

False Teachings

How Can I Know the Truth?

John 18:33-38

The question Pilate asked, "What is truth?" is still one people who are searching are asking today. It is a valid question, because there are so many things being said by so many people, that we also ask "How can I know what is true?" What distinguishes truth from error? What can I be assured of, what can I rest my soul on? With what can I say, "I know this is true and will never lie to me?"

Jesus said, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (John 18:37). Truth is found in Jesus.

Where religious truth is not found:

It is not found in one's personal feelings, emotions, or thoughts. Prov. 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Jeremiah said in Jer. 10:23, "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." It is not found in the religion of "do your own thing." This may appear to be appealing but is really very empty, because it is deceptive. In the end, doing your own thing does not work. Feelings, judgments can be deceptive as in the case of Jacob's grief over Joseph (Gen. 37:32-36). In Acts 26:9 Paul said, "I was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth." It is man's own pride and belief in his own knowledge and ability than often leads him to be self-deceived. Jesus fought the temptations, which appeal to the senses and desires by looking to the Word of God (Matt. 4:1-10).

It is not found in what the majority of men believe. Matt. 7:13,14 reminds us the majority will be lost though they may think they are doing the right thing. Only Noah and his family survived the flood. Only Lot and his daughters survived Sodom and Gomorrah. Ex. 23:2 says, "You shall not follow a crowd to do evil." In Numbers 13 and 14, ten spies brought back a bad report and were wrong, while only two brought back a good report. God does not take opinion polls to decide what his will is; nor does He change with the fickle ideas of the world. In John 12:42,43 some would not confess Jesus for fear of the Pharisees; they were condemned.

It is not found in the traditions that arise from men. The old is not necessarily right because it is old; the new is not necessarily right because it is new. In Matt. 15:1,2 the Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking a tradition. Jesus' replied in Matt. 15:8,9, "this people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." He further says of human traditions, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up" (15:13). Long, established practices are not on the same level as the teaching of God. No man has the right to bind a human tradition on any other man.

It is not found in false prophets. There are false prophets who deceive (2 Tim. 4:2-5). Dynamic personalities can blind people from the truth! (2 Cor. 11:14,15) Hearing what we want to believe can keep us from what is able to save our souls. John said in 1 John 4:1, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." False prophets deceive themselves and speak from the imagination of their own heart and not from God (Jer. 23:16-39).

Truth is found in Jesus Christ and His Word

* John 8:31,32 To be "true disciples" we must abide in His word.

* John 17:17 Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

* John 18:38 "I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to

me."

* Col. 1:5 the gospel is called "the word of truth"

* 2 Tim. 2:15-18 Faithful Christians need to study the word of truth. To leave the teaching of Christ as Hymenaeus and Philetus did is to wonder from the truth and to destroy the faith of some.

* Acts 17:11 says the noble Bereans "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

* 1 Tim. 2:3,4 remind us that God wants all men to be saved and to know the truth.

* Psalm 19:7-11 God's Word is true and righteous altogether.

If you cannot read it in the Bible, God's holy Word, then don't believe it. "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" said Jesus. The question of what the Bible says must always be first and foremost.

Prov. 23:23 "Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding." In things so important as your soul, don't settle for anything less than what will bring you to God, the source of all truth. God is the only One on whom you can depend for now and for eternity; all else will fail.

Truth can never contradict itself or deny itself. Truth does not change, though it may have many facets. Truth cannot be right and wrong at the same time. Truth can be hidden for a time, but it can never be buried. Truth does not need the approval of the crowds or the applause of men; it need not be popular or pleasant. Ignoring the truth does not change its power; forgetting it does not make it any less true. One can pull the shades but cannot turn off the sun. One can tell a lie, but he is powerless to stop the truth.

God's Word is true because God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). God loves us too much to deceive us. One can exchange the truth of our loving God for a lie, but one cannot change God himself or change God's mind once God has spoken (Rom. 1:18-32).

Contend for the Faith

Jude 3,4

Christianity was born in a crucible of controversy. For nearly three centuries Christianity was sometimes permitted and sometimes illegal. Jews despised and opposed them. Judaizing Christians wanted to bind the Old Testament law on them. Pagans secretly tried to bring their false teaching into the church. Christianity was new, and there were many immature who were drawn away into the errors of false teachers. It was in this kind of setting that Jude urges the disciples to defend the faith.

The Faith Was Delivered to Us

The Faith of Jesus Christ was revealed to us in past generations and handed down to us in the Word of God. We did not discover its great principles and truths all by ourselves. The disciples were promised the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:12,13), and the faith was given through the Holy Spirit. Heb. 2:3, 4 says that the truth was passed to the apostles and was confirmed by signs and wonders.

Paul realized what he was delivering to the churches was divine.

* 1 Cor. 14:37 "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment."

* 1 Thess. 2:13 "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."

* 2 Thess. 2:15 "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us."

* 2 Thess. 3:14 "And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame."

Our Faith Was Delivered Once and For All

Just as Jesus was offered only once for all on the cross, so the faith has been delivered once for all to the saints (Heb. 9:27,28). The teaching of the Scripture taught in the first century by the apostles and prophets is the "one faith" mentioned in Eph. 4:5. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." He is the only way to Heaven. Peter said in Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."

3. Illustrations of how this was meant to be:

- 1 Cor. 11:23-26 we observe supper till he comes
 - Matt. 28:18-20 preach the gospel till the end of the world
 - 1 Pet. 1:23-25 word of the Lord stands forever, what was preached to you
4. The faith of Jesus Christ is eternal and an unchangeable commodity.
- a. 2 John 9-11
 - b. Rev. 22:18-19

The Christian Faith Was Entrusted to God's Saints

1. Saints are members of the church (1 Cor. 1:1,2) They became members of the church when they were washed in the name of the Lord Jesus (6:11). We are washed when we are baptized (Acts 22:16)

2. God has given every saint the privilege and the responsibility to study the faith, to practice the faith, to preach it, and to defend it.

3. When the early brethren were scattered abroad, they went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1,4).

4. There is no such thing in New Testament Christianity as a professional clergy, who alone possesses the truth of God's Word.

IV. The Faith of Christ Must Be Defended, Fought For.

1. Phil. 1:16 Paul said that he was "put here for the defense of the gospel."

2. Our faith is always under fire by believers, by false teachers, by people who place pleasure above all else.

a. Jude 4 "godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

b. Jude 11 way of Cain, Balaam's error, Korah's rebellion

c. Jude 16 grumblers, faultfinders, evil desires, boasters, flatterers

d. Jude 17-19 scoffers who want to divide the church

3. But you faithful ones--Jude 20-22

Conclusion:

The true faith today is under attack by men who believe

- * the grace of God will cover any error whether one repents or not;
- * that we can worship as we wish and still please God; (way of Cain)
- * by men who deny the authority of the Scripture (Korah's rebellion)
- * by people who sell out to worldly ways (error of Balaam)

We must realize that we are to contend for that faith which was handed down to us in the Scriptures and not vary from it to the left or to the right.

Characteristics of Cults

Christians need to be aware that there are false teachers in the world who will attempt to lead them astray.

