son of God' they deny that he is God exclusive of others. He is the firstborn son of God in eternity but there are many others. There were also others before Jesus' incarnation as a 'spirit-child'. Brigham Young also denied the Virgin Birth.

The denial of Jesus' exclusive divinity as the God-Man means that Mormonism is not Christian at all.

Zoroastrianism

No mention.

New Age Occultism

Some groups claim to reverence Christ or to treat him as a prophet or a great teacher. Most reject Christ, for instance pantheists and occultists. Some groups are Satanists. Some talk about the 'cosmic Christ' and identify him with a sort of Hindu world soul.

Summary

- Christianity: Christ is the Son of God, the Saviour and Lord of all.
- Judaism: Christ is rejected and denied.
- Hinduism: Christ is just another minor god.
- Jainism: Christ is irrelevant.
- Sikhism: Christ is not God.
- Islam: Christ is a prophet like Moses.
- Buddhism: Christ is a teacher.
- Zen Buddhism: Christ is irrelevant.
- Shinto: Christ is irrelevant.
- Taoism / Daoism: Christ is irrelevant.

- Baha'i: a good teacher with many others.
- Mormonism: the firstborn son of God along with many other gods.
- Zoroastrianism: Christ is irrelevant.
- New Age Occultism: some revere him as a prophet, some see him as the cosmic Christ in a Hindu sense; many ignore him while some despise him.

Creation

Christianity

God created the world in six literal, 24-hour days, out of nothing. The earth is young, about 6,000-7,000 years old. There is no evolution of life. The universe, and all living things, were created by God, in Christ, in order to glorify him forevermore. Man was created out of the dust of the earth on the sixth day; woman was created from man's rib. The features and seasons of the earth as we see them today are largely the result of the global flood which God sent as a judgment on sin about 4,400 years ago. Gen 1-2.

Judaism

Strict Torah believing Jews would follow the Christian doctrine above; however, other sects of Judaism have been influenced by evolutionary theories.

Hinduism

For Christians, God created the world out of nothing; Hinduism declares that '*out of nothing, nothing can come*' (*navastuno vastusiddhih*). For Hindus, the universe is God (pantheism).

Jainism

There exist an infinite number of inanimate substances (*jivas*, with sentient essence or soul) and animate substances, *ajivas* (non souls). These are committed to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. All these exist independently of our perceptions of them. The world itself is subject to a process of growth and decline, being part of a universe that is without beginning and without end, passing through various cosmic cycles divided into phases of ascent and descent. These endless cycles lead to the fatalism and determinism of Jainism.

Sikhism

The one god created all things.

Islam

God made the universe and all thing good and brought life out of water: '*Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together, then We clove them asunder and We got every living thing out of water.*'¹⁵

Islam taught a form of evolution long before Darwin but after Greek philosophers: '*Allah has caused you to grow out of the earth as a good growth. Then will He cause you to return, thereto, and He will bring you forth a new bringing forth.*'¹⁶ Man was not created out of dust but progressed through stages – but these stages (four of them) were all men (except for one stage being a rock) not lower animals. However, popular Muslim belief claims that man was created in paradise from where he was put on earth.

¹⁵ Koran, 21:30.

¹⁶ Koran, 71:14-19.

Buddhism

Buddhists reject the notion of a personal creator God, who is the origin of all things. Instead, Buddha formulated the idea of 'dependent origination' to explain how all things come into being and how they cease to be. The doctrine states that all aspects of individual existence, or modes of being, are conditioned by others; in this world there is nothing permanent, independent, or absolute, not even the individual self, change is always possible.

Zen Buddhism

As Buddhism.

Shinto

Similar to Daoist mythology. From the elemental egg the pure elements formed heaven, the impure ones sank to become earth. Then the deities (*Kami*) were created. A reed sprouted to become *Kuni-toko-tachi no Mikoto*, then many others were formed which are not omnipotent. Two gods (Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto, male and female) then created the earth and new gods, who in turn produced the trees, the sun (Amaterasu, who later became prominent) etc. The original Japanese emperors were considered to be gods, spawned by Amaterasu.

One myth is important featuring the male *kami*, Izanagi. When his spouse, Izanami, died, he missed her so much that he went to the underworld of the dead. As a result, he became impure. Realising this, he purified himself on returning to this world using water in order to revitalise himself. Izanagi thus became pure, and remarkably felicitous happenings occurred as result of this act of purification, namely the birth of three major deities of Japan, Amaterasu-ômikami (Sun *kami*), Tsukuyomino-Mikoto (Moon *kami*) and Susano-no-Mikoto.

Taoism / Daoism

Daoist creation is centred upon ancient Chinese creation myths.

Originally there was chaos. In the elemental chaos of elements and gases, resembling an egg, there was a dormant organising principle. After incubation for 18,000 years the egg hatched. Then the heavens and the earth came into existence. The lighter, most pure substances floated upward and became the heavens. These elements were named yang. The heavier, more impure substances descended and became the earth. These were named yin.

Then a giant was born called Pan Ku who divided the heaven and earth. He lived for 18,000 years helped by a tortoise, a phoenix, a dragon, and a unicorn. Together they created the world as we know it today. Upon death Pan Ku's left eye became the sun and his right eye became the moon. His blood became the rivers and oceans, his breath became the wind, his sweat became the rain, and his voice became the thunder. His flesh became the soil, and from the fleas living on his body, the human race appeared.

Baha'i

God and the universe have no beginning and no end; existence is eternal and perpetual. The composition of elements and all things by God was one of combination and natural organisation of existent things. *'As to thy question concerning the origin of creation. Know assuredly that God's creation hath existed from eternity, and will continue to exist forever. Its beginning hath had no beginning, and its end knoweth no end. His name, the Creator, presupposeth a creation, even as His title, the Lord of Men, must involve the existence of a servant.'*¹⁷

¹⁷ Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p150.

Mormonism

All human beings had a pre-earth life in the spirit as spirit children of the Father. They then entered into earthly life having a physical, mortal body.

Zoroastrianism

Ahura Mazda is the bountiful sovereign who made all things but evil is the work of the destructive spirit Angra Mainyu – he rules in hell, created demons and is the creator's enemy.

In the later (Middle Persian) formulation, in the Pahlavi language, Hormuzd created heaven and its inhabitants. At this time Ahriman was intent on destroying the creation but, dazzled by light, fled to the darkness and created 99,000 male and female demons (Divs or Dews and Darujes). Hormuzd spoke the mystic word to prevent Ahriman acting for 3,000 years. In his time Hormuzd created archangels and angels to preside over creation, and the spirits of men. He then created the natural world. In this period there is a struggle for mastery between the good and evil principles, with Ahriman corrupting the creation; thus light is matched by darkness, summer with winter, vegetation was diseased and moral evil began to prevail. Ahriman became trapped on earth, which is now the scene for the cosmic battle between good and evil. With the birth of the prophet Zoroaster, the gradual defeat of evil began, a conflict which will last 3,000 years.

New Age Occultism

A wide variety of teachings; often referring to different ancient sacred books.

Summary

- Christianity: God created all things out of nothing through Christ.
- Judaism: God created all things out of nothing.
- Hinduism: the universe is eternal and is god.
- Jainism: the universe is without beginning or end and trapped in an endless cycle of rise and fall.
- Sikhism: The one god created all things.
- Islam: God made the universe and brought life out of water, which evolved in stages.
- Buddhism: everything is changing, nothing is permanent.
- Zen Buddhism: nothing is permanent.
- Shinto: complex mythology similar to Daoism.
- Taoism / Daoism: ancient Chinese mythology about eggs and a giant.
- Baha'i: God and the universe have no beginning and no end; existence is eternal and perpetual.
- Mormonism: the Father (god) created the world; the spirit world produced men.
- Zoroastrianism: Ahura Mazda made all things but evil is the work of the destructive spirit Angra Mainyu.
- New Age Occultism: A variety of teachings depending on the sacred texts used.

