

CHRISTIANITY

VS.

WORLD RELIGIONS

MIKE MAZZALONGO

bibleTalk^{TV}

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14998 E. Reno

Choctaw, OK 73020

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1.

Introduction: Unorganized Religions

For most of history, the majority of the world's population has not known God and has followed other gods. Jeremiah and the other prophets lamented the fact that even God's own people were so often drawn away to worship pagan gods (Jeremiah 2:20). In this day and age, 60 percent of the world's population have not heard the good news of Jesus and live without any religion, or serve a religion that has no power to save them. We know that there is no salvation except through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12), so no matter how old the religion is or how elaborate its ceremonies or how many followers, it will be destroyed along with everything else in this world when Jesus returns (II Peter 3:18).

This being so, it is still important to understand what others believe for several reasons:

1. We need to be able to relate to other beliefs for the purpose of evangelism. Paul quoted the poets of Greece and made reference to their idols as a way of introducing the gospel to them (Acts 17:16-31).
2. Knowledge helps us avoid being offensive towards non-Christians. We need understanding if we are to relate to others without insulting them. We can reject their beliefs without rejecting the people if we demonstrate some

understanding of their belief system. This is why missionaries study different religions, cultures and societies before launching out to spread the gospel in foreign countries.

3. Knowledge of other religions helps us appreciate the Christian faith even more. When we are able to compare Christianity to the other religions of the world we really begin to appreciate the superiority of our faith.

This book, therefore, has three objectives:

1. Provide an overview of the world's major religions.
2. Broaden our understanding of how other people think and what their religious experience is like.
3. Increase our faith through a greater appreciation of the Christian religion.

Religion

The dictionary defines religion as, "...man's expression of his acknowledgement of the divine." The Bible writers use the word religion when describing the ceremonies that the Jews performed in expressing their faith (Acts 26:5). When we talk about the religions of the world, we are referring to the different ways that human beings express their awareness that there is something other than themselves (usually a higher form of being) in this world.

Disciples of Jesus Christ believe that Christianity is not a man-made religion but rather a faith given to us by God. However, for

the purpose of this study I will list it next to other organized religions in order to compare it with these historically, theologically, geographically, etc.

There are many philosophies and movements that come and go throughout history which have an impact on society but are not necessarily religions. For example:

- New Age Movement: Combination of ideas from existing religions and philosophies.
- Communism: Political and ideological movement.
- Naturalism/Humanism/Post-Modernism: Outgrowth of Atheism that try to formulate a worldview without God.

These and others have had influence on the world but are not considered organized religions.

Religions of the World

In order for a belief system to be considered an organized religion it must have certain features. For example:

1. History/Origins: All religions can trace their origins to a place or a person.
2. Concept of Deity: The main feature of a religion is that it acknowledges the existence of a higher being or power.
3. Concept of Mankind: A key question that most religions try to answer is, "Where did man come from?" and each religion offers an explanation of some kind.

4. Salvation: Each religion has its own answer to the problem of suffering and death, and offer the hope (and description) of a better existence.
5. Worship: Most religions practice rituals and ceremonies that express faith, obedience or adoration and are done individually or collectively.
6. Scriptures: Organized religions keep records of their founders, teachings, history and worship.
7. Geography: Most religions have certain countries where they begin and flourish, and where they exercise great influence.

Not every religion has all of these features, but most have a majority of these in common. Our study will compare the major religions of the world using these different categories.

Primitive Religions

There are only eleven major organized religions in the world today. They are divided into three geographic groups. These are Far Eastern Religions, Eastern Religions and Near Eastern Religions:

- Taoism (Far Eastern)
- Buddhism (Far Eastern)
- Shinto (Far Eastern)
- Confucianism (Far Eastern)
- Sikhism (Eastern)

- Jainism (Eastern)
- Hinduism (Eastern)
- Zoroastrianism (Near Eastern)
- Judaism (Near Eastern)
- Christianity (Near Eastern)
- Islam (Near Eastern)

I'd like to finish this first chapter with a review of "Primitive" religions. These groups do not fit into our pattern of organized world religions because religions of this type are usually disorganized, have no unified teaching, history or founders but do have many practitioners. Before we study "organized" religion, therefore, we will take a brief look at "unorganized" or "primitive" religion.

When discussing Primitive religions we are not referring to one religion in particular, but certain practices taking place in a variety of ways throughout history in different countries. Some of the features of Primitive religions are:

1. Strong belief in magic and the occult.
2. Primitive religion has no god or gods, only the belief that there are good and evil powers at work.
3. The following are various forms and practices found in Primitive religions:
 1. Animism: Objects inhabited by spirits (charms, luck).

2. Dynamism: Impersonal forces at work in nature. One of the principle reasons why primitive people have stayed within their confined territories is that they believe that the trees or rivers, etc. have power or are inhabited by spirits or spirits of the dead. The ancient Canaanites, Egyptians and Assyrians, to name a few, practiced Primitive religion in one form or another, as do the native peoples of various countries.
3. Fetishism: An object into which power is induced by a Shaman (e.g. voodoo doll). Also, the belief that an object has a specific purpose, for example a fertility stick used to deflower virgin girls, or a lucky charm for protection.
4. Totemism: Tribes associate the characteristics of animals with themselves and emulate them. The idea is that if honor is given to a particular animal this will in turn impart its qualities to the tribe. Totem poles represent the characteristics of the tribe by showing which animals are on the totem (North American Indians).

The further one goes back into history the more gods there are. The first type of primitive religions were tribal in nature. The families of the tribes developed their own systems. Tribal religions were basically nature religions since their lives depended on their physical surroundings; their religion, therefore, centered on nature as well. Primitive nature religions rarely change or evolve because nature does not change. New ideas are simply integrated

back into nature and various calls to renewal are in essence a call back to the "old ways" of nature.

A brief history of Primitive religion:

1. Egyptian Religion (3200 BC):

1. Nature religion (the river Nile and the sun were worshipped as forms of deity).
2. Mystery cults (Priests performed rituals).
3. Symbolism (Sphinx - wisdom/protection - pyramids - shape represented new life emerging).