- Matt. 7:15-23 Jesus warns us of wolves in sheep's clothing
- 2 Cor. 11:13-15 false apostles who appear as servants of light
- 2 Tim. 4:1-4 people will not endure sound doctrine
- 2 Pet. 2:1-3 false teachers who will exploit you

Some cults today wish to radically change Christians into another religion, in which they teach strange things and enslave their members.

Common Characteristics of Cults:

They teach the false idea that God has revealed some new truth especially to them. This implies that the Christianity of the New Testament is inadequate and that there are new revelations available today. However the Bible teaches:

- Col. 2:1-10 Christ is all-sufficient to make every man complete
- 2. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 The Scriptures are able to equip us fully for every good work
- Jude 3 the faith was once for all time given to the saints
- John 16:12-13 Jesus revealed "all truth" to the apostles in the first century

They believe that the Bible must be supplemented with the new revelations that they give. Paul clearly teaches that the days of the gifts of prophecy were to cease (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

They use Non-Biblical Sources of Authority.

Cults use written sources of authority beyond the Bible and which they will hold as more authoritatively than the Bible:

- Mormons: Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, Doctrines and Covenants
- Sun Myung Moon: Divine Principle
- 3. Jehovah's Witnesses: Watchtower Tracts and Magazines

Cults will often criticize the Bible and regard it as incomplete. For instance, Mormons say, "We believe the Bible to be the Word of God in so far as it is translated correctly" (Article 8, Articles of Faith). They believe the Bible to be full of errors. Wherever the Bible contradicts their teachings, the Bible is considered as inaccurate or incomplete. The Bible is never read without their book being read along with it to interpret the Bible. The cult book is regarded as infallible, while the Bible has mistakes.

They speak of Jesus differently than the teachings of the New Testament.

The "Jesus" of the cults is always someone less than the Bible's eternal God who became flesh, lived here on earth, died for our sins, and arose from the dead.

1. Jehovah's Witnesses say Jesus is a created being, Michael the Archangel, the head of all angels. He is "a god," not the Son of God.

2. Mormons say Jesus is the "first born spirit child," spiritually conceived by a sexual union between the heavenly Father and a heavenly mother.

3. Moon says, "Jesus Christ is not God Himself." "Christianity made Jesus into a God." For them Jesus is considered a man. Moonies believe they can excel Jesus.

The Bible teaches Jesus is Unique as the Son of God (Col. 1:13-20; 2:9). Jesus is God made flesh (John 1:1-4,14; Phil. 2:5-8).

A strong authority whose word is final usually leads them.

A man who is their absolute leader heads up cults.

- Mormons: Joseph Smith, succeeded by the President of their apostles.

- Unification Church: Sun Myung Moon
- Boston Movement or International Church of Christ: Kip McKean
- Roman Catholic Church: Pope

Jesus is the only head of the church. Eph. 1:20-23; 5:23-25; 1 Cor. 3:11; Acts 4:12. There is no other way to heaven. John 14:6

They often use brainwashing techniques to recruit and control their members.

Some specific brainwashing techniques:

1. *Control of life and environment*: This is the purposeful limitation of all forms of communication with the outside world (newspapers, radio, books, television), along with sleep deprivation, a change in diet and control over the people whom the person being controlled can see and talk to.

2. *Mystical Manipulation*. Here the potential convert is convinced of the higher purpose within the special group and is shown his individual responsibility in the attainment of that goal. He must be convinced that he is of those chosen by God, or the group leader, for this work for the greater glory of his cause. By means of this manipulation, cults try to control the thinking of their converts.

3. *Need for Purity*. Cults demand moral perfection from their followers. This perfection is determined by the group's view of goodness. Recruits can contribute to the well being of the world only by pursuit of their definition of morality. Along with this urge comes a sense of guilt and shame for the "impure" acts or thoughts performed before joining the group.

4. *Confession*. In all religious cults, public or semi-public confessional periods are used to get members to speak and discuss their innermost fears and anxieties. In some cases cults use this confessional material as emotional blackmail if the members should decide to leave or to control their behavior.

5. *The Aura of Sacred Science*. Because the core of the religious cult system is sacred, it is beyond questioning. Cult leaders do not allow members to question their instructions or decisions. Leaders decisions are absolute and final.

6. *Loading the Language*. Religious cults invent a new vocabulary. They confuse well-known words with their own new meanings. When Moonies ask if one has "received the blessing," they are asking if one has been married by Moon.

7. *Doctrine over Persons*. Cults teach that their doctrine always takes precedence over everything a person has learned in life and it becomes the new reality in which to function. Some cults demand that people live according to the leaders strict standards, telling them when they can sleep or eat, and whom they can date or marry. The value of an individual member is insignificant compared to the value of the group, its work and its beliefs. (Doctrine here refers not to Biblical teaching but to cult teaching.)

8. *Dispensing of Existence*. Cults draw sharp lines between those who will be saved (the cult members), and those who are doomed to hell (everyone else). God does not judge men through the Bible, but their cult leaders judge men according to cult teaching and loyalty to their cause.

Cults desire to control and manipulate the lives of their members. The Scriptures are designed to bring freedom and an abundant life (John 10:10) to all who are willing to believe and serve the Lord.

- 1. Gal. 5:1-6 Paul condemns the Judaizers who add the Law to our obedience to the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).
- 2. Col. 2:20-23 Paul warns that men's commandments are of no value against the flesh.

Cults have sometimes arisen because the established churches have failed to emphasize certain important aspects of religious life, or have neglected certain techniques. People often find in the cults emphases and practices which they miss in the established churches. (This does not

mean that cults are always right.)

There are some things we can learn from the cults:

- The importance of having definite convictions about matters of faith.
- The importance of knowing the Scriptures.
- Zeal for soul winning.
- Use of the printed page.
- The strong sense of urgency.
- The large role they assign to each member.
- The sense of dedication.
- The definite techniques for soul winning.
- The willingness to endure ridicule.
- The Christian faith has a contribution to make to good health (spiritual and emotional.)

1 John 4:1 admonishes not to believe every spirit but to test the spirits to see if they are from God.

<h2>Astrology</h2>

"Astrology is the art--its devotees would call it the science--of divination by reference to the stars and planets." It was the astrologer's task to discover the relations of the planets to one another, to the zodiacal signs, and to the observer, and to make deductions therefrom. The first two are in a sense scientific, the latter is based upon ancient lore which has no scientific basis but rests largely upon observed parallelisms between given zodiacal positions and human events. (Charles S. Braden, *The New Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia* 1:91).

What is wrong with Astrology?

1. Its origin is of idolatry (Deut. 17:2-4). God warned against serving other gods and worshipping them, including the sun, or the moon or any of the hosts of heaven, which he had not commanded. Such is an abomination. Under the Law of Moses such idolatry was punishable by death. See also Lev. 19:26,31; 20:27; Deut. 4:19; 18:9-14. Astrology leads people to look away from God and His Word to the stars and astrological calculations and horoscopes. God is in control of nature; nature is not in control of God.

2. It is worthless (Isa. 47:13,14). God issues the challenge: "Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save you from the things that shall come upon you. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves."

The astrologers and diviners among the Chaldeans were unable to interpret the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, but Daniel was able (Dan. 2:1-11,26-28; 4:7).

3. Their predictions will be foolish (Isa. 44:24,25). "I am the Lord, . . .that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; . . .that frustrateth the signs of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish."