Man in sin

Christianity

All men are born in sin and are incapable of doing the good that God demands. They are dead in sins and lost unless they find a saviour to rescue them. Sin is rebellion against God and transgression of his laws, resulting from pride, expressed in thought, word and deed. Rm 1:18-23, 3:10, 23, 5:12; Eph 2:1.

Judaism

Man is not born in sin, neither is he good. He is born free and able to choose either good or evil.

Hinduism

Good and evil are relative terms; whatever helps is good, whatever hinders is bad. Failure to make the most of the good results in trying again in a reincarnated life. Man is trapped in *samsara* (Sanskrit, 'journeying through') rather than sin. This is the way in which successive lives are determined by the laws of *karma*. In Hinduism, the soul continues to be reborn in a variety of forms, according to its actions in past lives, until release (*moksha*) is achieved.

Jainism

Similar to Hinduism.

Sikhism

As in Hinduism.

Islam

There is no original sin in Islam. Sin is failure to do Allah's will; i.e. the failure to do one's religious duty as outlined in the '*Five Pillars of Islam*'.

Buddhism

Sin is that which hinders man's progress. Man is responsible for his own sin. Similar to Hinduism (*samsara*). Buddhism rejects the existence of the soul but clearly recognises a spiritual link between successive lives.

Buddha's *Four Noble Truths* show man's problems: 1) Suffering is the result of past *karma*. 2) The cause of such suffering is desiring wrong things; wrong values. No material thing has ultimate value. 3) It is possible for suffering to end. 4) The solution is the *Noble Eight-Fold Path* (see: 'salvation' and 'Practical life')

Zen Buddhism

Similar to Daoism. Sin is neither affirmed nor denied. Without evil good cannot be seen just as darkness enables us to understand light (Yin & Yang).

Shinto

There is no concept of original sin; however, ancient Japanese considered all unhappy incidents as sins caused by external factors. Sin adhered to people externally requiring purification at shrines through rituals called *oharai*. The mechanism is expressed in the saying, '*Hate the sin, but not the sinner.*' the act of purification is the source of energy and productivity, and is essential not only for the salvation of the individual but of the nation. This is the reason for the Shinto emphasis on purification.

Taoism / Daoism

Dao is more concerned with the balance of opposites (Yin / Yang) than with sin. Life's problems are resolved through meditation and observation. The goal is to become one with the Dao force.

Baha'i

Mankind is essentially good if proper ethical teaching is available. Some teach that sin does not exist. Adherents are careful not to speak evil of others, based upon Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. Pride is the key problem to spiritual growth.

Mormonism

Man is progressively becoming a god. Adam's sin was necessary in order to provide bodies for the spirit children of god who were waiting for earth life.

Zoroastrianism

Evil comes from the evil spirit Ahriman and is unnatural in the pure creation. Each man must choose whom to side with in the cosmic struggle between Mazda and the evil spirit. Choosing good or evil results in either rewards or punishments. There is no idea of original sin, nor of the need for a substitutionary death, as in Christianity.

New Age Occultism

There is again a wide variety of notions. Most reject the concept of sin and hold to a sort of evolutionary upward development of man gradually becoming a spiritual being. Some accept sin but tone it down as a sort of impediment easily overcome, merely ignorance of one's spiritual potential. Many have a Hindu or Daoist conception of sin.

Summary

- Christianity: all men are sinners, unable to be righteous, who need salvation.
- Judaism: man is neutral and able to choose good or evil.
- Hinduism: whatever helps is good, whatever hinders is bad. Failure to utilise the good results in reincarnation.
- Jainism: Similar to Hinduism.
- Sikhism: Similar to Hinduism.
- Islam: Sin is failure to do Allah's revealed will, one's religious duty; no original sin.
- Buddhism: Similar to Hinduism; sin is that which hinders man's progress.
- Zen Buddhism: Similar to Daoism. Sin is neither affirmed nor denied.
- Shinto: sin is external, affecting men and requiring ritual purification.
- Taoism / Daoism: Dao is more concerned with the balance of opposites.
- Baha'i: Man is essentially good but pride hinders spiritual growth.
- Mormonism: Man is progressively becoming a god.
- Zoroastrianism: Evil comes from the evil spirit; each man must choose whom to side with. No concept of original sin.
- New Age Occultism: sin is largely ignored. Generally a Hindu or Daoist concept is held.

Salvation

Christianity

Man's works are unable to save him. Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone, who died to save his people from sin and death. 1 Cor 15:3-4; Acts 4:12; Titus 3:5; Eph 2:8-10.

Judaism

Salvation is by commitment to the one God and living righteously.

Hinduism

Man is saved through devotion, meditation, good works and self-control.

The different expressions and scriptures of Hinduism posit a very complex and varied method of salvation. The Vedas teach an elaborate system for the higher castes, from initiation, to meditation, seeking enlightenment and renunciation. The Upanishads teach a different way: the current world is *maya* (a temporary illusion of time and space with no

meaning). Man's soul (*atman*) is a part of the *paramatman* (world-soul). Each soul stuck in *maya* is struggling to get back to the world-soul. This is achieved through reincarnation (*punar-janman*), going through higher life forms, and then higher human castes. The journey is by following his duty (*dharma*); i.e. responsibilities, religious duties and social works. *Moksha* is deliverance from the cycle of reincarnation.

Another method is through yoga, disciplining of life to restrain passions. Enabling *atman* to escape the cycle of death and reincarnation and be joined with the world-soul. Traditional Brahmans opposed any short-circuiting of reaching the Brahmin class. Those unable to do this (most of the population) are doomed to an endless cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*). [This notion was opposed by Buddha.]

The freeing of the *atman* is to lose itself in the world-soul which is called *nirvana*, becoming part of the infinite.

After Buddhism appeared, a new form of Hinduism arose about 1,000 BC following the later scriptures. This includes worship of Krishna as a way of salvation. New Hinduism allows for 330 million gods.

'People's Hinduism' teaches that salvation can be attained by either: a) following one's *dharma*; b) the way of knowledge of the Upanishads; c) or the way of devotion to a god such as Vishnu or Krishna. The last method is popular amongst the lower castes.

The modern Vedanta teaches that Brahman has incarnated himself many times, including as Christ and Buddha. These are called *avatars* (saviours). The last incarnation was Sri Ramakrishna who lived at the end of the 19th century. Aldous Huxley was a devotee of him. Since then others (mostly fraudulent impostors) have claimed incarnation status.

The history of Hinduism defies any arrangement into logical order; it is hopelessly confused, self-contradictory and amorphous.

Jainism

Salvation is attained by perfection of the soul through successive lives (reincarnation). Man is free to work out his own salvation, even in a cycle of descent. Full salvation is not possible for a woman unless she is reincarnated as a man (according to the Digambaras).

The way of salvation is by acquiring the Three Jewels: 1) Right knowledge (knowing Jain teachings); 2) Right faith (believing Jain teachings); 3) Right conduct (obeying Jain teachings).

Sikhism

Coming to know god is experienced through meditation. Salvation is Hindu in conception being based upon *samsara*, *karma* and reincarnation.