2. Assyro Babylonian Religion (3000 BC):

1. Magic (first practitioners of astrology).
2. Temple rituals, fertility rights, occult (read livers of animals to discern the future)

3. Canaanite Religion:

1. Probably most immoral and evil of religious practices (sexual activity part of worship, children burned as offerings to the gods).
2. Nature religion.

4. Greek Religion:

1. Began as nature religion and evolved to a mythological stage (many gods and goddesses -

Zeus, Apollos, Athena), philosophical stage (Plato, etc.), and ended up mixed with Roman style mythology (Romans took the Greek gods and gave them Roman names (i.e. Zeus = Jupiter).

5. Roman Religion:

1. Still primitive in its style in that it was a mixture of nature religion, magic and Greek mythology.
2. Eventually the Roman religion was eclipsed by Christianity. (Why Roman Catholicism has many mystic practices using candles and images, etc.).

Today there are many primitive religious practices that take place in poorer countries (i.e. voodoo in Haiti), but researchers have found that as education and modernization increases, primitive religion decreases.

2.

Christianity vs. Judaism

So far in our study we have noted that there are only 12 major religions in the world. We have briefly looked at Primitive religion (which is not normally considered an organized worldwide religion) and will continue by examining the remaining religious groups. We will do this by comparing the eight different categories used to describe each religion. By approaching our study in this way, we will be able to more easily note the similarities and differences between all the religious groups and determine if some are more effective, adaptable and enlightened than others. We begin with Christianity since this will be used as the basis for comparing all other religions.

Christianity

Founder

Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth called the Christ. A Jew in the 1st century, who claimed to be the divine Son of God and the Jewish Messiah. He was put on trial by the Jews for making this blasphemous assertion and was executed by the Romans as a political favor to the Jewish leadership. Jesus taught that His death and resurrection from the dead were predicted in the Jewish

scriptures and when accomplished, would verify and confirm His claim to be the Messiah.

Origins

- Ancient Christianity (30-476 AD):
 - Spread of apostolic Christianity culminating in Christian religion becoming the religion of the Empire.
 - Collapse of the Roman Empire gave rise to the social and spiritual leadership by religious leaders in Rome
Emergence of the Roman Catholic church.
 - Rome was the largest city with the largest church having the most influence and thus began to dominate and control the Christian religion.
- Medieval Christianity (476-1517 AD):
 - Consolidation of religious authority and dominance by the Roman Catholic Church.
 - Secularization (political) of the Roman Catholic Church and leaders.
 - Renaissance (Italian) reaction against Universalism.
 - Church became the political power broker in Europe.
- Modern Christianity (1517-1960):
 - Luther's 95 theses (1517).
 - Protestant Reformation.

- Fragmentization of religious groups, which among other things eventually produced the Restoration Movement from which came the Churches of Christ.
- Idea that individuals have the responsibility for finding and expressing the truth of the Bible. This idea influenced by modern democratic thought.
- Post-Modern Christianity (1960-Present)
 - Churches moving away from Bible authority.
 - Idea that all things are relative and religions are equal.

Concept of Deity

God is one and yet has diversity:

- Creator, sustainer, judge (Father)
- Prophet, priest, king, savior (Son)
- Intercessor, witness, revealer, facilitator (Holy Spirit)

All encompassing, eternal, monotheistic. Exclusive, personal, intimate.

Concept of Man

Man is created in the image of God, essentially good, with free will, with the world as his sustainer. Man has fallen through moral failure and needs restoration.

Salvation

Man's guilt separates him from God eternally. God takes on humanity and offers His perfect human life as payment for the sins of all mankind. This person is Jesus Christ. Mankind is reunited to God through faith in Jesus.

Cultus

Faith is expressed through repentance and baptism and a pursuit of right living. Public gathering for commemorative meal (communion), prayer and teaching.

Scriptures

The Bible (Old and New Testaments). Belief that these writings are directly inspired by God and recorded by men.

Geography

Began in Israel but has spread throughout the world. Greatest concentration in America, Europe, South America, Africa and more recently an underground movement in China.

Miscellaneous

- Specific clergy
- Evangelistic in nature
- Revelational
- Many groups
- Belief that Jesus will inaugurate the end of the world at His second coming.

This is how Christianity would be categorized if it were looked at through the eyes of one studying Comparative Religion. Let us now compare Christianity with the other 10 organized religions of the world.

Judaism

Judaism is one of the four religions grouped (based on geography) in the Near Eastern section. Had the Jews accepted Christ these two religions (Christianity and Judaism) would not be separate but form a single unit. One merely completing the other.

The claim of Jesus and the Apostles was that the whole purpose of Jewish history, religion and society was to provide a historical stage upon which the Christ could make His appearance in this world. The Jews, however, rejected this claim and their Messiah, and thus capped their religion at this point. We, therefore, study Judaism as a major religion as it is now, not as what it was meant to be.

Founders/Origins

Jews see their history differently than we see it. We see it as one unbroken thread from Abraham until now. They see their history in stages:

- Biblical Judaism (1400 BC-200 BC):
 - Abraham, Moses, prophets, kings, statehood
 - Recorded Old Testament
- Rabbinic Judaism (220 BC-425 AD):

- Called this because the authority in religion was the Rabbi.
- We see this in Jesus' constant conflict with the Rabbis and Pharisees.
- European Judaism (425 AD-1400 AD):
 - Majority of Jews lived in Europe, not Israel.
 - Islamic influences had despised them and there was constant struggle with the Roman Catholic Church.
 - Jews were constant targets of oppression and intolerance.
 - Since they were not allowed to own property, they survived by developing skills in commerce, medicine, law, shipping and banking.
- Since the 1800s there have been three main groups within modern Judaism (1800-Present):
 - **Reform Judaism** - Liberal branch who try to reconcile their beliefs to modern science and society. It was through the efforts of this group that the modern state of Israel was re-established after World War II.
 - **Conservative Judaism** - They hold to the old ways of Judaism although they do not offer animal sacrifices. They still maintain the concept of the Messiah as a personal Savior.
 - **Orthodox Judaism** - Most conservative of Jews. Hold to everything except animal sacrifice, the reason being that there no longer is a temple or priesthood (the area

where the Jewish temple stood is now controlled by the Palestinians and a mosque (Dome of the Rock) now stands where the temple was located). Presently they hold the balance of political power in the Israeli government (modern day Pharisees).