4. It terrifies those who do not know God (Jer. 10:2). "This is what the Lord says: 'Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them.'"

5. We are not to seek forbidden knowledge (Deut. 29:29). The secret things belong to the Lord. It is not for us to know times or seasons, which the Father has set within His own authority (Acts 1:7). All spiritual knowledge is found in the Word (John 16:12,13; 2 Pet. 1:3).

6. Sorcery, as a work of the flesh, is condemned (Gal. 5:19-21).
7. When the Ephesians learned of Jesus Christ, they burned their books (Acts 19:18-20).

Does Anyone Have Miraculous Gifts Today?

When people claim to speak from God and claim to work miracles to prove that their claim is true, Christians have a right and the duty to test those claims (1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:2). Many persons are arising today claiming to have miraculous gifts, saying that the miraculous gifts of the Bible are for people today. Citing such passages as Mark 16:17-20; John 14:12,13; and Hebrews 13:8, they think that there are no differences between the first century and the present. Our purpose is to ask why God gave miraculous gifts, how people got them, if they would cease, and what differences are there between modern faith healers and the healing one can read about in the New Testament.

First, the Lord gave men the power to work miraculous gifts in order to confirm the preaching of the gospel by the apostles and prophets (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3,4). These miraculous signs were proof or guarantees that they were speaking God's Word with God's blessing. God gave Moses a miraculous rod for this same purpose (Ex. 4:1-5), "that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee." The writer of the book of Hebrews, however, tells us that the preaching of Christ and His apostles "was confirmed" by such signs and wonders (Heb. 2:3,4). The confirmation spoken of here is like that of a governmental seal upon a legal document; once the confirmation has been made, further proof is never needed. Now since the preaching of the gospel "was confirmed" in the first century, it no longer needs confirming. There is no longer a need for miracles. It also needs to be said that Jesus promised that all truth would be revealed to the apostles (John 16:12,13; Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3). This revelation is complete and once for all; God is no longer inspiring men to reveal new truth. If this is the case, no miraculous signs are needed today.

Second, miraculous, spiritual gifts were given to the apostles directly by Christ Himself (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:1-8). In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit was indeed poured out upon the apostles. Paul too received apostleship and power from Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 11:5; Gal. 2:11-17); Paul displayed the "signs" of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). The only persons "baptized with the Holy Spirit" other than the apostles were the household of Cornelius (Acts 10-11:16). But this happened to them before Peter began speaking to them and before they were believers in Christ (Acts 11:4,15). This baptism with the Holy Spirit took place to convince the Jews and Peter that the Gentiles were also granted repentance (Acts 11:15-18). No one else, however, is ever mentioned as being able to work miracles unless the apostles laid hands on them (Acts 2:43; 3:6; 5:12-15; 6:5-8; 8:5,6). A close reading of Acts 8 shows that while Philip had received power from the apostles, he could not pass it on to the Samaritans. Only the apostles could give these powers to others. (Note also Acts 19:6 and 2 Tim. 1:6.) If only the apostles could give these miraculous gifts, then after the apostles died and those on whom the apostles laid their hands died, the miraculous gifts would cease to be. This agrees with the purpose of the gifts coming to an end.

Third, Paul clearly states the miraculous will cease in 1 Cor. 13:8-13. Paul used three chapters in I Corinthians to discuss miraculous gifts. In the middle of this discussion he declares that love is more important than any miraculous gift (13:1-3), Then he describes love (13:4-7). In the final section of the chapter (13:8-13), he shows that love is greater because it will outlast the spiritual gifts. Paul said, "Prophecies will fail, tongues will cease, and (miraculous) knowledge will be done away." These gifts cause Paul to say that "we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (9,10). These miraculous gifts were to cease when "that which is perfect is come."

What is "that which is perfect"? Since "perfect" means complete," it stands in contrast with that which is in part." The "part" is miraculous knowledge and prophecy, which revealed the Word of God orally. It is most natural, then, to realize that the complete or "perfect" is the full revelation given to man in the written record of the New Testament. This complete revelation of God's will, "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), came into general possession about the end of the first century. When the complete came, the partial was done away. Since the New Testament records the complete will of God (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Pet. 1:3), there is no longer a need for miraculous gifts in the twentieth century to give us any more revelation.

Fourth, the last reason for denying miraculous gifts today comes from experience with those who claim these gifts. Just as there was a difference between Simon the sorcerer and Philip in Acts 8:5-13, so there is today a difference between so-called faith healers and the miracles Jesus and His apostles performed. Note these things about the biblical miracles:

(1) Jesus healed everyone who came to him without fail (Matt. 4:23,24; 8:16; 9:35; 12:15; 14:34-36; 15:29-31; Acts 5:16).

(2) Jesus healed everyone completely; no one came back in a few days still suffering. Crippled persons who had lost arms and legs and eyes were made whole, so that the crowd could see immediate physical changes (Matt. 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37; John 7:23; Acts 3:7-11). (Maimed persons are crippled with arms or legs missing. (See Matt. 15:29-31; 18:8,9.) Who is putting on arms and legs today? I know no one!

(3) The enemies of Jesus admitted that he could work miracles (John 11:46,48; Acts 4:16), but today faith healers are regarded as frauds.

(4) Jesus and His apostles did not use their miraculous powers to become wealthy as Simon the sorcerer did and as some do today (Matt. 10:8-10; Acts 3:16). The apostles earned their living from their work, but they did not live lavishly. (See I Corinthians 9.)

(5) Jesus did not require a person to be present at a healing service to be healed. He could heal from afar (Matt. 8:5-13).

(6) Jesus did not require faith of everyone before He healed them; some did not believe and some could not believe, for they were dead (Luke 7:11,12; 8:54,55). Jesus worked miracles to cause people to believe (John 11:42; 20:30,31; Acts 13:11,12). Jesus never said that He could not work miracles because unbelievers were present. Jesus never made excuses, for He healed everyone. Some today claim to be able to heal but fail, and then they make excuses for their failures. The truth is that they never had the power to heal.

(7) Jesus did not require great stirrings of emotions or a special atmosphere to heal anyone, but modern, fake faith healers always have them.

(8) The apostles did not exalt themselves or use their powers to form a new denomination. Rather they pointed to Christ and to the one true church that Jesus died for. They taught against division (Acts 4:10-12; 1 Cor. 1:10-13).

The Holy Spirit's work was to guide the apostles into all the truth (John 16:12,13). The Holy Spirit does not lie; nor does the Holy Spirit say one thing to one person and another thing to another person. He does not cause confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). He does speak but one gospel (Gal. 1:6-9) and have but one faith (Eph. 4:5). Yet those who claim to be inspired and work miracles disagree among themselves as to what God says. They often contradict the plain, Bible teaching on baptism, on the plan of salvation, on Jesus Christ, and on the nature of the church. They also break God's commandment by having women preachers (1 Cor. 14:34-37; 1 Tim. 2:8-11). Does the Holy Spirit lead men to disobey clear teachings of the Word of God? Is the Holy Spirit trying to confuse men? These things are not the Holy Spirit's work but the Devil's (Matt. 7:15-23; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Thess. 2:8-12). Sometimes false teachers have powers too. God gives them this power to test us to see if we will follow His Word (Deut. 13:1-5). If a man teaches a gospel that is different from the true gospel, he is to be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9). If a man does not have the doctrine of Christ, he does not have God and is not to be followed or supported (2 John 9-11). Christians, beware!