Islam

Man earns his own salvation and pays for his own sins by following the teachings of Muhammad. There are five essential principles of Islam (the *Pillars of Islam*).

Buddhism

Salvation is by self-effort, whatever is conducive to spiritual progress is good, and whatever tends to hinder spiritual progress is bad. The way to *nirvana* is by *dharma* (duty) – the dynamic that gives inner power and quality to life. Buddha summarises *dharma* as friendship with what is lovely. This is the condition for following the *Noble Eight-fold Path* to overcome *karma*. Reincarnation enables man to learn to deal with *karma* over successive lives.

Zen Buddhism

Salvation is enlightenment (*satori*) achieved through training and meditation. Reincarnation enables further opportunities but it can be achieved in one life.

Shinto

Salvation is by honouring the gods and doing good, ritual purification, obeying parents and especially one's duty to the nation and the community. Many Japanese practice syncretism so that Shinto rituals are performed alongside Buddhist ones, such as Shin Do Buddhism, (for example, one is usually married in a Shinto ritual and buried with a Buddhist one).

Taoism / Daoism

Through silence, stillness, and actionless action (*wu wei*) the Daoist aims to achieve unity with the Dao (life-force).

Baha'i

Doesn't focus upon sin at all but emphasises education and unity of faiths. This is because Baha'i considers that men are naturally good, essentially spiritual, beings. Any concept of sin has to do with turning away from God and not benefiting from his love. Salvation is like Buddhism, whatever is conducive to spiritual progress is good, and whatever tends to hinder spiritual progress is bad. Bahai's do not think of salvation in terms of being saved from original sin, or from the devil; rather, it delivers people from the captivity to their own lower nature. Salvation means drawing nearer to God and progressing on the path to a deep and satisfying happiness.

Mormonism

It is universalistic in teaching that Christ's resurrection brings about the general immortal salvation of all men, i.e. escaping death.¹⁸ However, individual salvation (gaining spiritual life) is by works. All men will spend eternity on some level of a multi-layered heaven. The level you attain depends on your efforts. Obedience to the Gospel is required in faith, repentance, baptism, laying on of hands for the gift of the Spirit, and endurance to the end by keeping God's commandments.

Smith also taught that some men's sins are so serious that they need to be killed to be saved (by firing squad or beheading); that their physical death would atone for their sin.¹⁹ Smith's own brother testified in court that he was fearful for his life on this account. One of the sins worthy of death was marrying a black person. This was preached openly in Utah in the 1850s but ceased after so many non-Mormons moved into the state.

This is outright paganism.

Zoroastrianism

By self-effort, choosing good over evil.

New Age Occultism

Most New Age sects would not see salvation from sin a necessity; rather the person needs enlightenment to initiate seeking ascent up the mystical ladder to achieve oneness with the universe / god.

Summary

- Christianity: salvation is only by the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross, which purchases forgiveness for the elect.

¹⁸ *What Mormons think of Jesus Christ*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Salt Lake City (1982) p17.

¹⁹ J & S Tanner, *Mormonism, Shadow or Reality?* Lighthouse Ministry, Salt Lake City (1987) p398.

- Judaism: Salvation is by commitment to the one God and living righteously.
- Hinduism: in the simplest terms, freedom from the cycle of reincarnation is by following one's *dharma* (path of duty) or devotion to a god.
- Jainism: Right knowledge, right faith, right conduct.
- Sikhism: Salvation is Hindu in conception being based upon *samsara*, *karma* and reincarnation.
- Islam: Man earns his own salvation and pays for his own sins.
- Buddhism: Salvation is by self-effort. The way to *nirvana* is by *dharma* (duty) and following the *Eight-fold Path*.
- Zen Buddhism: Salvation is enlightenment (*satori*) achieved through training and meditation.
- Shinto: Salvation is by honouring the gods and doing good, ritual purification, obeying parents and especially one's duty to the nation and the community.
- Taoism / Daoism: Through silence, stillness, and actionless action (*wu wei*) the Daoist aims to achieve unity with the Dao (life-force).
- Baha'i: like Buddhism, whatever is conducive to spiritual progress is good, and whatever tends to hinder spiritual progress is bad. Drawing nearer to God and progressing towards happiness.
- Mormonism: individual salvation (gaining spiritual life) is by works.
- Zoroastrianism: By self-effort, choosing good over evil.
- New Age Occultism: in general, enlightenment and ascent up the mystical ladder to achieve oneness with the universe / god.

Practical life

Christianity

The life of the Christian is given over to God in order to fulfil his commandments. These include doing good to all, especially to other Christians, helping the poor and needy, serving the brethren and preaching the Gospel. Gal 6:10; 1 Cor 1:17; Jm 1:27; Isa 58:6-7.

Judaism

Modern Jews are theoretically called to obey God's commandments as laid down in the *Torah* but, in effect, the rabbinic commentaries in the *Talmud* determine exactly how this is to be done and provide numerous excuses for failing. Jews follow a number of sacramental practices and feast days (such as Passover), including circumcision of males and Sabbath observance. Dietary observance (*kosher*) means not eating blood or pork or any unclean animals.

Hinduism

Classic Hinduism is dominated by the caste system. Brahmin (priest, the highest class); Kshatriya (warrior or nobleman); Vaishya (peasant worker, traders, merchants); Shudra (slave, menial unskilled worker). Shudras are not allowed to hear the *Vedas* or to use them to find salvation. People outside the system, such as unsubjected groups or those with unacceptable practices, were Pariahs (outcastes, untouchables). For centuries Pariahs were outside the caste system and were shunned. The caste system is based on the idea of reincarnation; people are born unequal due to their previous lives.

There are food offerings, incense, flowers and coloured powders. In the morning the sacred word (*AUM*) is uttered and the local god worshipped whilst bare to the waist; some repeat words from the *Rig Veda*. Water is offered to images. There are various festivals, such as Divali in January. Many Hindus revere the cow.

In later Hinduism more emphasis was placed on the individual following his *dharma* or *shakti*.

Jainism

Asceticism demanded; a life of renunciation and non-violence. Vows are taken to lead a righteous life (not swearing, stealing, fornicating etc.) and limitation of possessions restriction of travel. Meditation is also practised for at least 48 minutes a day.

Avoiding harm to any living creature to avoid bad *karma*; thus diet is severely restricted and vegetarian. Farming is forbidden to avoid accidentally killing something while ploughing. Some wear masks to prevent accidental ingestion of a creature. Many Jains are bankers or merchants.

The ceremonies of life (birth, marriage, funeral) are Hindu, presided over by Hindu leaders.

Sikhism

Strict Sikhs (Khalsa saints) obey the five k's: 1) *kesa* – long uncut hair; 2) *kangha* – 'comb'; 3) *kacha* – short trousers (originally to aid horse riding); 4) *kachu* – metal bracelet; 5) *kirpan* – 'sword'.

Islam

Obey the Koran's teachings. Drinking, gambling and eating pork is forbidden; circumcision is also practised. Polygamy is permitted, but losing favour.

Buddhism

Following the *Eightfold Path*: right knowledge; right purpose; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right thought; right concentration.

Various splinter groups arose out of Buddhism all teaching different methods.