Concept of Deity

God is one - YAHWEH (not diverse). He has revealed Himself through the prophets (Old Testament). Pure spirit, eternal, just, compassionate. Jesus is only a man.

Mankind

Created by God. Has a soul, will die once. Subject to sin. Moses is the greatest teacher.

Salvation

Transgression against God's Law is sin and means separation from God. Keeping God's Law leads to salvation. No need for a sin sacrifice on their behalf. The Jewish nation is the Messiah. God's choice of them is their guarantee of salvation and if they keep His Laws (which range from moral to ceremonial depending on the group) they are saved and will be with God in heaven. Being Jewish is what saves you.

What is wrong with this?

1. God is not partial (Leviticus 24:22).
2. All have sinned, cannot keep Laws (Psalms 14:1-3).
3. Resurrection (Psalms 49:15).

Cultus

The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. Synagogues were later used for assembly, prayer, singing and readings. The largest temple today is the Belz temple located in Jerusalem and can accommodate over 10,000 people for worship.

Different groups within Judaism follow various Jewish festivals and holy days.

Scriptures

Torah (means to teach) is the Hebrew Bible. It contains written laws and revelation (Christian - Old Testament). It also has the oral teachings, traditions and commentaries recorded by various rabbis (Talmud, Midrash, Mishnah). Jews do not consider their writings as the Old Testament, since they reject the New Testament as having any religious authority. We refer to their Scriptures as the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh).

Geography

Israel, Europe, worldwide.

Miscellaneous

Theodor Herzl began the Zionist Movement in 1863 as part of Reform Judaism and this ultimately led to the reestablishment of modern Israel in 1947.

Jews believe that their national presence is a blessing to the world and through them God will bless mankind (to the point where some believe that the state of Israel is the Messiah). They also

believe that the Jewish nation will be the instrument of world salvation (this being the main reason for their present suffering). Many Christian politicians believe and use this in their argument for the support and defense of Israel (aside from its strategic location in the Middle East as a proxy for American political influence).

3.

Christianity vs. Zoroastrianism and Islam

We are using the comparative method in order to study the different organized religions of the world. We said that there are three main groups: Near Eastern (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity), Eastern (Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism), and Far Eastern (Confucianism, Buddhism, Shinto, Taoism). There are also many types of Primitive religions which are practiced throughout the world but are not considered "organized" religious groups. So far we have compared Judaism to Christianity (the basis for comparison that we are using in this study) and will continue with Zoroastrianism and Islam in rounding up our review of Near Eastern religions.

Zoroastrianism

Founder

Zoroaster (660-583 BC) was a camel herder from the lower social class in Persia (Iran). He claimed that he had received special visions while attending what were at that time primitive religious festivals. He maintained that he had received seven visions over a 12 year period. The visions were revelations about what God wanted him to tell the people. He had no converts for the first 10 years of his preaching.

Origins

According to tradition, his first convert was the Persian King Vishtaspa. This explains how Zoroaster's religious movement quickly spread since after his conversion the king made Zoroastrianism the "official" religion of the kingdom. The religion, however, had a positive effect on society because it espoused beneficial ideas concerning social justice and marriage.

Zoroastrianism flourished after the death of its founder until the conquest of Alexander the Great in 33 BC, who began mixing Greek ideas with those of this religion. Zoroastrianism declined for a century as the Greeks conquered the Persian Empire, but revived for a time from the second to the sixth century when it, along with Persia, were vanquished by the Muslims.

Many adherents migrated to India where various religions were tolerated. The majority (approximately 125,000) of those who practice this religion today are situated in Mumbai (formerly Bombay).

Concept of Deity

Zoroastrianism began as ethical monotheism (one god, do right). Ahura Mazda was the creator and sustainer of the world. Angra Mainyu was an evil spirit who struggled with Ahura Mazda and was eventually thrown down. Angels were seen as the personification of the attributes of Ahura Mazda.

Concept of Mankind

Mazda created man through the agency of his spirit. Man's special vocation was to keep his own soul.

Salvation

Zoroaster taught that the constant selection of right over wrong would ultimately lead to salvation. Performing good works established righteousness. Life was a struggle between good and evil, and those who chose good would go to heaven. The eternal resting place was presided over by the angel Gabriel.

Cultus

The purification of fire is the main activity of Zoroastrianism. Fire is the representation of Ahura Mazda. This religion has no priests or clergy as such, lay leaders conduct worship. Bodies of the dead are left in "towers of silence" to be eaten by birds so their flesh does not contaminate the earth.

Scriptures

Four books:

- Avesta - Knowledge (some written by Zoroaster)
- Gathas - Psalms
- Vendidad - History and theology
- Yasna - Worship/sacrifice

To five do I belong, to five others do I not; of the good thought am I, of the evil am I not; of the good word am I, of the evil am I not; of the good deed am I, of the evil, not; To Obedience am I given, and to deaf disobedience, not; to the saint do I belong, and to the wicked, not; and so from this on the ending shall be the spirits' parting.

- Yasna 10.16

Geography

Persia (Iran), Afghanistan, India.

Miscellaneous

- Zoroastrians believe that a special envoy is sent by God every 1000 years in order to give new teachings. This person is called a Saoshyant. It is believed that Jesus was such an envoy.
- Some think that the "wise men" present at Jesus' birth were Zoroastrians.
- Their monotheism eventually became dualism as they raised the profile of the evil spirit (Angra Mainyu) to the point of being an enemy and rival of Ahura Mazda.
- Bridge of Separation: Zoroastrians believe that there is a bridge between heaven and hell. At judgment, a person crosses over this bridge and if he has enough good deeds, a hand will point to Paradise and Zoroaster himself will accompany this person across. Those guilty of evil deeds will only be able to cross to the middle of the bridge before stumbling and falling to their punishment.