Study the Word of God and prove all things (1 Thess. 5:21,22; 2 Tim. 2:15). Always follow the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament (John 12:48), for it truly has the whole counsel of God, all that pertains to life and godliness, and is able to completely furnish man unto every good work (Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:3). Since we have the Lord's Word, we do not have miraculous gifts today!

Buddhism

For centuries, Buddhism has been the dominant religion of the Eastern world. Today it remains the predominant religion in China, Japan, Korea, and much of southeast Asia. With the rise of the Asian population in the U.S., Buddhism has made a tremendous impact in the United States. Presently, there are over 300,000 Buddhists in the U.S. It remains the dominant religion in the state of Hawaii and many prominent Americans have accepted this religion, including the former governor of California, Jerry Brown.(1)

The Origin of Buddhism

Buddhism began as an offspring of Hinduism in the country of India. The founder was Siddhartha Gautama. It is not easy to give an accurate historical account of the life of Gautama, since no biography was recorded until hundreds of years after his death. Today, much of his life story is clouded in myths and legends which arose after his death. Even the best historians of our day have several different--and even contradictory--accounts of Gautama's life.

Siddhartha Gautama was born in approximately 560 B.C. in northern India. His father Suddhodana was the ruler over a district near the Himalayas, which is today the country of Nepal. Suddhodana sheltered his son from the outside world and confined him to the palace where he surrounded Gautama with pleasures and wealth. Despite his father's efforts, Gautama one day saw the darker side of life on a trip he took outside the palace walls.

He saw four things that forever changed his life: an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a beggar. Deeply distressed by the suffering he saw, he decided to leave the luxury of palace life and begin a quest to find the answer to the problem of pain and human suffering.

Gautama left his family and traveled the country seeking wisdom. He studied the Hindu scriptures under Brahmin priests, but became disillusioned with the teachings of Hinduism. He then devoted himself to a life of extreme asceticism in the jungle. Legend has it that he eventually learned to exist on one grain of rice a day which reduced his body to a skeleton. He soon concluded, however, that asceticism did not lead to peace and self realization but merely weakened the mind and body.

Gautama eventually turned to a life of meditation. While deep in meditation under a fig tree known as the "Bohdi" tree (meaning, "tree of wisdom"), Gautama experienced the highest degree of God-consciousness called "Nirvana". Gautama then became known as "Buddha", the "enlightened one." He believed he had found the answers to the questions of pain and suffering. His message now needed to be proclaimed to the whole world. As he began his teaching ministry, he gained a quick audience with the people of India since many had become disillusioned with Hinduism. By the time of his death at age 80, Buddhism had become a major force in India. Three centuries later it had spread to all of Asia. Buddha never claimed to be deity but rather a "way-shower." However, seven hundred years later, followers of Buddha began to worship him as deity.(2)

The Way of Salvation

The question Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, sought to answer was, Why is there pain and suffering? Also, he held to the Hindu belief of reincarnation: after death one returns to earthly life in a higher or lower form of life according to his good or bad deeds. This belief prompted a

second question that needed to be answered, "How does one break this rebirth cycle?" The basic teachings of Buddhism, therefore, focus on what Gautama believed to be the answer to these questions. These basic tenants are found in the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Path. Let us begin with the Four Noble Truths.

The First Noble Truth is that there is pain and suffering in the world. Gautama realized that pain and suffering are omnipresent in all of nature and human life. To exist means we will all encounter suffering. Birth is painful and so is death. Sickness and old age are painful. Throughout life, all living things encounter suffering.

The Second Noble Truth relates to the cause of suffering. Gautama believed the root cause of suffering is desire. It is the craving for wealth, happiness, and other forms of selfish enjoyment which cause suffering. These cravings can never be satisfied for they are rooted in ignorance.

The Third Noble Truth is the end of all suffering. Suffering will cease when a person can rid himself of all desires.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the extinguishing of all desire by following the eight-fold path. "The eight-fold path is a system of therapy designed to develop habits which will release people from the restrictions caused by ignorance and craving."(3)

Here are the eight steps in following the eight-fold path.

The first is the Right Views. One must accept the four noble truths.

Step two is the Right Resolve. One must renounce all desires and any thoughts like lust, bitterness, and cruelty. He must harm no living creature.

Step three is the Right Speech. One must speak only truth. There can be no lying, slander, or vain talk.

Step four is the Right Behavior. One must abstain from sexual immorality, stealing, and all killing.

Step five is the Right Occupation. One must work in an occupation that benefits others and harms no one.

Step six is the Right Effort. One must seek to eliminate any evil qualities within and prevent any new ones from arising. One should seek to attain good and moral qualities and develop those already possessed. Seek to grow in maturity and perfection until universal love is attained.

Step seven is the Right Contemplation. One must be observant, contemplative, and free of desire and sorrow.

The eighth is the Right Meditation. After freeing oneself of all desires and evil, a person must concentrate his efforts in meditation so that he can overcome any sensation of pleasure or pain and enter a state of transcending consciousness and attain a state of perfection. Buddhists believe that through self-effort one can attain the state of peace and eternal bliss called Nirvana.

Karma, Samsara, and Nirvana

Three important concepts in understanding Buddhism are "karma", "Samsara", and "Nirvana".

"Karma" refers to the law of cause and effect in a person's life, reaping what one has sown. Buddhists believe that every person must go through a process of birth and rebirth until he reaches the state of nirvana in which he breaks this cycle. According to the law of karma, "You are what you are and do what you do, as a result of what you were and did in a previous incarnation, which in turn was the inevitable outcome of what you were and did in still earlier incarnations."(4) For a Buddhist, what one will be in the next life depends on one's actions in this present life. Buddha believed, unlike Hinduism, that a person can break the rebirth cycle no matter what class he is born into.

The second key concept to understand is the law of "Samsara" or "Transmigration". This is one of the most perplexing and difficult concepts in Buddhism to understand. The law of Samsara holds that everything is in a birth and rebirth cycle. Buddha taught that people do not have

individual souls. The existence of an individual self or ego is an illusion. There is no eternal substance of a person, which goes through the rebirth cycle. What is it then that goes through the cycle if not the individual soul? What goes through the rebirth cycle is only a set of feelings, impressions, present moments, and the karma that is passed on. "In other words, as one process leads to another, ... so one's human personality in one existence is the direct cause of the type of individuality which appears in the next."(5) The new individual in the next life will not be exactly the same person, but there will be several similarities. Just how close in identity they will be, Buddha did not define.

The third key concept is "Nirvana". The term means "the blowing out" of existence. Nirvana is very different from the Christian concept of heaven. Nirvana is not a place like heaven but rather a state of being. What exactly it is, Buddha never really articulated.

Nirvana is an eternal state of being. It is the state in which the law of karma, and the rebirth cycle come to an end. It is the end of suffering, a state where there are no desires and the individual consciousness comes to an end. Although to our Western minds this may sound like annihilation, Buddhists would object to such a notion. Gautama never gave an exact description of Nirvana, but his closest reply was this. "There is disciples, a condition, where there is neither earth nor water, neither air nor light, neither limitless space, nor limitless time, neither any kind of being, neither ideation nor non-ideation, neither this world nor that world. There is neither arising nor passing-away, nor dying, neither cause nor effect, neither change nor standstill."(6) Although no Buddhist really understands the condition of Nirvana, it is their eternal hope.

