

Do All Religions Lead to God?

A popular modern philosophy in the western world is that all religions lead to God. Gone are the days when Christianity was looked upon as the only religion for the West. The idea itself stems from eastern thinking which tolerates a multitude of beliefs and many different gods.

The idea is attractive because it is non-confrontational. Each of us is free to worship our own god in our own way provided that we keep our beliefs largely to ourselves. This being the case, there should be no need for religious persecution, intolerance of other cultures, or wars in the name of some god.

But is this view correct? If it is not true, then it cannot really lead to the hoped for peace and tolerance. Nothing good can come from a lie no matter how well intended it is or how many people believe it.

This paper presents the arguments to show that it is logically and practically impossible for all religions to lead to the one true God. Also provided is a comparison of the main religions which shows that the Christian faith is the most rational and reasonable view of God and the world we live in.

Are All Religions Fundamentally the Same?

The view that all religions lead to the same God, albeit by different paths, assumes that they are all fundamentally the same and only superficially different. Such a view is attractive because it is inoffensive. However, it is also clearly wrong. In practice, the main religions are in complete opposition to one another in regard to their underlying principles.

All religions have their roots in one of two fundamental philosophies: pantheism or theism. Thus, God is either identical with the universe (pantheism) or he is independent and outside of the universe (theism). The goal of the eastern religions is to attain oneness with the cosmos, while the goal of the theistic religions is to achieve eternal fellowship with the God who created the cosmos. In the words of H. P. Owen, "... divine reality cannot be both personal and impersonal ... our final bliss cannot consist both in the attainment of Nirvana and in eternal fellowship with a personal God of love."

*It is not enough to worship God; we must worship the God who really is.
Otherwise we are not really worshipping God at all – Brian Maiden.*

The pluralistic view is also illogical. It requires that everyone tolerate everyone else's views even when they are contradictory. Yet truth, by definition, is very narrow, and by its very essence is intolerant of error. The very purpose of religion is to find truth. Therefore, to accept falsehood for the sake of toleration is irreligious and self-defeating. Worshipping some god does not mean that we are worshipping the true God. We must be certain that what we believe is true and have good evidence to support our beliefs.

Jesus compared the way of truth to a small gate and a narrow road, while the way of deception is wide and easy, but ultimately hopeless:

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

Truth is the only reasonable basis for religion. Love, sincerity, honesty and faith, by themselves, will not lead to righteousness. Hitler sincerely believed in what he was doing, and suicide-bombers are willing to die for their cause. But if our beliefs are not founded on truth, they will ultimately prove worthless.

Unless a religion squares with the facts of history and human experience, and unless it agrees with the truth of God which is the underlying reality of all things,

that religion, however sincere it's followers may be, is not good enough – Dr. Vernon Ground.

It is not arrogant and unkind to tell the truth in a loving manner. In reality, those who condone a false religion as true are being cruel to those who follow a mistaken path. They are, ironically, denying true love and compassion to those who are in trouble.

It is not that Christians are narrow-minded or uncharitable about other faiths. But if Jesus is indeed, as the resurrection asserts, God himself come to our rescue, then to reject him, or even to neglect him, is ultimate folly – Michael Green.

All religions differ in their view of who and what God is. They cannot all be right. If all religions contradict one another, there are only two logical choices: either they are all false, or there is only one true religion. If there is one true God, then there must be one true way to reach him. If God has communicated to man in Scripture as to how we should please him, then to choose other ways is to deny God's truth and ignore his revelation. Honesty should move us to reflect, in the light of our sin and rebellion, not why there is only one way to God, but why there should be a way at all!

Is Hinduism a Viable Belief System?

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world and dates back to about 3000 BC. It involves a variety of beliefs and practices, and it has been rightly said that Hinduism is more a culture than a creed. The word *Hindu* is Persian for Indian. The Hindu scholar K. M. Sen asserts, "The religious beliefs of different schools of Hindu thought vary and their religious practices also differ ... indeed Hinduism is a great storehouse of all kinds of religious experiments."

In one sense Hinduism is the mother of all Eastern thinking. Popular Hinduism has as many as 330 million gods. In the West the question is, "Does God exist?" but in the East the question is, "Which god to worship?"