Islam

Islam (means submission) is the second largest religious group in the world today (Christianity is first, Buddhism is third). It is also referred to as Mohammedanism, after its founder Mohammed. The term Muslim means "...one who submits."

- Islam: The religion
- Muslim (Arabic version)/ Moslem (English version): The believer in Islam
- Mohammed: The founder and alternate name (although not used by Muslims themselves).

Founder

Mohammed (570-632 AD) lived in Mecca (in present day Saudi Arabia), worked as a merchant and was married with one daughter named Fatimah. His wife was Jewish (Khadijah). His uncle was the caretaker of the local temple and Mohammed was displeased at the sexual depictions used in the worship there. He believed that this did not represent sincere religion.

He claimed to have seven visions from the angel Gabriel and from these he wrote the substance of the Koran (the holy book of Islam).

Origins

Muslims consider 622 AD (year one on their calendar) as the beginning of Islam when Mohammed began to preach concerning his visions and writings. He was persecuted and fled to Medina

(also in Saudi Arabia) but converted 10,000 people there in the following decade.

In 630 AD he took an army to invade Mecca and conquered it. He destroyed the old temple and built the Kaaba (square building) which holds the Black Stone.

According to tradition, this stone was given to Adam on his expulsion from paradise in order to obtain forgiveness of his sins. Legend has it that the stone was originally white but has become black by absorbing the sins of the countless thousands of pilgrims who have kissed and touched it. Muslims consider this to be a sacred object (Britannica.com).

In 632 AD Mohammed died and his leadership role was taken over by different individuals throughout the following centuries. Who had legitimate leadership has been the source of division and war since his death. Aside from the religious impact he had, one of Mohammed's great accomplishments was the uniting of the nomadic and dispersed Arab tribes into one nation by giving them a common religion.

Muslims have different periods in their history:

- Caliphs (632-661): These were deputies charged to lead Islam after the death of Mohammed.
- Umayyads (661-750): They were a family of rulers based in Damascus. They led the effort to expand the Muslim religion and empire to Spain and France (their defeat by Charles Martel in the Battle of Tours in 732 prevented Muslims from invading Europe).

- **Abbasids (750-1258):** This group removed the Umayyads and established Baghdad as headquarters. Their influence pushed Islam into Asia and Eastern Europe all the way to Italy.
- **Mongolian Dominance (1258-1299):** The Mongols invaded Muslim lands and in 1271 Marco Polo visited China under Mongolian rule.
- **Ottoman Empire (1299-1924):** The Ottoman Empire began with the defeat of the Mongols and an expansion of the Muslim religion into its present regions.
- **Modern Islam (1900-Present):** With the fall of the Ottoman Empire there has been no one voice or leader for Islam. One of the goals has been to try to unite all Muslims into one nation, but this has not been successful. There are many sects and each has its own leaders and theology:
 - **Sufis:** Mystics (like Pentecostals within Christianity)
 - **Bahá'í:** Claimed to have the final truth and are now separate from mainstream Islam.
 - **Black Muslim:** American Social Justice version of Islam
 - **Sunnis:** Are a majority in most Muslim communities (80-90 percent). They are in southeast Asia, China, south Asia, Africa and most of the Arab world.

- **Shiites:** Make up the majority of the citizen population in Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon, Iran and Azerbaijan, as well as being a politically significant minority in Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.
- **Shiites** believe that each era produces a leader related to Mohammed (war between Iraq and Iran, 1980-1988 was fought over this as well as other economic and political issues).

Concept of Deity

Allah = God. God is one and totally in control. The great difference between the Christian concept of God and the Muslim view is that Christianity's God is consistent in His teachings and promises (contained and verified in Scripture); whereas with Allah this is not necessarily so. For example, in Sura 2:62 of the Koran, God promises that everyone (regardless of religious affiliation) who believes and does good will go the heaven; In Sura 3:85 the very opposite promise is made: that those practicing any religion other than Islam will lose all spiritual good. Islam's central focus is man's complete surrender to Allah, inconsistencies of their holy book notwithstanding.

Along with this idea of God is the concept of kismet or fatalism which teaches that whatever situation exists, remains. There is no use trying to change what is established because whatever happens is meant to happen. Because of this type of thinking Muslim culture is often static since the faithful believe that the condition of their present lives has been set by the will of Allah.

Concept of Man

Mankind is created by Allah but men are created superior to women. This is why the religion reinforces social customs that are often repressive for women (e.g. women cannot drive, cannot sue for divorce, must be covered, etc.). Man, however, must submit to Allah in whatever situation he finds himself in.

Salvation

Salvation comes when man is totally submitted to God and this submission is expressed in completing what is called the Five Pillars of Faith:

1. **Confession:** "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his Prophet." This is the first step in conversion and a phrase continually repeated.
2. **Almsgiving:** A Muslim must never go by a beggar without giving. The 2.5 percent (Zakat) tax is usually collected by the government and beggars are licensed.
3. **Prayer:** Submission to Allah through prayer is the primary method of salvation. Muezzin (caller) calls people to pray five times per day facing Mecca (east).
4. **Fasting:** Especially during the month of Ramadan (changes every year because Muslims calculate it according to the lunar calendar) which is a holy month. This is done in commemoration of the things that happened in Mohammed's life, and as a sign of submission.

5. **Pilgrimage:** Making a trip to Mecca (or sending a representative) once in a lifetime to participate in worship there. The highest title worn by a Muslim is Hajj which means pilgrim.

The Muslim concept of heaven and what it means to be saved is very earthly (food, fellowship, comfort, sensual pleasure, i.e., back to the Garden of Eden).

Note that the process of salvation is strictly a works-oriented system aimed at a fickle god with a reward that is very much like life here on earth but without any of its imperfections.

Holy War (Jihad) is a war declared to protect against a danger to Islam. Muslims believe that if one dies during such a war, he is guaranteed heaven (where 72 virgins await the martyr).