God and Buddhism

It may have occurred to the reader that in our discussion thus far no mention has been made of God or an eternal deity. It is clear that Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, did not claim to be divine. He claimed to be the one to point the way to Nirvana, but it was up to each individual to find his own way there.

The concept of a personal God does not fit into the Buddhist system of religion. Today there are many sects of Buddhism. Many differ in their concept of the divine and of Buddha. In general, Buddhists are pantheistic in their view of God. Many view God as an impersonal force which is made up of all living things and holds the universe together.

Here are what some of the most prominent of scholars say of the Buddhist view of God. Dr. John Noss states, "there is no sovereign Person in the heavens holding all together in unity, there is only the ultimate impersonal unity of being itself, whose peace enfolds the individual self when it ceases to call itself 'I' and dissolves in the featureless purity of Nirvana, as a drop of spray is merged in its mother sea."(7)

Here is what the late Dr. Suzuki, one of the greatest teachers of Zen Buddhism, says about his concept of God: "If God after making the world puts Himself outside it, He is no longer God. If He separates Himself from the world or wants to separate Himself, He is not God. The world is not the world when it is separated from God. God must be in the world and the world in God."(8)

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

Professor Kraemer describes the Buddhist system as "a non-theistic ethical discipline, a system of self training, anthropocentric, stressing ethics and mind-culture to the exclusion of theology."(9)

Since Gautama's death, many sects have developed within Buddhism. Many of these sects differ in many fundamental ways and comparing them to one another is like comparing two separate religions. Many sects have developed their own unique concept of God. Some are pantheistic in their view of God. Others are atheistic. Still others have developed a polytheistic system of gods. Some have combined pantheism and polytheism. Several sects have elevated

Gautama (or Buddha) to the level of a savior or divine being although it is clear he never claimed to be a deity. Other sects have combined some of the doctrines of God from other religions with Buddhism.

Since Buddha never emphasized his concept of the divine, Buddhism is left with some life's deepest questions unanswered, questions such as the origin of the universe and the purpose of man's existence.

A Comparative Study of Christianity and Buddhism

It is quite clear that Christianity and Buddhism differ from one another in fundamental ways. Some sects of Buddhism have tried to synchronize the two together. However, the two are so different, they cannot both be right at the same time, nor can the two be blended together. Here is a comparison of these two religions.

Much of the Buddhist scriptures and sayings attributed to Gautama were written about four hundred years after his death. By the time they were written, Buddhism had split into many sects. What do we have then? Not even the best scholars are not sure of the accuracy of the Buddhist scriptures. In Christianity, however, we have an accurate historical account written by eyewitnesses to Jesus and the events surrounding His life.

The two differ in their concept of God. For Buddhists in general, the Absolute does not play a vital role in daily living. Gautama said little about his concept of God. Buddha denied the existence of a personal God but was monistic in his view of the Absolute as an impersonal force made up of all living things. The Bible teaches of a God who rules the universe, and cares for man in a personal way. Psalm 46:10 states, "Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted among the earth."

It is clear that Buddha never claimed to be deity. Although several sects have elevated him to the status of a god, he clearly claimed to be only the way-shower to Nirvana. Jesus, however, claimed to be God and not simply a way-shower but instead the only way to eternal life. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 1:1 also states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Buddhism offers neither assurance of forgiveness or eternal life. Buddhists hope to enter into the state of Nirvana, but there is no clear, objective proof or teaching on what occurs beyond the grave. Even Buddha himself was not certain what lay beyond death. He left no clear teaching on Nirvana or eternity. What he did leave are philosophical speculations. Today the body of Buddha lies in a grave in Kusinara, at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains. The facts of life after death still remain an unsolved mystery in Buddhism.

In Christianity we have One who amazed His audience because He taught eternal truths with authority. His authority came from the fact that He existed before creation, and He proved His claims by rising from the dead. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a proven fact of history and clearly demonstrates Christ's authority over sin and death. When witnessing to a Buddhist, ask him this: "Do you have tangible proof of what occurs after death?" All the Buddhist has is hope in a teaching Buddha was not sure of. As Christians, we have a certain hope in a risen Savior. There is no guessing what happens beyond the grave because Christ alone has conquered the grave.

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3. Ibid. p. 32.
4. Davis Taylor and Clark Offner, The World's Religions, Norman Anderson, ed. (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1975), p. 174.
5. John Noss, Man's Religions (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 182.
6. Taylor & Offner, p. 177.
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8. D. T. Suzuki, The Field of Zen (London: The Buddhist Society, 1969), p. 16.
9. Taylor & Offner, p. 177.

HINDUISM

Though Hinduism may seem far removed from our everyday experience, it's becoming increasingly important that we as Christians understand this mysterious religion from India. This is so, if for no other reason than that Hinduism claims 1/6 of the world's population, with over 750 million followers worldwide. But it's also important because its influence is being felt more and more in our own country.

Most of us have had at least some exposure to what has become known as the New Age movement. If so, we have probably realized that Hinduism is the wellspring of a good deal of New Age thinking. Most of us are probably also aware than an increasing number of Asian Indians are residing in the U.S. We may be surprised, in fact, to learn that there are approximately 200 Hindu temples or Hindu centers in the U.S. Many believe that due to its eclectic nature, Hinduism has the potential to serve as a major vehicle for uniting much of the non-Christian religious world.

The appeal of Hinduism to Western culture is not difficult to comprehend. For one, Hinduism is comfortable with evolutionary thinking. As modern science emphasizes our physical evolution, so Hinduism emphasizes our spiritual evolution. As much of modern psychology emphasizes the basic goodness and unlimited potential of human nature, so Hinduism emphasizes man's essential divinity. As modern philosophy emphasizes the relativity of all truth claims, so Hinduism tolerates many seemingly contradictory religious beliefs. As a religion that also emphasizes the primacy of the spiritual over material reality, Hinduism appeals to many that are disillusioned with strictly material pursuits.

The word "Hindu" is of Persian origin, and simply means "Indian." The word was probably first used in its modern sense by the Muslim invaders of India about A.D. 1200 to distinguish the religion of the Indians from their own. Though there are some core beliefs common to virtually all Hindus, there really is no "Hindu orthodoxy"--no hard and fast dogma that all Hindus must believe. It's actually a family of gradually developing beliefs and practices.

Hinduism has its roots in the interrelationship of two basic religious systems: that of the ancient civilization residing in the Indus River Valley from the third millennium B.C., and the religious beliefs brought to India by the Aryan people (possibly from the Baltic region) who began infiltrating the Indus Valley sometime after 2000 B.C.

The religion of the Aryans is described in the writings of "holy men" contained in the Vedas

(meaning "knowledge" or "wisdom"). The Vedas are four collections of writings composed between about 1500 and 500 B.C., which form the basis for Hindu beliefs, and which reveal a gradual development of religious ideas. The later sections of the Vedas are known as the Upanishads. These Vedic writings are considered inspired. Later Hindu writings, including the renowned Bhagavad Gita, are of lesser authority, but widely popular.