- Theravada keeps to Buddha's original teachings. This emphasises the individual's efforts without divine help and it is almost impossible to become a buddha (enlightened one), though it recognises up to 28 buddhas.
- Mahayana is less strict where salvation is for all not just a few. This added the doctrine of a *Bodhisattva*, a sort of saviour who puts off becoming a buddha in order to save others – so he gathers others into his being (not difficult in a religion that does not recognise the individual self). In this sect there are millions of buddhas united in the absolute being (*Dharmakaya*).
- Vajrayana Buddhism: a mystical variant of Mahayana, similar to Indian Tantrism.²⁰ Uses mantras (magic sayings repeated over and over; e.g. '*om mane padme hum*'); *mudra* (gestures, special movements); *mandalas* (meditation circles).
- Lamaism: Tibetan Buddhism involving monks (a syncretism of Buddhism and Bon, an earlier animism involving spirit and demon worship by shamans).
- Zen Buddhism: originated in China as Ch'an but popularised in Japan as Zen where meditation, riddles and self-discipline are emphasised.
- There are many more.

Zen Buddhism

Self control is highlighted.

²⁰ Tibetan Buddhist practices involving images, sounds movement, breath control and ritualised sexual intercourse to achieve experience of the enlightened self.

Shinto

Emphasise on doing good and doing one's duty to family and country.

Taoism/ Daoism

There is a high ethical standard. Non violence, moderation, humility, compassion, contentment with one's lot.

Baha'i

Essentially Baha'i teaches peace and unity amongst men, sexual equality.

Mormonism

Following the rules of the Mormon Church; including proselytising.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroaster emphasised personal religion with all men and women having the same duties and personal responsibility to choose between good and evil. Man's duty is to make his body the dwelling-place of good spirits from god by following divine righteousness and devotion. Family life is encouraged and asceticism and sexual abstinence is condemned; caring for the environment is encouraged. Hygiene and cleanliness, especially the avoidance of dead things, is stressed as a part of the battle to rid the earth of evil.

New Age Occultism

There is a wide variation in advice for living on earth now. Some groups are very secular where mystical ideas are simply tacked on to everyday life; Transcendental Meditation would be like this, all you have to do is meditate upon your mantra for 15 minutes a day. Other sects involve much discipline, such a varieties of yoga, or prolonged periods of chanting (Hare Krishna Hinduism). Some folk are ascetic while others are hedonistic. Some require attendance at ceremonies and rituals (e.g. Wicca), some cults go further and demand living in the group's communes (such as Findhorn) for, at least, certain periods; yet others have no ceremonies at all, being individualist (like Zen).

Summary

- Christianity: obeying God's word; doing good to all, living righteously.
- Judaism: obey God's commands as prescribed and interpreted in the *Talmud*.
- Hinduism: in old Hinduism, try to escape your caste through reincarnation by following teaching (practices, rituals, sacrifices etc.). In later Hinduism, follow your *dharma*.
- Jainism: Asceticism and a life of righteousness, meditation, renunciation and non-violence. Avoiding harm to any living creature to avoid bad karma; thus diet is severely restricted and vegetarian.
- Sikhism: obey the five k's.
- Islam: Obey the *Koran's* teachings.
- Buddhism: For traditional Buddhists, follow the *Eightfold Path*: right knowledge; right purpose; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right thought; right concentration.
- Zen Buddhism: self control.
- Shinto: doing good and doing one's duty to family and country.
- Taoism / Daoism: Non violence, moderation, humility, compassion, contentment with one's lot.
- Baha'i: keeping peace and unity amongst men.
- Mormonism: following the rules of the Mormon Church,

- Zoroastrianism: Man's duty is to make his body the dwelling-place of good spirits from god by following divine righteousness and devotion.
- New Age Occultism: a wide variety of attitudes, practices and disciplines.

Worship

Christianity

Worship in the Christian church (which meets in a house; a church is people not a building) is a spiritual matter involving the full submission of the believer to God, through Christ, in all reverence and praise. This attitude of worship continues throughout the life of the believer, even in mundane things, but in corporate gatherings involves a-cappella singing of praise and worship, Bible reading, teaching, thanksgiving, prayer, meditation and adoration. The centre of the Christian gathering is the bread and wine (The Lord's Supper), which focuses believer's attention of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus as a memorial ritual. There are no other objective rituals or liturgy, no formal ceremonies, no formal priests and no musical instruments. Rm 12:1-2; Acts 2:42, 20:7; 1 Tim 4:13; Eph 5:19; Col 4:2.

Judaism

Worship is formal and centred in the various rituals associated with the weekly Sabbath, synagogue attendance and the annual feasts.

Hinduism

Different regions of India worship different gods, such as Vishnu or Shiva. Brahmins worship Brahman; other castes worship other local gods.

Jainism

Although Jainism has no god it is common for Jains in India to worship Hindu gods. Worship is also common of a true *deva* (a *Tirthankara* [also called *Jinas*] – the 24 great heroes, liberated souls; often of statues of these), by reciting their names. In theory, prayer and worship is really more contemplation; prayer is less of a petition of a *deva* but more as an inspiration to devotion. In practice, Jains do seek for help from Hindu gods; indeed, many Jain temples house idols of Hindu gods and Jain homes have domestic shrines. Worship occurs in the morning and evening. Most villages in a Jain area have a temple and priest.

Sikhism

Sikh temples are called *Gurdwaras*; the chief one being at Amritsar, India. Idolatry is forbidden but the *Adi Granth* has become an object of devotion. Sacred times, usually in the morning, are reserved for prayers and rituals.

Islam

There is no organised church or priesthood, but mullahs and ayatollahs are given authority. Prayer, preceded by ceremonial washing, is emphasised and can be performed in any clean place but meetings for prayer (worship) and preaching take place in a mosque. Muhammad is greatly revered. Prayer is spoken face down to the ground facing Mecca (but was originally facing Jerusalem.). The manner of observance of the five pillars varies between Sunnis and Shi'ites. The simple creed called the *Shahada* ('confession') is recited, '*There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of God*'. Prayer is now required five times a day but was originally two, then three, then five. On Fridays Muslims should attend noon prayers at the mosque. Although women are spiritually equal, they pray separately to the men, either behind them or to the side. Prayers include reciting passages from the *Koran* and praises to god, spoken in Arabic. The head is covered for prayer.

Buddhism

Worship was not a part of original Buddhism but many of the sects practice worship of statues of Buddha, relics and other idols. Some claim that this is not worship but merely intercession. Some Buddhists have a temple (*caitya*), others use a relic mound (*stupa*) while monks worship in a monastery (*vihara*). Some sects have complex rituals involving chanting, gestures, using finger-cymbals, bell ringing etc. The complex fragmentation of Buddhism led to a wide variety of worship types and teaching.

Zen Buddhism

Not applicable.

Shinto

Worship is not organised or centralised but is practised at home shrines, focused on honouring the god and ancestors.

Taoism / Daoism

Not relevant as there is no god.

Baha'i

There are no sacraments or rituals and no professional clergy.

Mormonism

Has various detailed rituals practised in a Mormon temple. These include washings, temple garments, symbolic gestures, liturgical rites, and oaths. Many aspects were borrowed from Freemasonry, especially the blood oaths of death by mutilation for betrayal, only modified in the 1990s. [Smith himself became a Mason, along with over 1200 other Mormons, in 1842.]

Zoroastrianism

Parsees honour fire as a symbol of Ahura Mazda and fire is kept burning in a temple attended by a priest. Rites were originally in the open air until temples were introduced by Artaxerxes (404-359 BC) in imitation of Babylonian practice. There are no set, strict rituals or special times. The disciple washes, enters the temple and offers prayers in a simple prayer room; though actually attending a temple is not necessary. Originally one must pray five times daily (after ablutions) in the presence of fire, whilst standing and reciting the *Gathas* (hymns of Zoroaster) as part of an act of worship called the *yasna*. He also reties the sacred cord (*kusti*) worn constantly over a sacred shirt. Urban dwellers largely neglect this today.