Cultus

The basis of worship are the five pillars of faith. There is no weekly ritual observances or services, but rather an integrated lifestyle where the believers gather for prayer at the mosque and work out the requirements of their religion in everyday life.

Scriptures

The Koran. What Mohammed presented is believed to be the total work of God, even the writing and the pages. It is claimed that the Koran is the final word of God to man. The Arabic language served to write the book is also holy. The present copy was assembled in the 650 AD era and all translations come from it. It is comprised of 114 suras or chapters. The Koran governs daily Muslim life, law (Sharia) and worship.

181. As to the month Ramadan in which the Koran was sent down to be man's guidance, and an explanation of that guidance, and of that illumination, as soon as any one of you observeth the moon, let him set about the fast; but he who is sick, or upon a journey, shall fast a like number of days. God wisheth you ease, but wisheth not your discomfort, and that you fulfill the number of days, and that you glorify God for his guidance, and that you be thankful.

182. And when my servants ask thee concerning me, then will I be nigh unto them. I will answer the cry of him that cited, when he crieth unto me: but let them hearken unto me, and believe in me, that they may proceed aright.

183. You are allowed on the night of the fast to approach your wives: they are your garment and ye are their garment. God knoweth that ye defraud yourselves therein, so He truth unto you and forgiveth you! Now, therefore, go in unto them with full desire for that which God hath ordained for you; and eat and drink until ye can discern a white thread from a black thread by the daybreak: then fast strictly till night, and go not in unto them, but rather pass the time in Mosques. These are the bounds set up by God: therefore come not near them. Thus God maketh his signs clear to men that they may fear Him.

Some guidance for pilgrims or those doing the five pillars of faith.

They believe that the Bible comes from God, but is corrupted by man and the Koran is the purer revelation.

Geography

Middle East, Africa, Pakistan, worldwide.

Miscellaneous

Many beliefs concerning angels and demons that are quite elaborate probably stemming from previous religious influence.

Islam's major problem is that it cannot accommodate technical or social progress very easily (i.e. changes in roles for women and advances in the technology of communication). Also, the Koran does not hold up well under critical analysis as does the Bible. Criticism is not even permitted and met with threats of death.

4.

Christianity vs. Hinduism

We have completed our review of the religions in the Near Eastern group which are usually the most familiar ones for those living in the West. Of those, Judaism is the oldest and we can easily see the influence that it has had on the others. The connection with Christianity is well known to us and we have discussed this already. We also note traces of Jewish influence in the ideas of Zoroaster (monotheism, righteous God and deeds, angel Gabriel, etc.). Jewish ideas are also seen in the Muslim religion especially Islam's notion of God (monotheistic). Islam even appropriates Judaism's drift into the legalism of the Pharisees of Jesus' day with their emphasis on a "works" approach to salvation which Jesus condemned.

Once we begin our study of the Eastern group of religions, however, we leave the familiar ideas of ancient Judaism and enter a world of truly foreign ideas.

Hinduism

The word Hindu comes from the original word for the country of India. It means one who comes from India. Since the religion is so fundamental to that geographic area, the people and the religion often carry the same name. However, in modern usage the term Hindu and Hinduism refer to religion and not the nation.

Hinduism is the oldest "organized" religion in the world still in existence today. It is complex and dates back to a period around 1500-2000 BC (i.e. Judaism - 1400 BC). It is a religion that is confined almost exclusively to India and finds its roots in the social, geographical and primitive religions of this country.

Founder

There is no one founder of Hinduism, it evolved as the thinking, practices and influences of its geography and society affected the people of that region and their reaction to it in both physical and spiritual ways. It began as a nature religion similar to those we looked at when reviewing primitive religions.

Origins

The formulation of the Hindu religion began as a "priesthood" arose to serve as the mediators of the natural and supernatural elements worshiped by the people. This rise of a special class of individuals gave birth to a stratification of their social system which continues to exist to this day, and which is the most important element of the religion and the society in which it is practiced.

With time there developed four stratas or castes within Indian society:

1. **Brahman:** Priestly caste, philosophers, the highest social position. Guardians of social heritage.
2. **Kshatriya:** Warriors, lords. Today, the politicians, bureaucrats and military leaders. Rajah=Ruler / Maharajah=Great Ruler.

3. **Vaisyas:** Commercial class, business people. Middle class.
4. **Sudras:** Artisans, blue-collar workers.
5. **Out Caste:** Beggars, those who belong to no caste. Not even considered as existing.

These four castes are divided into thousands of substructures, but several things remain sure:

- No intermarrying between castes.
- No changing of castes regardless of wealth.
- Everybody agrees to this from top to bottom.

Many ask why this system has continued into the modern era. The answer is that the continued practice of the Hindu religion is the major reason why this social stratification remains.

Deity

Brahma, a pure spirit and ultimate life power of the universe. Brahma does not have personality or being. Hindus do not pray to Brahma. Brahma gives life to lesser gods who in turn create and operate in the world.

Mankind (concepts)

- Atman: The condition of the true self which is the perfect harmony between the soul and the physical self.
- Maya: The idea that the entire world is only an illusion. The purpose of religion is to detach oneself from this illusion.

- **Caste:** This is a divine system not to be tampered with. Of course these ideas developed throughout centuries of life in difficult social and geographical conditions. The Hindu religion is a case of people adapting their religion to fit their suffering. A religion that justifies the inequalities of life and offers "detachment" as the only hope. In doing so it maintains social order and offers a type of hope.

Salvation

Moksha (merging). This is the objective of all life and the Hindu concept of salvation. Moksha is when the soul of man "merges" or becomes one with Brahma. The result is freedom from this world and unconscious oblivion.

Moksha is accomplished in various ways:

1. **Karma-Marga** (The Way of Works): Performing good deeds and devotional service like temple worship. Avoiding bad "karma." Hindus believe that good and evil deeds move you ahead or pull you back from moksha (merging). The evil done encrusts on your soul and slows the journey towards moksha, therefore, bad karma is to be avoided.
2. **Jnana-Marga** (The Way of Knowledge): Through the acquisition of knowledge there may be a sudden insight that instantly produces moksha.
3. **Bhakti-Marga** (The Way of Devotion): Moksha through emotional experience, ritualistic dances, ecstatic experiences (e.g. Pentecostals in the Christian Religion).