Hindu Beliefs about God and the World

An understanding of the Hindu beliefs about God is important even if we don't know any Hindus or people from India because we are all in contact with the New Age movement, and it draws its ideas about God from Hinduism. What then do Hindus believe about God?

The early portions of the Hindu scriptures known as the Vedas describe a number of deities who for the most part are personifications of natural phenomena, such as storms and fire. Prayers and sacrifices were offered to these gods. An extensive system of priestly rituals and sacrifices was eventually developed which served as means of obtaining the blessing of these gods.

The later portions of the Vedas, called the Upanishads, reflect a significant development in Hinduism's concept of the divine. Many of the Upanishads, instead of speaking of a multitude of gods, refer to an ultimate reality beyond our comprehension called Brahman. Though Brahman is impersonal in nature, it is sometimes referred to in personal terms by the name Isvara.

Along with this idea of a single divine reality, the Upanishads also teach that at the core of our being (referred to as "Atman") we are identical with this ultimate reality.

A popular saying in Hinduism is "Atman is Brahman!" In fact, all living things are Brahman at their innermost core! In addition, instead of ritual sacrifice, intuitive knowledge of the oneness of all things came to be endorsed as the way of contact with divine reality. Also found in the Upanishads is the teaching that the material world (including our conscious personalities) is less than fully real. The word "maya" is used to designate the power by which God, or ultimate reality, brought this less than real world into existence.

Though this monistic or pantheistic philosophy provided a comprehensive intellectual understanding of the divine reality for Hindus, it lacked a strong appeal to the heart. As a result, just before the dawn of the Christian era, a great transformation occurred in Hinduism, spurred particularly by the writing of the Bhagavad Gita, the "New Testament" of Hinduism. The Gita recounts the exploits of the god Krishna and emphasizes the importance of personal devotion to a god as the essence of true religion, rather than intuitive knowledge of the oneness of all things.

From this time forward, these two major streams of Hindu thought and practice grew and developed--the more intellectual and philosophical stream that emphasized the oneness of all things, and the stream that emphasized personal devotion to a god. The latter stream has predominated among the common people of India to this present day. Chief among the gods so venerated are Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer). In India there are many temples devoted to Shiva (or to one of his "wives," such as Kali), or to Vishnu (or to one of his ten incarnations known as avatars). All in all, it is often stated that Hinduism claims 330 million gods and goddesses!

One might wonder how such a multitude of beliefs about the divine could possibly co-exist in one religion. But they do. There is, however, a widespread recognition that none of the personal gods of Hinduism is in any way exclusive or unique. They are all simply different ways of conceiving of the one reality behind all things Brahman.

Foundational Hindu Beliefs

Next we must turn our attention to two core beliefs of Hindus: (a) what they believe about the source of evil and suffering and (b) what they believe about life after death.

The first of these core beliefs is the doctrine of karma. The word karma means "action." But the religious concept has more to do with the results or consequences of actions. The doctrine of

karma states that every thought and action results in certain consequences born by the actor or thinker. If a person lies or steals, he will be wronged in some way in the future. Hindus believe that all suffering is due to one's own past actions, in this or in a previous life. Some believe that karma implies strict determinism or fatalism (that one must simply resign himself to living out his karma). Most, however, believe that though our present is determined by our past, nonetheless we can influence our future by conducting ourselves in a proper manner in the present.

Some have equated the doctrine of karma with the statement in Galatians 6:7 that "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." It is certainly a biblical teaching that our actions have consequences--for good or ill. But this is not the same as believing that every experience in life is a consequence of one's own past actions. This is definitely not a biblical idea. The second core belief of Hinduism is the doctrine of reincarnation, or transmigration of souls, called "samsara." Since it is impossible that all of one's karma be experienced in one lifetime, the Hindu scriptures state that after death individual souls are "reborn" in this world, in another body--human or otherwise. The nature of one's rebirth is determined by the karma resulting from past actions.

Closely associated with the doctrine of reincarnation is that of "ahimsa" or non-injury to living things. This is the core moral value of Hinduism, the protection of all life (which is ultimately divine), and is the main reason why some Hindus are vegetarian.

Also associated with reincarnation is the "caste system." According to Hindu teaching, there are four basic castes or social classes (and thousands of sub-groups within the castes). Each has its own rules and obligations pertaining to nearly every facet of life. At the top are the Brahmins or priests. Second in rank are the Kshatriyas or warriors and rulers. Third are the Vaisyas or merchants and farmers. Below these are the Shudras or laboring class. Salvation is possible only for the top three castes, who are called the "twice born." Outside the caste system are the untouchables or outcastes. Though outlawed in India in the late 1940s, many in the countryside are still considered outcastes.

One's caste is determined at birth by his or her own personal karma. Attempts, therefore, to bring about social change or to improve one's social position would appear to run contrary to the law of karma and the caste system.

It's little wonder that the chief aim of the Hindu is to experience release or liberation from this cycle of death and rebirth caused by karma. Hindus call this liberation "moksha."

Hindu Ways of Salvation

Why do New Agers practice yoga? Why are they so devoted to meditation? It may come as some surprise that these practices are central to the Hindu search for salvation!

We noted earlier that the chief aim in Hinduism is to gain release from the cycle of reincarnation caused by karma--the consequences of past actions, in this or in previous lives! Now we want to look at the primary ways in which followers of Hinduism seek to achieve this salvation--liberation from earthly existence.

Before discussing the three primary ways of salvation in Hinduism, we must mention the four goals of life permissible to Hindus. Hinduism recognizes that in the course of many lifetimes people may legitimately give themselves to any of these goals. The first is the goal of pleasure or enjoyment, particularly through love and sexual desire. This is called "kama." The second legitimate aim in life is for wealth and success. This is called "artha." The third aim in life is moral duty or "dharma." One who gives himself to dharma renounces personal pleasure and power, to seek the common good. The final aim in life, however, is "moksha"--liberation from the cycle of lives in this material world, and entrance into Nirvana.

Hindus recognize three possible paths to moksha, or salvation. The first is the way of works or "karma yoga." This is a very popular way of salvation and lays emphasis on the idea that liberation may be obtained by fulfilling one's familial and social duties thereby overcoming the weight of bad karma one has accrued. The Code of Manu lists many of these rules. Most important among them are certain rituals conducted at various stages of life.

The second way of salvation is the way of knowledge or "jnana yoga." The basic premise of the way of knowledge is that the cause of our bondage to the cycle of rebirths in this world is ignorance or "avidya." According to the predominant view among those committed to this way, our ignorance consists of the mistaken belief that we are individual selves and not one with the ultimate divine reality called Brahman. It is this ignorance that gives rise to our bad actions which result in bad karma. Salvation is achieved through attaining a state of consciousness in which we realize our identity with Brahman. This is achieved through deep meditation, often as a part of the discipline of yoga.

The third and final way of salvation is the way of devotion or "bhakti yoga." This is the way most favored by the common people of India; it satisfies the longing for a more emotional and personal approach to religion. It is self-surrender to one of the many personal gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Such devotion is expressed through acts of worship "puja" at the temple, in the home, through participation in the many festivals in honor of such gods, and through pilgrimages to one of the numerous holy sites in India. In the way of devotion, the focus is one obtaining the mercy and help of a god in finding release from the cycle of reincarnation. Some Hindus conceive of ultimate salvation as absorption into the one divine reality, with all loss of individual existence. Others conceive of it as heavenly existence in adoration of the personal God.