New Age Occultism

There is a wide variety of worship forms as well as denial of any worship at all. Some engage in complex rituals, especially the occult groups such as Wicca. While claiming that they date from pre-history, most of them were laid out by Gerald Gardner in the 1950s based upon his experience of Asian shamanism related to a mother goddess.

Summary

- Christianity: complete submission to God, with thanksgiving, praise and obedience; individually and corporately.
- Judaism: Worship is formal and centred in the various rituals associated with the weekly Sabbath, synagogue attendance and the annual feasts.
- Hinduism: worship and devotion to whatever god you choose.
- Jainism: contemplation and meditation but also worship of Hindu gods.
- Sikhism: prayers and rituals at home and in the temple.
- Islam: meetings for prayer and preaching take place in a mosque.

- Buddhism: worship originally unnecessary as there is no god, but many sects now worship idols, especially of Buddha, some with rituals.
- Zen Buddhism: worship unnecessary as there is no god.
- Shinto: Worship is not organised or centralised but is practised at home shrines, focused on honouring god and ancestors.
- Taoism / Daoism: worship unnecessary as there is no god.
- Baha'i: There are no sacraments or rituals and no professional clergy.
- Mormonism: various detailed rituals practised in a Mormon temple.
- Zoroastrianism: there are no set, strict rituals or special times but there is fire worship, washing, and prayers.
- New Age Occultism: there is a wide variety of worship forms as well as denial of any worship at all.

The End and Judgment

Christianity

At the end of this world, the Lord Jesus Christ will return from heaven (the current realm of God) and bring about the destruction of the earth through fire and the death of the wicked. The righteous (believers in Christ) are raised to have a resurrection body like that of Christ.

After this, all the wicked who ever lived are raised in a new body to face the judgment of God for their sin. They give an account of themselves to God before all and are then condemned, along with the devil and his demons, to eternal perdition in hell – a place of separation from God and everlasting torment. 1 Jn 3:1-2; Phil 3:21; 2 Pt 3:10, 12-13; Rev 20:10, 12-15; 1 Thess 4:14-18; 2 Thess 1:7; Matt 24:30.

Judaism

The messiah will come who will bring a new beginning (a new heaven and earth) with Israel at the centre ruling the world.

Within Judaism there is a range of views on the after-life, heaven and hell. The Sadducees denied any kind of after-life. While there is no official formulation of doctrine, the general rabbinic consensus is that heaven is paradise and hell is a place of torment. It was after the shock of the destruction of the temple in 70 that rabbis began to develop doctrines of a better life after death for Jews who suffered on earth. Righteous souls go to a heaven that is like the Garden of Eden while others are punished in *Ge-hinnom*. Some see this as a place of torment for the wicked; others see it as a place of purification, like a purgatory, lasting 12 months. Only the utterly wicked fail to escape. For such, some rabbis say they are annihilated; others teach that they are eternally tormented, such as Maimonides.²¹

Hinduism

See 'heaven'.

Jainism

See 'heaven'.

Sikhism

See 'heaven'.

²¹ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Law of Repentance, 3:5-6.

Islam

Teaches a Day of Judgment. Islam teaches that hell is a real place prepared by god for those who do not believe in him, rebel against his laws, and reject his messengers. Hell is the ultimate humiliation and loss.

Buddhism

There is no Day of Judgment but an endless cycle of reincarnation, escaped by relatively few.

Zen Buddhism

The concept does not arise.

Shinto

In general the afterlife is that a person becomes a spirit-deity, and eventually becomes a part of the collective ancestral spirit. The afterlife isn't emphasised, but a Hades-like realm, called *Yomi*, is briefly mentioned in the *Nihongi* and *Kojiki* within the creation story. Shinto does not focus on death and the afterlife. Birth is coming from the invisible world to the visible world by the power of life; death is the disappearance from the visible world into the invisible world. So both birth and this visible world are positive realities, while death and the other world are merely negative aspects of the former.

Taoism / Daoism

There is a hell, as a sort of purgatory, with nine stages of punishments each governed by a demon king. Prayers can help people escape this judgment.

Baha'i

Judgment Day has already come and gone. Baha'is believe the references to Judgment Day are now symbolic; thus a new heaven and new earth refer to a new revelation or way of seeing things; people rising from their graves refer to souls who have risen from their disbelief; stars falling refer to the collapse of ecclesiastical institutions. Baha'u'llah says,

Hence, it is clear and manifest that by the words "the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven" is intended the waywardness of the divines, and the annulment of laws firmly established by divine Revelation, all of which, in symbolic language, have been foreshadowed by the Manifestation of God.²²

Since the Biblical teaching on final judgment is very clear and is repeated in didactic as well as figurative language, with moral warnings given on the basis of this, it shows how superficial Baha'i is in trying to synthesise all religions by dumbing down clear doctrines.

Mormonism

There is a millennium when all Jews will be gathered. The ten lost Jewish tribes will also be gathered (Mormons consider themselves to be the gathering of Ephraimites). There are two resurrections: the righteous will be resurrected to meet the Lord in the air, the wicked will be destroyed by fire. The spirits of the dead reside in a Purgatory where they may atone by suffering. In the millennium the central activity is the baptism for the dead. After the millennium, there is a second resurrection when the wicked are raised. Satan is released from prison to war against the saints, but is defeated by Jesus, enabling the judgment. [Note the similarities with Premillennial Dispensationalism.]

The Final Judgment sees the dissolution of the earth resurrected as a celestial body like the sun.

²² Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Iqan*, p41.

Zoroastrianism

After the struggle between good and evil, Ahriman is triumphant. Men cease eating food and only drink water. Then comes the resurrection of men. The righteous are rewarded with perfect happiness while the wicked, after undergoing three days purgation in the molten metals of hell, will be purified for a better life in a renovated universe.

Men are judged on the basis of how they exercised their free will. If a man's good thoughts, words and deeds outweigh evil ones, he goes to heaven. The wicked go to hell. This doctrine originally offended those whose status as priests or princes gave them precedence to heaven. Hell is punishment fit for a man's crimes. It is a dark, chaotic place under the earth.

The final sentencing awaits the end of the current cycle of spiritual warfare, there is a Judgment Day when all good souls are released into eternal life but the wicked dead are sent to hell. Before this time all souls are in an intermediate abode; the good in paradise, the wicked in torment.

New Age Occultism

Since the idea of sin is downplayed or ignored in most New Age cults, there is little mention of a Day of Judgment. Many teach that there is a coming spiritual Utopia or a Harmonic Convergence, rather than a Day of Judgment.

Summary

- Christianity: Christ returns to end the world, save his saints and usher in judgment for the devil, demons and sinners. The wicked go to everlasting hell; righteous believers go to heaven, which is on a restored earth.
- Judaism: no clear statements but a general rabbinic consensus that the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished.
- Hinduism: no judgment, no hell.
- Jainism: no judgment, no hell.
- Sikhism: no judgment, no hell.
- Islam: enemies of Allah judged; hell is real.
- Buddhism: no judgment, no hell.
- Zen Buddhism: no judgment, no hell.
- Shinto: no judgment, no hell; death is absorption into the spiritual world.
- Taoism / Daoism: there is a sort of purgatorial hell.
- Baha'i: Judgment Day and hell are merely symbolic.
- Mormonism: there is a purgatory after death and a final judgment at the end.
- Zoroastrianism: there is a purgatory after death and a final judgment at the end, including hell for the wicked.
- New Age Occultism: rarely any mention of hell or sin. Rather than a Day of Judgment, New Agers look forward to a coming spiritual Utopia.