Yoga is the exercise used to achieve the release of moksha.

Cultus

Worship is directly related to obtaining moksha. Temple worship, yoga, readings for knowledge, all done to achieve moksha.

Scriptures

Several works have been developed over the centuries. Hinduism does not rest its authority on divine revelation.

1. Brahmanas: Religious ceremonies. Mantras are those portions dealing with chants written in Sanskrit between 1000-700 BC.
2. Aranyakas: Folk wisdom, mythology.
3. Upanishads: Philosophical books.
4. Bhagavad Gita: Talks about Krishna who was one of the three lesser gods under Brahma. With the arrival of Christianity this god was fashioned by Hindu writers in the style and work of Jesus Christ. You can be a Hindu and believe in Jesus as well. In Hinduism the more gods you have, the better your chances for moksha.

"12. Never have I not been, never hast thou and never have these princes of men not been; and never shall time yet come when we shall not be. 13. As the body's tenant goes through childhood and manhood and old age in this body, so does it pass to other bodies; the wise man is not confounded therein." -The Bhagavad-Gita

5. Laws of Manu: (250 BC) An attempt to codify Hindu laws and commands.
6. Vedas: The oldest of the books (2000 BC), poetry, musings about the primitive Hindu faith.

Geography

India, however, it has influenced religions that sprang from it to other countries (i.e. Buddhism).

Miscellaneous

Reincarnation is a basic belief of Hinduism. It is the concept that the soul continues to migrate through the creation until it reaches moksha. One could reincarnate as someone in another caste (craftsman or priest) or go down to the out caste (for bad karma). This reincarnation happens until moksha takes place. This is why Hindus do not change the system, because to do so is futile, it will not help in the attainment of moksha. According to the Hindu religion cows are sacred because they represent the final step before reaching moksha. To kill one would be to deny a soul entering moksha.

The "dot" on women's foreheads is called a "bindi." It is usually red in color and normally worn by married women. It is placed on the forehead between the eyebrows because Hindus believe that this is the focal point for wisdom and where the body's energy is concentrated.

The Hindu greeting is called the "namaste." The word means to greet. It is a non-verbal way to say good day as well as a non-contact form of greeting. When the hands are put to the forehead

it is a gesture of worship. In the Hindu religion the namaste is a way of saying "the spirit in me respects the spirit in you". Usually, the younger person initiates this gesture before an older person as a sign of respect.

5.

Christianity vs. Jainism and Sikhism

We have begun to describe Eastern religions which include Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism. These three religions all originate from the country of India and share much historical background. In this chapter we will review the remaining two religions in the Eastern section: Jainism and Sikhism.

Jainism

Founder

Nataputta Vardhamana (or the title given to him, Mahavira = hero/great man) 599-527 BC. Lived in a palace with his father who was a Hindu raja in the Kshatriyas caste (second to Brahmans). After his father and mother died he gave his goods to the poor, joined Hindu monks and made the following vows:

- No maintenance of the physical body.
- Suffer quietly all calamities visited upon him by man or divine power.

Apparently, he left the monks after only a month and decided to reach moksha (merge with Brahma) using two main ideas:

1. An individual can reach moksha more quickly by practicing severe asceticism.
2. In order to maintain purity and avoid bad karma (evil influence that retards the soul's journey to moksha) one must not injure any living thing (ahimsa).

He pursued these two ideas tenaciously. For example, he would not spend more than one night in a small village and no more than five in a large village in order that he might not become attached to anyone or anything. This is one way that he rejected the basics of human comfort and denied his flesh. He also practiced extreme care in not killing any living thing. In the pursuit of this it was said that he strained his water before drinking it, swept the pathway before walking onto it, ate only left-overs or things killed by someone else, he allowed insects to crawl on him without disturbing them, did not bathe, wore no clothing, spoke to no one and meditated at all times. He eventually claimed to have reached moksha (or nirvana) in the 13th year of this extreme practice of his religious quest and, unlike others before him, continued to live on after he attained this state. This was a departure from the normal course of someone who would reach the state of moksha only at death.

Origins

After reaching moksha (freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth as a result of negative karma and the continual effort in life necessary to ultimately reach this state) he gathered and

organized disciples. Mahavira died from self-starvation, willfully cutting himself free from this world to enjoy moksha (which is the non-participation of this world). His movement grew largely as a reaction against the Brahman caste.

The religion/movement was called Jainism because:

1. The word "Jain" refers to those who conquer the flesh, which is what the founder is said to have done.
2. Jain is the deified personification of the founder.
3. He was added to the many other Hindu deities.

Two main branches of the religion:

1. White clad: wear one white garment.
2. Sky clad: naked, like the founder.

Devotees mainly follow individual teachers.

Deity

Jainism rejects the concept of a supreme being (Brahma). Man is the highest form of life. All things both living and inanimate are eternal.

Mankind

Man is part of the physical world which is eternal (it has always been there, no creator). Woman is man's greatest temptation and cannot reach moksha until she is reincarnated as a man. Man's purpose is to withdraw himself from the physical world and reach moksha.

Salvation

The moksha/nirvana for Jainism is different than that of Hinduism in that the individual is conscious of his bliss and detachment, whereas in Hinduism the ultimate state is total oblivion. This dramatic difference was this new religion's appeal to Hindus.

To become a Jain the initiate chooses one of two sets of vows:

1. A Monk's Vow:

1. Renounces injuring/killing any living thing.
2. Renounces uncontrolled speech.
3. Renounces possessions and receives only what is given (lives as a beggar).
4. Renounces sex.
5. Renounces personal attachments such as family or friends.

2. Regular Followers:

1. Vow not to kill.
2. Vow not to lie.
3. Vow not to steal.
4. Vow not to be impure.
5. Vow not to be greedy.
6. Vow not to travel.
7. Vow to limit the use of things.
8. Vow to reject immorality.