A Christian Response to Hinduism

The editor of the periodical *Hinduism Today* said not long ago that a "small army of yoga missionaries" has been trained to "set upon the Western world." And in his own words, "They may not call themselves Hindu, but Hindus know where yoga came from and where it goes."

What should be the appropriate Christian perspective on this religion of the East that is making such an impact in the West? At the outset we must say that as Christians we concur with Hindus on a couple of points. Hindus are correct in their recognition that all is not right with the world and with human existence in it. They are correct as well in suggesting that the ultimate remedy to the human dilemma is spiritual in nature. Beyond these two points, however, there's little common ground between Hinduism and Christianity. Let's note just a few of the more important areas of divergence.

First, Hinduism lacks any understanding that God created this world for a good purpose. It is common for Hindus to speak of God bringing the universe into existence simply as a "playful" exercise of His power. Also lacking is a conception of God as infinitely holy and righteous and as the One to whom we as His creatures are accountable for the way we conduct our lives.

The second major area of contrast between Hinduism and Christianity is the conception of human nature and of the source of our estrangement from God. According to Hindu teaching, man is divine at the core of his being. He is one with God! The problem is that man is ignorant of this fact. He is deceived by his focus on this temporal and material world, and this ignorance gives rise to acts that result in bad karma and traps us in the cycle of reincarnation.

According to the biblical teaching, however, the source of our alienation from God (and ultimately of all that is imperfect in this world), is not ignorance of our divinity, but our sinful rebellion against God and His purpose for our lives.

This leads to the third and final point of contrast--the way of salvation. According to most Hindu teaching, salvation from the cycle of reincarnation is achieved by our own efforts--whether through good works, meditation, or devotion to a deity. According to the Bible, however, our spiritual need is for deliverance from God's judgment on our sin and for restoration to a life under His direction and care. This salvation can be provided only by God's gracious and undeserved action in our behalf.

It is true that in certain Hindu groups there is a similar emphasis on God's grace (probably as a result of past Christian influence). But even here, there is a major distinction. The Hindu teaching about grace sees no need for atonement for sin, but simply offers forgiveness without any satisfaction of the judgment on sin required by a holy God. In contrast, the Christian gospel

is this: God the Son became a man, died a sacrificial death on the cross, making real forgiveness of real sins against the real God possible to those who place their trust and obedience in Christ.

The Religion of Islam

"Islam" means "submission". A follower of the religion of Islam is called a "muslim" which means "one who is in submission to the divine will."

Islam is the youngest of the 5 major religions of the world. According to the best estimates, there are 800,000,000 to 1 billion Muslims worldwide. At present, over 20 million Muslims reside in Europe. There are now over 2000 mosques in England! The former Soviet Union, the 4th largest Muslim nation in the world, has 53 million adherents representing 1/5 of the total population. After ethnic Russians, Muslims are the largest population group but are growing 4 times as fast, and may out-number them in less than 20 years. Currently, there are 48 nations where adherents of Islam are in the majority.

The current resurgence of Islam began with the oil cartel following the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Millions of dollars from enormous foundations are being spend to fuel the worldwide expansion of Islam. There are now more adherents of Islam in the U.S. than Episcopalians!

The greatest threat to world peace and stability in the next decade or two, may be the result of the religion of Islam. Almost every controversy in the Middle East can be traced to this religion, either through intra-party squabbles, or Islam verses non-Islam.

Historical Background

The religion was founded by Muhammad who was born in 570 A.D. in a small village (Mecca) along a caravan route in what is today known as Saudi Arabia. The young Muhammad, an orphan at an early age, had an inquiring mind and an intense interest in religion. The prevailing religion at this time in Arabia was one of polytheism and animism. He inquired of both Judaism and Christianity. The Christianity that he came into contact was of a very heretical sort. Christianity at this time was losing its vitality and was about to enter the Dark Ages.

At about 25 years of age Muhammad married a wealthy widow 15 years his senior. Due to the ensuing economic security, Muhammad turned the more to religious contemplation often retiring to caves in the wilderness for long periods of time. He practiced fasting and was prone to dreams. He had a profound dissatisfaction with the polytheism and superstition of his day. He received his first of many "revelations" at 40 years of age, and thought at first he was possessed of a demon. Later he claims he was visited by the angel Gabriel who informed him to warn the people. This marked the beginning of his prophetic office.

The response in Mecca to his claims was small and limited mainly to family members. Soon he and his followers (around 200) were forced to flee. This flight to Medina occurred in 622 A.D. and is known as "The Hegira". In Medina, Muhammad became a leader and theocratic head of the town. Muslims reckon time from the Hegira. 622 A.D. = the year 1 A.H.

In less than a 100 years Islam spread from the Atlantic Ocean across central Asia deep into India. This empire lasted over a 1000 years. Only a handful of countries have ever reversed themselves after becoming an Islamic nation in 14 centuries of history!

The Belief System of Islam

Islam is a religion of rigid monotheism and an all-encompassing law. It is a belief system, i.e., a world and life view. Everything is seen from an Islamic perspective. Islam's five fundamental articles of faith:

1. *There is no God but God.* "Allah" is the Arabic word for "God". This god is the sovereign Lord of the universe. Everything that occurs is according to his will. He is also the source of

both good and evil. The Koran assigns 99 names to Allah. The 100th name is secret and is known only to the camel!

2. God gave prophets (the Koran mentions 28) to every age from Adam to Muhammad. Muhammad, the last and greatest prophet, was sinless as were all the other prophets. Jesus was the prophet of the previous age. They affirm that Jesus was born of a virgin and performed many miracles, but they vehemently deny that he was God, was crucified, or rose from the dead.
3. Islam believes that each age was given a book through its prophet, but all have been lost except portions of the Old Testament and the Gospel of Jesus, which was corrupted by Christians. The Koran ("Quran") was given to Muhammad and supercedes all other revelations. The Koran is divided into 114 Suras (chapters) and was given directly to Muhammad. To the Muslim, every word of the Koran is the Word of God and is of an eternal nature. In other words, it existed in heaven prior to being dictated by the angel Gabriel. The Koran governs every area of the life of a Muslim, from how to prevent crime to the proper use of a toothpick! It is often the only constitution of some Muslim countries.
4. There are good and bad angels. The chief good angel is Gabriel. The chief fallen angel is Shaitan (Satan).
5. There will be a day of judgement in which all the dead will be resurrected. Allah will be the judge and each person will be sent either to heaven, a place of sensual pleasure, or hell, a place of torment. Hell is for those who opposed Allah and his prophet, Muhammad. Salvation is attained by the quality of a person's obedience to the law as determined by Allah. Muhammad is seen as a mediator who helps a person attain salvation. The bridge to paradise is likened to a razor-sharp sword; Muhammad awaits to assist in crossing.