Heaven

Christianity

Heaven is the fellowship of Christians directly with God in Christ on a renewed earth for eternity. This will be a realm of immortal happiness. 2 Cor 4:18; Isa 35:10; Rev 21:4.

Judaism

Judaism admits that there is a heaven but does not stress this, rather accentuating the need for a moral life now. See 'The End' for discussion.

Hinduism

The law of Karma results in repeated re-incarnations until eventually, when your good has increased above your evil, you attain union of your soul (*atman*) with the immortal world soul (*paramatma*). This is an unconscious, amorphous lack of existence (see Jainism).

Jainism

Like Hinduism, Jainism teaches *karma* and reincarnation. Escape from the cycle of births and deaths and be a liberated soul is to obtain *moksha*. *Moksha* and *nirvana* are not the same. *Nirvana* is when the soul is passed from one body to another in the upward climb. When a soul (*atman*) achieves *moksha*, it is released from the cycle of births and deaths, and achieves its pure self. It then becomes a *Siddha*, literally one who has accomplished his ultimate objective. Attaining *moksha* requires annihilation of all *karmas*, good and bad; Eventual unification with the universal soul is equivalent to heaven. Heaven as a place of rest, or an exalted spiritual state, full of divine splendour and communion with the Absolute.

Sikhism

Similar to Hinduism, relying on the idea of reincarnation. Once a soul merges in God, it achieves salvation, gets rid of birth and death and all the suffering of this world. That soul then becomes one with God. Sikhism believes in the existence of heaven and hell, however, these are created to reward and punish; a person is then reborn into the cycle of reincarnation until he merges with God.

Islam

Heaven is also known as 'Paradise', called *Jannah*. There are many levels of Paradise depending on how righteous a person is on Earth. The highest level that all Muslims are encouraged to ask for is *Jannatul Firdaus*; living in unrestrained hedonism, having everything one wished for.

Buddhism

The goal of life is *nirvana*, which is the human life transformed into spiritual consciousness and independent reality (enlightenment, becoming a buddha). It is radically different to the material world.

Zen Buddhism

The goal is *satori*, enlightenment.

Shinto

The primary goal is to achieve immortality among the ancestral beings, the *Kami*. After death one becomes a 'family spirit', or 'family *kami*' called *ujigam*.

Taoism / Daoism

After death the aim is to be an important ancestor in heaven.

Baha'i

Baha'is view heaven in a similar way to Hindus. Every man has as rational soul that is immortal. Death only frees this soul into a spiritual existence. This sphere of existence is timeless. Heaven is rather seen as a state of nearness to god following individual efforts. The details if the afterlife are stated to be a mystery.

Mormonism

You become a god with your own universe to rule. There are four classes of people: the sons of perdition (the devil, demons and men who have committed the unpardonable sin); these alone are consumed by the Lake of Fire at the judgment. The saved are in one of three kingdoms: 1) the highest is the Celestial Kingdom for the righteous. They live as gods with their spouses who were married in a Mormon temple and continue to bear spirit children. 2) The Terrestrial Kingdom on some planet containing the less faithful who escaped Purgatory. 3) The Telestial Kingdom on another planet for the remaining souls, the wicked who, after punishment, are offered salvation.

Zoroastrianism

Heaven is a return to where man came from; a similar view to Hinduism in a unification with the world soul. Later texts speak of heaven as a lofty, exalted, fragrant, pure, beautiful existence; the abode of sacred beings and filled with comfort, joy and peace. There are some contradictions in the various texts regarding hell, heaven and the afterlife.

New Age Occultism

Again there are various beliefs; but most common is a form of Hinduism, being the gradual mystical evolution of a person that eventually results in union with a universal soul. While Hindus do this through reincarnation, most New Agers seek to achieve this in one life by ascending the mystical ladder and achieving death of the self. A variety of different techniques are used to achieve this, depending upon the sect you are in.

Summary

- Christianity: the final state of believers is life, with Christ, on a restored earth where heaven and earth are untied.
- Judaism: little said about heaven; emphasis upon life now. Some Jewish sects deny any afterlife.
- Hinduism: union with the universal soul; an unconscious, amorphous lack of existence.
- Jainism: Heaven is an exalted spiritual state; communion with the Absolute, like Hinduism.
- Sikhism: the soul becomes one with God (like Hinduism).
- Islam: a paradise of hedonistic sensual pleasure.
- Buddhism: the human life is transformed into spiritual consciousness and independent reality.
- Zen Buddhism: enlightenment.
- Shinto: immortality among the ancestral beings (gods and ancestors).
- Taoism / Daoism: similar to Shinto.
- Baha'i: the soul is freed into a spiritual, eternal existence in a mysterious way.
- Mormonism: you become a god with your own universe to rule.
- Zoroastrianism: unification with the world soul (like Hinduism).
- New Age Occultism: most common is union with a universal soul (like Hinduism).

A composite world religion

If all religions lead to God then it must be possible to combine all the respective elements into a working faith; in fact Baha'i claims to do this. However, this section will show that it is logically impossible without being self-contradictory and absurd.

Scriptures

This religion has no sacred scriptures but at the same time has one sacred scripture. Confusingly, it also claims to have thousands of scriptures. The scriptures were written by god, but also written by men. At the same time one of its scriptures condemns all others, while all others condemn the first one; then one text accepts all others. The canon was closed thousands of years ago, 1,000 years ago, a few hundred years ago, a hundred years ago, and is still open – all at the same time.

God

This religion has no gods at all, and yet it has one god over all, but also has many millions of gods. It has no conception of an individual god, rather positing a universal soul that includes all rational human souls as well. Yet it also posits that the universe is god without any consciousness. It forbids idols of gods and at the same time provides thousands of such idols. Furthermore, it also states that god is within men at the same time as stating that god is purely transcendent.

Christ

In this religion Christ is God and the only mediator, yet at the same time he is denied and blasphemed, but also ignored completely and further admitted as a prophet but not god, and yet admitted as one of millions of gods or one of many saviours.

Creation

Creation was by an act of God out of nothing to express his divine nature but at the same time never happened - all that is was always so. But it was also from a primordial bunch of elements that gathered into a giant egg and hatched life in the form of giant who then dissipated into the universe, with the help of some animals. Yet at the same time there is no creation at all, it is an illusory vapour.

Man in sin

Sin doesn't exist in this religion, and yet it is also a central problem to man at the same time, as well as being a mere hindrance to progress. Sin has no effects at all while, at the same time, ruining creation and sending people to hell. At the same time, man is evil, man is good, man is morally neutral, man is nothing, man is slowly becoming a god, man already is god, man is part of the universe that is god.

Salvation

In this religion there is no such thing as salvation and at the same time salvation is everything to man. Salvation is in Christ, in self-effort, in practising certain disciplines, in having the right mind, in meditating, in chanting, through enlightenment, through right action and through stillness. Salvation is only available in this one life that we live but it is also gradually available through living thousands of different lives after many deaths and reincarnations. Salvation is only for the spiritual elite but it is also available for every man.