9. Vow to meditate.
10. Vow to practice regular self-denial.
11. Vow to spend one day as a monk on a regular basis.
12. Vow to give alms to monks.

Jains reject knowledge as transient and ineffective as a way to reach moksha, practicing only self-denial as the true pathway toward that goal.

Cultus

No services, worship or prayers. A memorial service is conducted to honor Mahavira. The "mathura" or memorial mound is the oldest building in India. There is a Jain temple in Calcutta (now known as Kolkata).

Scriptures

Writings by different leaders include the vows and comments on them. There have been many disputes over the authenticity of these by followers. Two principal works:

- Agamas: Precepts
- Prakrit: Special vernacular used to write Agamas. Many do not know this language so the writings are not available to most Jains. The commentaries about the Agamas are written in Sanskrit:

1,2,2,1: A wise man should remove any aversion (to control); he will be liberated in the proper time. Some,

following wrong instruction, turn away (from control). They are dull, wrapped in delusion. While they imitate the life of monks, (saying), "We shall be free from attachment," they enjoy the pleasures that offer themselves. Through wrong instruction (would-be) sages trouble themselves (for pleasures); thus they sink deeper and deeper in delusion, (and cannot get) to this, nor to the opposite shore. Those who are freed (from attachment to the world and its pleasures), reach the opposite shore. Subduing desire by desirelessness, he does not enjoy the pleasures that offer themselves. Desireless, giving up the world, and ceasing to act, he knows, and sees, and has no wishes because of his discernment; he is called houseless.

- The Ayaranya Sutra

Geography

Since Mahavira was from a high caste, many of his followers were also from the higher classes which meant they were city dwellers, merchants, leaders and bankers who controlled the commerce in the south.

Misc.

There are approximately three million adherents in the Mumbai (formerly Bombay) area. Jainism is a very exclusive, closed and non-evangelistic religion.

Sikhism

Sikhism began as an attempt to harmonize Islam and Hinduism (the monotheism of Islam with the concept of karma within Hinduism). The term Sikh means disciple.

Founder

Nanak (1469-1558 AD).

Nanak was a Hindu of the Kshatriyas caste born near what is today Pakistan (northwest India). He was influenced by an earlier writer called Kabir who wrote about the Muslim and Hindu religions. Nanak lived in a place where Hindu and Muslim peoples were settled side by side and this influenced his thinking. He is said to have had a vision from God declaring that there was no Hindu or Muslim, only those who loved God (the true one) and one another. After Nanak's death, successors called Gurus were appointed to lead his followers. There were nine successive Gurus appointed as heads of the Sikh religion until modern times.

Origins

The history of this religion can be traced through the lives of the successive Gurus as it developed in northwest India, which is now Pakistan. Here is a brief history of some of these leaders and their contributions:

- Angad (1539-1552): Developed the alphabet and formed the Sikh scriptures.
- Amar Das (1552-1574): A social reformer who fought for equal rights for men and women.

- Arjan (1581-1601): Formed a guerrilla army to protect Sikhs from Muslim attack.
- HarGobind (1606-1645)
- Gobind Singh (1675-1708): An especially important leader who was responsible for establishing modern Sikhism and served as the religion's last Guru. He outlawed the caste system, organized villages into military units, required all devotees to attach "Singh" to their names (means lion). He fought to have their area become independent from India and did so, becoming the country named Pakistan in 1947, but the nation was not ruled by the Sikhs.

His most significant achievement was to open the Sikh religion to men of all castes in order to form a new culture. This was done through the "Baptism of the Sword." The equality of men and women in the Sikh religion made it very appealing to those who were endlessly trapped at the bottom caste of Hindu society.

Gobind Singh initiated five disciples by making them drink a mixture of nectar and water stirred with a sword and then sprinkled on each man five times on their hair and eyes. These men then added the title Singh (lion) to their names and were charged to wear the five K's throughout their lifetimes as a symbol of their religion:

1. Kesh: Long hair/beard
2. Kangha: Comb (turban)
3. Kachha: Shorts
4. Kara: Steel bracelets

5. Kirpan: Sword

Not all Sikhs became Singhs (some remained pacifists), but those who did became skilled in military arts.

Gobind Singh left instructions that after his death there were to be no other Gurus, but that the followers were to use their holy book as a religious guide which they do to this day.

Deity

Sikhs are monotheists. "Truth" is the name of God. They rejected the Hindu concept of formless diety and adopted the sovereign God concept of the Muslims.

Mankind

They believe in the universal brotherhood of all men. Man was created by God. They accept the idea of moksha and karma (except the experience of moksha is life with God). They place great value on the individual and his social responsibilities.

Salvation

Repeating the name of God is worth more than all the rituals, "There is one God, and truth is his name." The love of God and man is the way to moksha. The difference between Hindus and Sikhs is that for Sikhs the avoiding of bad karma (by doing good) is how one reaches moksha, however, union with God is a perceived and conscious thing whereas in Hinduism it is not.

Cultus

Sikhs reject ritualism. Their only ceremony is the baptism of the sword. The Golden Temple at Amritsar houses the original holy Granth (Sikh holy book).

Scriptures

The "Granth" = the book.

The original Granth was composed in 1604 by the 5th Guru which came to have the same authority as the Adi Granth. This later work was also a compilation of many authors. These were written in different languages and not many people have been able to read the complete works because of this. Only a few have been translated into English. For example, the following is a key document written by Nanak. They must memorize it and Orthodox Sikhs repeat it in the morning.

REPEAT HIS NAME

The True One was in the beginning; the True One was in the primal age. The True One is now also, O Nanak; the True One also shall be.

By thinking I cannot obtain a conception of Him, even though I think hundreds of thousands of times.

Even though I be silent and keep my attention firmly fixed on him, I cannot preserve silence.

The hunger of the hungry for God subsideth not though they obtain the load of the worlds.

If man should have thousands and hundreds of thousands of devices, even one would not assist him in obtaining God.

- The Japji

Geography

The Punjab region of northwest India. Most (8-10 million) live there, but many have migrated to the West.

Misc.