Each Muslim has Five Pillars of Faith or obligatory duties:

6. Reciting the creed. "There is no God but Allah". The word "quran" in Arabic means "to recite".
7. Pray five times a day facing Mecca.
8. Tithe to the poor and for the furtherance of Islam. It varies from 2 to 10 per cent.
9. Fast for one month each year during the 9th month, the lunar month of Ramadan. This month of fasting is during the day only. Feasting takes place after sundown.
10. Make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during a lifetime. A male who makes a pilgrimage to Mecca is called a "Haji" a title of honor similar to the English "Sir". The concept of "Jihad" ("holy war") is sometimes referred to as a 6th pillar. Jihad is also a religious duty of all adult males who must commit to any summons of war against infidels. Any who die in such a war are assured paradise. Today there is controversy as to who in the Arab world can legally declare a Jihad. In the past, this has been a most successful form of "evangelism". Polytheistic cultures have been given the option of submission or death. Historically, Jews and Christians, since they were considered "people of the Book" were given a choice of submission or paying tribute (taxes).

Other Muslim beliefs

The unforgivable sin to a Muslim is to attribute deity to anything other than God himself. To claim that Jesus is God or the Son of God is blasphemy to a Muslim. They believe that God is

unbegotten and begets not. Most Muslims believe Jesus predicted the coming of Muhammad when He said that He would send "another Comforter" in John 14:16. Muslims even refer to Muhammad as the "Holy Spirit." Muslims are very anti-Trinitarian. The Koran teaches that Christians believe in a Trinity of God, the Father, Jesus, the Son, and Mary the Mother! Most Muslims believe Judas died on the cross, not Jesus. God caused Jesus to be ascended into heaven. Most Muslims do not separate church and state, i.e. politics and religion. There is no such thing as secular and sacred. This is a cause of some of their intra-mural conflicts. Occasionally a ruler attempts to secularize the state. For this Sadat was assassinated. Turkey gets away with it, but it is resented in much of the Muslim world. The Koran allows a man to have up to four wives if he believes he can treat them equally!

The Koran teaches that if a Muslim soldier kills another Muslim soldier in an unjust war he will go to hell! In the recent war, many Iraqi soldiers did not believe it was just war, hence they deserted in large numbers (and probably for other reasons as well!). Muslim soldiers can declare a victory in battle even though they were stomped by the enemy, because to a Muslim, win or lose, it is the will of Allah. So if you lose, you win, because it is the will of Allah. The Koran teaches that Muslims should take up arms against infidels. The following quote from the Koran should give insight into Saddam's behavior:

"When ye encounter unbelievers, strike off their heads until ye have made a great slaughter among them, and bind them in bonds; and either give them free demission afterwards or exact a ransom... Verily if God please he could take vengeance on them, without your assistance, but he commandeth you to fight his battles... And to those who fight in defense of God's true religion, God... will lead them into paradise..."

<p>The Book of Mormon and the Bible Gilbert W. Holt</p>
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Book of Mormon Teaches

He did not confound the language of Jared (Ether 1:35)

And behold, He shall be born to Mary at Jerusalem (Alma 7:10)

There was darkness for a space of three days following the crucifixion of Christ (Helaman 14:20)

For behold, blood cometh from every pore (Mosiah 3:7)

That believers were called Christians in 73 B.C. (Alma 46:14-15)

The church of Christ was built in 73 B.C. (Mosiah 18:17)

Salvation was in and through the blood of Christ in 124 B.C. (Mosiah 3:18)

The Nephites received the Holy Spirit in 29 B.C. before Christ was born (Helaman 5:45)

Adam and Eve could have borne no children if they had not sinned (Nephi 2:22-23)

The Bible Teaches

The Lord did there confound the language

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness until the ninth hour (Matt. 27:45).

And his sweat was as it were great drops of blood

Disciples were called Christians first in Antioch

Upon this rock, I will build my church (Matt. 16:18)

And without the shedding of blood there is no remission

The Holy Spirit was not given until Pentecost

and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28)

That Christ was on the North American continent after His ascension, showing His body, and ministering (3 Nephi 10:18-19)

That He will remain in heaven at God's right hand, trampling under His feet the enemies the footstool of His feet" (Acts 2:33)

Mormons and Archaeology

Mormon scholars can be frustrated and embarrassed understandably when they realize that after all the years of research by Mormons and other archaeologists:

- No city cited in the Book of Mormon has been located.
- No names cited in the *Book of Mormon* have been found in the New World.
- No genuine Hebrew inscriptions have been found in America.
- No genuine Egyptian inscriptions have been found in America. Nor has anything similar to Egyptian, which could correspond to Joseph Smith's "reformed Egyptian."
- No ancient inscriptions of any kind have been discovered in America, which indicate the ancient inhabitants had Hebrew or Christian beliefs.
- No *Mormon* persons, nations, or places have been found.
- No artifact of any kind, which demonstrates the *Book of Mormon* is true, has been found.
- Rather than finding supportive evidence, Mormon scholars have been forced to retreat from traditional interpretations of *Book of Mormon* statements. (Hal Houghey, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon*, p. 12.)



Information from the

MORMON ARCHAEOLOGY

National Museum of Natural History

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION WASHINGTON, D.C. 20560

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1. The Smithsonian Institution has never used the Book of Mormon in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archeologists see no direct connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book.
2. The physical type of the American Indian is basically Mongoloid, being most closely related to that of the peoples of eastern, central, and northeastern Asia. Archeological evidence indicates that the ancestors of the present Indians came into the New World--probably over a land bridge known to have existed in the Bering Strait region during the last Ice Age--in a continuing series of small migrations beginning from about 25,000 to 30,000 years ago.
3. Present evidence indicates that the first people to reach this continent from the East were the Norsemen who briefly visited the northeastern part of North America around A.D. 1000 and then settled in Greenland. There is nothing to show that they reached Mexico or Central America.
4. One of the main lines of evidence supporting the scientific finding that contacts with Old World civilizations, if indeed they occurred at all, were of very little significance for the development of American Indian civilizations, is the fact that none of the principal Old World domesticated food plants or animals (except the dog) occurred in the New World in pre-Columbian times. American Indians had no wheat, barley, oats, millet, rice, cattle, pigs, chickens, horses, donkeys, camels before 1492. (Camels and horses were in the Americas, along with the bison, mammoth, and mastodon, but all these animals became extinct around 10,000 B.C. at the time when the early big game hunters spread across the Americas.)
5. Iron, steel, glass, and silk were not used in the New World before 1492 (except for occasional use of unsmelted meteoric iron). Native copper was worked in various locations in pre-Columbian times, but true metallurgy was limited to southern Mexico and the Andean region, where its occurrence in late prehistoric times involved gold, silver, copper, and their alloys, but not iron.
6. There is a possibility that the spread of cultural traits across the Pacific to Mesoamerica and the northwestern coast of South America began several hundred years before the Christian era. However, any such inter-hemispheric contacts appear to have been the results of accidental voyages originating in eastern and southern Asia. It is by no means certain that even such contacts occurred; certainly there were no contacts with the ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, or other peoples of Western Asian and the Near East.
7. No reputable Egyptologist or other specialist on Old World archeology, and no expert on New World prehistory, has discovered or confirmed any relationship between archeological remains in Mexico and archeological remains in Egypt.
8. Reports of findings of ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, and other Old World writings in the New World in pre-Columbian contexts have frequently appeared in newspapers, magazines, and sensational books. None of these claims has stood up to examination by reputable scholars. No inscriptions using Old World forms of writing have been shown to have occurred in any part of the Americas before 1492 except for a few Norse rune stones which have been found in Greenland.