Practical life

Man is called to do good and obey God's commandments but is also called to do nothing at all and be still. All men are equal before God but also men are divided into classes where some are accepted and others are despised. Man's good works earn his salvation but also do not and only stem from it. Man offers sacrifices and does not offer sacrifices. Man must undergo ascetic disciplines but also enjoys hedonism. Many must be mystical and yet avoid mysticism. Man can kill and eat animals but must also not harm any creature or even a rock. Man can eat pork but it is also forbidden. Man can drink alcohol but it is also forbidden. Man must go on a pilgrimage to certain places and also has no need to do this. Man must not be violent but is also commanded to kill enemies of god.

Worship

Men must only worship God through Christ and no one else; yet they must worship Allah and no one else; but also Krishna, Buddha, Vishnu, Agni, Ahura Mazda, and many more. But at the same time they should worship themselves or worship no one at all. Worship involves complicated rituals and yet involves no rituals at all. Worship involves special days of the week and no special days at all. Worship has annual festivals and none at the same time. Worship of god, a man, the universe and the devil occurs at the same time.

The end and judgment

There is no end but continual cycles of ascent and descent. Yet the world does come to an end, resulting in actual judgment for sin. Judgment Day is coming and yet is has already come. At the same time this judgment is merely symbolic and not real. There is no hell and there is a hell at the same time. Hell is merely symbolic but also a real place. Hell is eternal, temporary and a few months at the same time. There is a Purgatory and yet there isn't. There is a golden age millennium and there isn't.

Heaven

Heaven both does not exist as a reality and does exist as the dwelling place of God. Heaven is symbolic with no real meaning, but is also a real destination of those who are saved. Heaven is available now as nearness to god but is also available as a future state. Man is reincarnated and man is not reincarnated. Man exists in heaven in a physical condition and in an ethereal psychic state, but is also annihilated. Life in heaven is conscious and is also unconscious. There is one heaven, which involves submission to God, and yet it is also having your own universe to rule as god. Heaven is a place of sensual, fleshly delights (such as multiple wives) but is also a place where there is no such fleshly activity and no marriage. Heaven is where men cease to be an individual but also where individuals serve God.

Interim conclusion

It is absolutely impossible to maintain that all religions are the same, that all lead to God, that all can be combined into a compromised philosophy. There are mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, it means that a true religion will logically be one that demands complete submission to it and denies salvation anywhere else. Any religion that fails to do this cannot be a true religion because it does not take into account the facts (as we have demonstrated here).

List of religions and their sects

- **Baha'i:** Babism.
- **Buddhism:** Falun Gong, Hinayana, Lamaism, Mahayana, Nichiren, Rinzai Zen, Soka Gakkai, Soto Zen, Tantrism, Theravada, Tibetan Buddhism, Zen.
- **Christianity** (multiple sects).
- **Confucianism:** neo-Confucianism.
- **Hinduism:** Brahmanism, Krishna Consciousness, Saivism, Shaktism/Saktism, Shivaism/Sivaism, Tantrism, Vaishnavism, Vedantism, Vishnuism, yoga.
- **Islam:** Druzes, Ismailis, Mahdism, Senussi, Shia, Sufism, Sunni, Wahhabism.
- **Jainism:** Digambara, Svetambara.
- **Judaism:** Conservative Judaism, Essenes, Falashas, Hasidism, Kabbalah, Karaism, Messianic Judaism, Orthodox Judaism, Pharisaism, Rabbinism, Reconstructionism, Reform Judaism, Samaritanism, Zionism.
- **Shinto**

- **Sikhism**
- **Taoism**
- **Zoroastrianism:** Mazdaism, Parseeism.

Also:

- Ancestor worship
- Animism
- Candomblé (in Brazil).
- Cargo cult (in Melanesia).
- Druidism
- Eleusinian mysteries.
- Ghost Dance cult (among American Indians).
- Hau-hauism (among Maoris).
- Macumba (in Brazil).
- Mithraism (in the Roman Empire).
- Myalism (in Jamaica).
- Neopaganism
- Orphism (in Ancient Greece).
- Paganism
- Pocomania (in Jamaica).
- Rastafarianism
- Ratana Church (in Jamaica).
- Sabaism (star worship).
- Scientology
- Shamanism Shango (in the Caribbean).
- Spiritualism Subud (in Java).
- Theosophy
- Totemism Umbanda (in Brazil).
- Unification Church ('Moonies').
- Voodoo
- Wicca
- Yezidism (among Kurds).

Conclusion

There are noble features in some religions and the devotion of followers cannot be denied. There are also aspects of truth in the sacred scriptures of some religions; indeed, some have taken ideas from the Bible. Furthermore, some religions clearly lead disciples to seek righteousness and not harm other people; this is praiseworthy.

However, even those religions with scriptures that contain good parts were all written by men. We can (usually) point to a time when a certain man wrote a text or developed a new religion. All these men lived and then died and they are honoured by their devotees; but this is the essential difference between the world's faiths and Christianity. Only with Christ do his followers engage with a living person; not only living, but one who has been raised from the dead.

There is only one Saviour who lived a perfect human life, claimed to be God, died for men and then was raised from the dead. Not only that, the risen Christ was witnessed by hundreds of people who, frankly, did not expect to see him again. Then again, when the Gospel was first preached and published there were thousands of hostile contemporary witnesses of Christ who could have denied the resurrection and contradicted the teaching of Christ contained in the Gospel; but they were silent. In those early days a sceptic could have knocked on the door of a witness of Christ and asked him face-to-face what the truth was. No other religious leader has this testimony.

Then again there is no sacred scripture that compares to the Bible. Written over many centuries by a number of very different characters under divine inspiration, it reveals a deep unity of thought regarding salvation. There is no comparable book in history that can come near this. On any key doctrine the text of the Bible is in complete harmony from something written in 1500 BC to something written in 95 AD. Time and time again science, archaeology, anthropology and other disciplines have proved that the Bible, against the odds, was correct; such as identifying the Hittite Empire when archaeologists originally knew nothing of it. This is to say nothing of the very many fulfilled prophecies; the minute details regarding the life of Christ, written centuries before, prove this, let alone naming future emperors, such as Cyrus.

Thus there is no scripture comparable with the Bible and there is no Saviour comparable with Christ. Independent students of comparative religion need to take this into careful consideration. If Christ is true and the Bible correct, then we should listen to what he says in the Gospels.

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After this paper was completed I discovered the BBC religious web pages which have sound information written by scholars; more trustworthy than some websites. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>

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Appendix One

Select glossary (avoiding personal names)

Animism: worship of spirits in living and inanimate objects.

Asceticism: austere practices to aid devotion, including fasting, and self-harm.

Ashram: [Hinduism] a monastery; a guru's commune.

Ashrama: [Hinduism] the four stages of life; and personal dharma, according to which one's religious duty is defined by birth and circumstance.

Atman: [Hinduism] Man's soul, self.

Avatar: [Hinduism] 'one who descends'; a sort of saviour, such as Krishna an incarnation of Vishnu.

Bhakti: [Hinduism] Devotion to a particular god. One of the paths to union with god.

Bodhisattva: [Mahayana Buddhism] a semi-divine being who has renounced, or put off, nirvana to help others reach salvation; a sort of saviour figure. Some of these are worshipped. One (Avalokiteshvara) is supposedly reincarnated as the Dalai Lama.

Brahman: [Hinduism] the absolute, divine reality. The neuter form of Brahma – the creator god of early Hinduism.