Central to Hinduism is the concept of Brahman – the impersonal, the ultimate reality, the supreme soul of the universe which is beyond all human description. Only Brahman is real, all else is illusion:

Brahman alone is real, the phenomenal world is unreal, or mere illusion – Shankara.

Another principle concept of Hinduism is reincarnation. For the Hindu life is an endless cycle of birth and rebirth until one achieves ultimate release (Moksha). Moksha is achieved by attaining oneness with the cosmos (Nirvana) and effectively amounts to annihilation.

Hinduism is fundamentally fatalistic. The iron law of Karma, which fixes future and present status, leads to merciless cruelty. To the Hindu the fate of the poor and the sick is determined by their Karma which is the result of their sins in a previous life. Thus, it is pointless to help such people. Indeed, it is better that they be allowed to suffer in this current life so that their lot may be improved in the next incarnation.

In Hinduism God is not separate from man, God is man. God is the one reality and man has no individual existence outside the reality of God. This raises a number of logical difficulties. The pantheist may suggest that God is beyond reason and continue to affirm the view, but such a leap of faith provides no comfort or hope to a seeking mind. If everything is God, then in reality nothing is God.

Also, if everything is God, then God is both good and evil. If this is true, then there is no difference between loving or killing someone. Both Hitler and Mother Teresa would be equally God, and equally good. This is clearly nonsense.

Hinduism stands poles apart from the faith of the Hebrew prophets with their clear-cut certainty of truth and falsehood, and with their inspired intolerance of false belief or make-believe – Christopher E. Storrs.

The Hindu belief system is totally inadequate. To tell a man earnestly seeking God that he is God, is like telling a hungry man that he is food! The Hindu God is impersonal. He cannot love man, and man cannot be saved. In effect, Hinduism is man's attempt to save himself using mind games. The reality is that only the God who made man can offer a solution to man's problems.

Does Buddhism Answer the Problem of Life?

Buddhism was founded in India by Siddhartha Gautama (also called Sakyamuni) about 500 BC. The word *budda* means "wise" and is a title applied to Gautama, but also generally to anyone of a series of Buddhist teachers. Buddhism is essentially a Hindu heresy. Buddha developed his teachings in the context of Hinduism, seeking to provide a better solution to the problem of human suffering.

According to Buddhism, God is beyond all description. He cannot be known and any attempt to find him is a useless waste of energy. In this sense, Buddhism is similar to agnosticism.¹ God, therefore, does not really feature in the doctrine. According to Ninian Smart, a leading scholar in comparative religion, Buddhism is "Mysticism without God."

In Buddhism, there is no such thing as belief in a Supreme Being, a creator of the universe, the reality of an immortal soul, a personal Savior – Kenneth W. Morgan.

Buddha taught the "Four Noble Truths" and the "Eight-Fold Path" to Nirvana. These amount to an acknowledgment of the existence of suffering, and a human plan to avoid it and to reach Nirvana as soon as possible. He never spoke about God or ways to approach him. In this sense, Buddhism is a philosophy of life rather than a philosophy of God.

Buddha taught that to exist is to suffer, and the answer to suffering is to achieve Nirvana through successive reincarnation. Though Buddha was profoundly moved by human suffering, he did nothing to alleviate it. Buddhism leaves man to solve his own problems by removing himself from the reality of life and suffering. The Buddhist is completely self-centred and self-reliant; he is on his own.

Man is born alone, lives alone and dies alone, and it is he alone who can blaze the way which leads to Nirvana – Buddha.

Buddhism is profoundly inadequate. Man cannot solve his own problem for there is no human solution to the human problem. However good the Eight-Fold Path, no human self-improvement projects are good enough to make a person perfect before a holy God.

There is a world of difference between the passive and serene figure of Buddha and the active, suffering figure of Christ – George Carey.

Buddha gave his doctrine; Christ gave his life – Alfred North Whitehead.

Does Islam Offer a Reliable Revelation?

Islam is the second largest, and arguably the fastest growing, religion in the world. An adherent of Islam is called a Muslim. The word *Islam* did not originally mean "submission" as many people have supposed. Instead, it described a warrior-like quality of heroism, defiance and bravery in battle. The Middle-East scholar, Dr. M. Bravmann, in *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam*, wrote:

¹ Agnosticism is the belief that we can know nothing of things beyond material phenomena; a First Cause and an unseen world are things unknown and apparently unknowable.