Brahmanism: [Hinduism] the religion of India at the time of the Upanishads and early Buddhism. It involved rituals and sacrifices made by priests called Brahmins (the top caste). Texts were in Sanskrit.

Buddha: [Buddhism] (lit. 'enlightened one') Siddhartha Gautama, the prophet of Buddhism who lived in India in the 6th century BC from the Shakya tribe. The term is also applied to anyone who has reached enlightenment.

Chakras: [Hinduism] six nerve centres (lotus centres) in the body from which psychic energy is transmitted (forehead, throat, heart, navel, genitals, coccyx). In these serpent energy (kundalini) is coiled. Certain forms of yoga release this kundalini with extreme physical results.

Dao: [Daoism] the life force.

Devi: [Hinduism] The female form of Deva, 'god', i.e. the 'Divine Mother'. Devi is also called Prakriti. The Indus Valley culture had a cult of the Great Mother or the Divine Mother dating back to 3,000 BC. She is similar to such goddesses in Persia (Anahita), Asia Minor and the Mediterranean. The idea of the Mother Goddess dates back to Nimrod's idolatrous religion where his wife (Semiramis) became the first female deity, as he himself claimed to be god.

Dharma: [Hinduism, Buddhism] essentially duty, right conduct, cosmic order; the dynamic that gives inner power and quality to life. In Buddhism dharma is the teaching of the Buddha.

Kami: [Shinto], gods.

Karma: [Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism] the law of cause and effect.

Guru: [Hinduism, Sikhism] a teacher, spiritual guide.

Maya: [Hinduism, Buddhism] the vapour of illusory life today.

Moksha: [Hinduism, Jainism] escaping the cycle of reincarnation.

Nirvana: [Buddhism, Jainism] enlightenment; when the soul passes from one body to a higher level.

Paramatma(n): [Hinduism] world-soul.

Punar-janman: [Hinduism] reincarnation, going through higher life forms, and then higher human castes.

Satori: [Zen] enlightenment.

T'ai Chi: [Daoism] (the 'absolutely transcendent') the ultimate source of reality, from which springs yin and yang and all creation.

Talmud: [Judaism] the commentaries and sayings of rabbis, being the authoritative text for modern Jews. One was developed in Palestine but the key Talmud originated in Babylon.

Tantra: [Hinduism] Scriptures that challenged the Vedas and led to the development of Tantric (Tibetan) Buddhism where Tantrism is strongest. A style of Hindu ritual and meditation that arose in medieval India, before the 5th century, which came to influence all forms of Indian religion. A development of Hinduism aimed at the ordinary person rather than the monk; world-involvement rather than world-renunciation.

Torah: [Judaism] the five books of Moses.

Varna: [Hinduism] the division of mankind into four classes or types, the forerunner of the caste system.

Appendix Two

Select Timeline

BC

4000-2000	The Indus Valley Civilisation of ancient Hinduism.
2000-1400	Abraham settles in Canaan.
1500-500	The Vedic period of Hinduism.
1000	Rig Veda written.
1000-100	Spread of Brahmin religion (early Hinduism).
1309-1291	Israelites in Egypt.
1275	The Exodus.
1235-1200	Israel occupies Canaan.
1000-961	David king of Israel.
922	Israel divided into North (Israel or Samaria) and South (Judah) kingdoms.
800-400	Composition of <i>Upanishads</i> .
721	Israel conquered by Assyria.
586	Judah conquered by Babylon.
c. 563-483	Teachings of Mahavira the Jain and Gautama the Buddha.
551	Confucius born (dies 479).
500 BC–500 AD	The Epic, Puranic and Classical Age of Hinduism.
515	Jerusalem temple rebuilt.
369-286	Chang-tzu writes the <i>Chang-tzu (Zhuangzi)</i> .
350-300	Lao-tzu's <i>Tao Te Ching</i> appears.
274-236	Spread of Buddhism by Emperor Ashoka (Asoka) in India.
200	Beginning of the rise of major Hindu sects (Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism).
200+	Jainism splits into two sects.
100+	Spread of Mahayan Buddhism, and Buddhism to China.
4	Jesus born in Bethlehem.

AD

30	Jesus crucified and resurrected.
36	Paul converted.
70	Romans destroy Jerusalem and the temple.
90	John's Gospel.
95	John's Revelation, the last Bible book to be written.
200+	Spread of Buddhism to Korea.
220-618	Taoism spreads in China and flourishes.
313	Constantine champions Christianity.
325	Council of Nicea.
400+	Spread of Buddhism to Japan.
405	Jerome's Latin Vulgate.
500+	Buddhism spreads to Tibet.
570	Birth of Muhammad.
622	The Hejira (Muhammad's escape to Medina).
630	Muhammad occupies Mecca.
632	Muhammad dies.
1095	First of the Crusades.
1191	Zen Buddhism begins.
1192-1333	Shinto-Buddhist amalgamation.
1253	Nichiren Buddhism begins.
1290	Jews expelled from England.
1300+	Rise of Tibetan Buddhism.
1436	The Taoist canon (<i>Tao Tsang</i>) gathered into its present form (the <i>San Tung</i> and <i>Ssu Fu</i>).
1469	Birth of Guru Nanak.
1517	The Reformation begins in Wittenberg with Martin Luther's 95 Theses.
1675	Gobind Rai Singh become 10 th Sikh Guru.
1700	Three great Muslim empires (Mogul in India, Safavid in Persia & Ottoman in Turkey).

- 1761 Sikhs establish themselves as rulers of the Punjab.
- 1857 In the Indian Mutiny, the Sikhs stay loyal to Britain and are rewarded with land. Number of Sikhs in British army grows.
- 1882 First major migration of Jews to Palestine.
- 1942-45 The Holocaust.
- 1947 India partitioned; Sikhs divided equally between India and Pakistan, but 2,500,000 leave Pakistan.
- 1948 Partitioning of Palestine and creation of the State of Israel.
- 1966 Punjab created as a Sikh province.
- 1967 Six Day War of Jews with Arab states.
- 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Appendix Three

Unique features of Christianity

The Bible

- Only in Christianity has the sacred Scripture been proved over and over again to be historically, archaeologically, and scientifically accurate.
- Only in Christianity has the Scripture contained hundreds of verified, fulfilled prophecies.
- Only in Christianity is the Scripture united in doctrine, agreeing in its main topics over thousands of years.

Christ

- Only in Christianity is Christ placed centre-stage in the saving work of God.
- Only in Christianity is Christ, the Saviour provided by God, raised from the dead and ascended alive to heaven to rule the universe.
- Only in Christianity is the Son of God touched by men in his incarnation and resurrection bodies.
- Only in Christianity is a divine, but real, man on the throne of the universe (as opposed to an unconscious, impersonal spirit being).

Creation

- Only in Christianity is the creation made by, through and for Christ to reveal his glory.
- Only in Christianity does the creation story accord with the facts of geology, archaeology, palaeontology, zoology and botany.

Sin

- Only in Christianity is sin, and especially original sin, a serious issue.
- Only in Christianity is man unable to do any spiritual good or any good work acceptable to God.

Salvation

- Only in Christianity does God die for sin.
- Only in Christianity does the Son of God die a substitutionary, penal death for sinners.
- Only in Christianity is there a real atonement made for sin.
- Only in Christianity is there a justification for men based on a blood atonement and redemption.
- Only in Christianity is salvation applied to men now on earth, enabling them to become sons of God in reality with eternal life, and yet also salvation is consummated in the future to include a full spiritual inheritance.
- Only in Christianity does God redeem the earth.

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