[Islam was originally] a secular concept, denoting a sublime virtue in the eyes of the primitive Arab; defiance of death, heroism; to die in battle – Dr. M. Bravmann.

Islam was founded by Muhammad² in the early part of the seventh century, and the sayings of Muhammad are compiled in the Muslims' sacred book called the Quran³. The word *Quran* means "sacred readings" and every devote Muslim believes that the Quran is the verbatim word of Allah, the Islamic equivalent of God.⁴ The Quran must not be subjected to any form of question or criticism. Beside the Quran the Muslim believes the Hadith and Sunna. These are accepted with respect but they are not equal to the Quran.

The central teachings of Islam are the "Five Pillars":

1. Confession that, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet."
2. Praying five times daily facing Mecca.
3. Giving alms to the poor.
4. Fasting during the month of Ramadan.
5. One pilgrimage to Mecca during a lifetime, if possible.

Islam is essentially a Hebrew-Christian heresy. Muhammad taught an apostolic succession of prophets who came with parts of Allah's revelation – Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ – but he was the final prophet (the Seal of Prophecy) to confirm and seal all previous revelation before the day of judgment. He admitted that Christ was sinless, born of a virgin, and performed miracles, and was the greatest prophet before his own appearance. But he rejected the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ.

Muhammed would not even grant that the crucifixion was historical; for if [Allah] had thus failed one faithful prophet, might he not fail his final prophet? – Christopher E. Storrs.

Muhammad initially tried to encourage Christians and Jews to follow him, but was rejected by both. He first commanded his followers to pray like Daniel, the Old Testament prophet, facing Jerusalem. But when the Jews and the Christians did not accept his message, he directed them to face Mecca.

Muhammad never claimed to be divine, "I am no more than all men; I am only human", nor performed any miracles to verify his claims. He admitted that he was a sinner and even expressed that he needed help by asking his followers to pray for him.

Muhammad indeed confessed to be a human prophet, sinful, and on occasions fallible; but his revelations were infallible – Christopher E. Storrs.

During Mohammed's ten years in Medina, he planned 65 military campaigns and raids, and he personally led 27 of them – Lowell Lundstrom.

In Islam, Allah is so far removed from man that he is practically unknowable. He is believed to be Almighty, but the attributes of love and holiness are hardly mentioned. There is no provision for sin, and Allah has done nothing for the salvation of man that has cost him anything. There is no assurance of eternal life, and heaven is a place of sensual pleasures.

Islam has all the appearance of a man-made religion. It offers no solution to the problems of life, but instead makes life all the more difficult for everyone in the world. Its founder admitted to being sinful, and provided no proof to support his claims. Yet he expected his followers to believe his teachings and obey his commands, many of which promote violence

² Also spelt Muhammed, Mohammed and Mohammad.

³ Also spelt Qur'an, Coran, Koran, Qo'ran and Qu'ron.

⁴ It is shown in a more detailed discussion on Islam that Allah is not equivalent to God, and these titles have been purposefully kept separate in these papers.

and hatred. There is nothing about Islam to recommend it, and no reasonable basis for accepting it as God's truth.

The Uniqueness of Christianity

Christianity is unique. It differs from all other religions in its basic teaching regarding who God is, what man is, how God redeems man, and what sin is. All other religions teach salvation by good works, but Christianity offers salvation by grace alone through faith. In other religions man is constantly seeking God, but in Christianity God is in search of man.

There are many religions in the world, but only one Christianity, for only Christianity has a God who gave himself for mankind. World religions attempt to reach up to God; Christianity is God reaching down to man – Billy Graham.

In all other world religions man offers his own solutions to his own problems, but in Christianity we have God's answer to man's problems. In Christ, the infinite has become finite, the abstract concrete, the invisible visible; God became man. Christianity answers the questions of history, offers a solution to the problem of sin, removes the burden of guilt, releases us from the fear of death, changes our despair into hope, and provides us with the power to live a victorious life with God.

The supreme gift we bring to others, not arrogantly nor with pride, is that in Jesus our Lord we find the final and complete answer to man's needs – George Carey.

For the human sickness there is one specific remedy, and this is it. There is no other – Stephen Neill.

Christianity is unique because Jesus Christ is different from all the leaders of the world. Christ was a man, but also the Son of God who came into the world to be its Saviour.⁵ He was tempted in every way that we are, yet he was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). It is from this position of righteousness that he willingly gave up his life so that we might have the opportunity to be redeemed from our own sins.

He became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Philippians 2:8-9).

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father (John 10:17-18).

From the time that Christ commenced his ministry to now, the Christian faith has been exposed to criticism and attack, but it has never been shown to be false. Consider the following hallmarks of the Christian faith:

Reliable Revelation

The Christian revelation is contained in the Bible, the authenticity of which have been verified by considerable historical and archaeological evidence.⁶

The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no-one dreams of questioning – Prof. F. F. Bruce.

⁵ See also *Was Jesus Christ God?* in this series.

⁶ See also *Is the Bible the Word of God?* in this series.

Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established – Sir Frederic Kenyon.

Through the wealth of data uncovered by historical and archaeological research, we are able to measure the Bible's historical accuracy. In every case where its claims can be thus tested, the Bible proves to be accurate and reliable – Jack Cottrell.

The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries – Sir Frederic G. Kenyon.

The Reality of the Resurrection

There is one event in the life of Christ that separates him from every other person who has ever lived – the resurrection.

There are but two essential requirements: Has any one cheated death and proved it? Is it available to me? Here is the complete record:

Confucius' tomb – occupied

Buddha's tomb – occupied

Muhammad's tomb – occupied

Jesus' tomb – empty

Argue as you will ... there is no point in following a loser – G. B. Hardy.

The fact that all the founders of the world's religions could not conquer their own death is good evidence that they do not represent the truth. Jesus Christ demonstrated that he is the truth by dying and rising from the grave (cf. Matthew 12:38-42). By defeating death, man's greatest enemy, Christ proved that he is the ultimate authority on truth, and that he alone has the right to speak on all the great questions of life, God and death. No theory has ever been produced which could logically refute the reality of the resurrection while adequately considering all the available evidence.

Indeed taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no single historical incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ – Bishop Westcott.

A Personal Relationship With God

The Christian faith is unique in this most special way – Christians have a personal relationship with God. Through Christ, fallen man is able to be restored, by faith, into right relationship with a holy God – sins are forgiven, guilt is removed, the fear of death is destroyed, our faith is founded on reality, our search for truth is satisfied, our identity and worth is confirmed, and our lives are now based on a new hope. Every other religion tells us what we need to do, but Christ says, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves.

I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord (Psalm 40:1-3).

Conclusions

The world's religions differ markedly in their views of God and truth. They cannot all be right. We can choose to ignore the contradictions between religions or consider them as non-essentials. But in doing this, we achieve a false peace at the expense of truth (cf. John 14:27).

The eastern religions embrace many beliefs and a multitude of gods, but the pantheistic view of God is illogical and wholly inadequate for solving the problems of life. The Islamic faith also fails to offer any hope to its followers. Only the Christian faith provides a solution to the problem of sin and evil in the world, and any real hope of salvation.

All other religions teach man's ideas for reaching an impersonal God, while Christianity shows how God has reached out to everyone in love. The fundamental difference between Christianity and all other religions is in the quality of its founder. Jesus Christ spoke words unmatched by any other leader before or since. He performed miracles to support his astonishing claim to be the Son of God, and finally proved the truthfulness of his teachings by rising from the dead.

Only the Christian religion provides hope for people in a world full of trouble, and a practical means by which we can be saved. It is only through faith in Christ that we can attain peace with God in this life and in the next.

I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).

If you would like to be among those who are being saved, this is what you should do:

- ❖ **Pray to Jesus Christ.** "The Lord is near to all who call on him ... he hears their cry and saves them" (Psalm 145:18-19).
- ❖ **Read the Bible.** You should start by reading the whole of the New Testament, asking Jesus to help you to understand what you are reading.
- ❖ **Join a church.** It is vital that you find a church which holds the Bible to be the final authority in all matters of faith and practice for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

List of Papers in This Series

Does God Exist?

Was Jesus Christ God?

Did Jesus Christ Rise from the Dead?

Is the Bible the Word of God?

If There is a God, Why is There Evil?

Do All Religions Lead to God?

Is Atheism Rational?

Acknowledgments

The following sources were used in the preparation of this paper:

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Bible quotations are from the New International Version, 1984.