Their reaction to the Muslim threat gave rise to the militaristic sect of the Singh (lions). These became great soldiers and bodyguards in the British army later on. They only used their military prowess to preserve themselves and did not try to conquer other nations or groups. Their movement elevated the position and condition of the rejected social "outcastes" as well as the position of women in Indian society.

6.

Christianity vs. Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto and Buddhism

We are ready to examine the four religions in the Far Eastern category of world religions. Two of these come from China, one from Japan and the other, Buddhism, began in India but spread eastward and then worldwide.

All four of these religions have common traits:

1. All are a mix of beliefs taken from different cultures, and many of the teachings are common to all four.
2. They accept the idea that truth is universal, but since individuals only have part of this universal truth, each person's idea of truth is different.
3. They practice various forms of ancestor worship. The spirit of past generations is maintained so long as the present generation keeps their memory alive.
4. These religions have an element of "animism," believing in the presence of good and evil spirits that need to be appeased in various ways (e.g. fireworks, kites used to keep evil spirits away).
5. Far Eastern religions are usually associated with the country's politics.

6. They are more concerned with what is socially appropriate rather than sin, salvation or the end of the world. For example, in Japan, political or other type of leaders will resign their positions if they lose face (failure, social embarrassment).

Let us begin with the two religions from China first: Taoism and Confucianism.

Taoism

(Pronounced "daoism")

Founder

Lao-tzu (604-517 BC) Known as the "Old Master."

He was a humanist and believed/taught that man was at the highest level. To experience God, man had to look within himself and nature. He believed in the perfect unity and harmony of nature. He rejected social organizations (the federal political system of the times) and withdrew from society to live as a hermit.

Origins/Deity/Mankind

Taoism taught that there was a force in nature called the Tao. It was this force that animated nature. The Tao had two elements which, when balanced, produced a good life. The force was separated by the Tao symbol of yin and yang (Yin - black, negative, earthly, feminine; Yang - red, forceful, heavenly, positive).

The idea was that the forces within the Tao flowed back and forth between positive and negative creating the life one had, and

man's lot was to observe this flow and adapt to it in order to find balance. This helps explain the pragmatic approach that the Chinese have towards politics, social movements or conflicts. They carefully observe the flow of events and make decisions that will create or achieve the favorable balance necessary to maintain the status quo.

Salvation

In Taoism the objective is not to "know" because absolute truth is not knowable, the objective of man is to be "at one" with the Tao. At death the soul merges with the spirits of the ancestors which are embodied in the yin part of the Tao.

Cultus

Taoists built temples and practiced various rites (we would describe as magic) and developed Taoist philosophies.

Scriptures

One such work entitled, "Tao Te Ching" (treatise of Tao and its power) was written in the 4th century BC by several authors, however was not considered a "holy book" or seen as divine revelation.

Geography

This religion began in China and spread to Tibet and Japan.

Miscellaneous

Taoism has approximately 40 million followers. Taoists have no concept of morality (absolute right or wrong). They reject all institutions as counterproductive.

Confucianism

Founder

Kung Fu Tze (551-478 BC)

He was a civil employee of the Chinese government who was promoted to the position of provincial judge. He saw social injustice destroying the state and wrote a treatise on the "art of living" as an attempt to correct the problems of his society caused in large part by a declining feudal system.

His treatise was not written as revelation from God. His teachings were directed at the noble and ruling classes. Eventually, he formed disciples to carry on his teachings.

Origins

The religion is based on the teachings he left behind and not any divine revelations or his personal charisma. However, his synthesis of past wisdom into a system of teaching influenced Chinese society for over 2000 years until Mao Zedong's communist revolution took over the country in the 20th century.

Deity

There is no personal deity in Confucianism. The usual nature or spirit worship and/or ancestor worship as seen in other religions is practiced in Confucianism as well. This ideology has no religious "end of the world" scenario.

Mankind

In Confucianism man is part of the universe and born good. The emphasis is not where mankind goes after death, but rather how he interacts now with the five major relationships in life. The study of these relations and the objective of each individual within that relationship was the essence of the teaching and practice of Confucianism:

1. Father (kind) - Son (respectful)
2. Elder brother (noble) - Younger brother (obedient)
3. Husband (kind) - Wife (obedient)
4. Elder (kind) - Younger (deferential)
5. Ruler (benevolent) - Subject (loyal)

Salvation

There is no concept of heaven or hell for individuals. The ideal to which the religion pointed was proper harmony in life between all men based on the proper maintenance of their relationships with one another.

Worship

There is no practice of worship or ritual to honor a deity. The practice of Confucianism was the study and implementation of its teachings. In addition to this there was the pursuit of the five cardinal virtues:

The Five Virtues

- Ren is the virtue of benevolence, charity, and humanity.
- Yi, of honesty and uprightness.
- Zhi, knowledge.
- Xin, the virtue of faithfulness and integrity.
- Li, correct behavior, or propriety, good manners, politeness, ceremony, worship. Harmony with each other meant harmony with the past, harmony with the spiritual forces (Tao) and ultimately harmony with heaven.

In later times Kung Fu Tze's disciples raised him to the status of deity with temples and worship systems developed throughout China.

Scriptures/Geography/Miscellaneous

His writings and those of his disciples were collected in the Four Books:

1. Analects - sayings of Confucius.
2. Great Learning - how to be a gentleman.
3. Doctrine of the Mean *key* - Philosophy.

4. Book of Mencius - Commentary on Confucian philosophy.

Confucius himself compiled six books of writings called "Classics."

The Chinese had a religion for a thousand years before Confucius, but his system of teaching and personality gave form to that religion and after he died the two merged to produce a religion for China called Confucianism which eventually spread to South East Asia and Korea.

Shinto

Until World War II this religion was woven into every part of Japanese life and thought. Their politics, religion and history were a single unit.

Founder/Origin

There is no founder of this religion. It evolved from basic nature worship. With time, a mystic story developed where Japan became the center of creation, destined to rule the world. They added concepts from Taoism (harmony) and Confucianism (social order) as well as Buddhism (philosophy) to form their completed religion.

Deity/Mankind

They believe in many gods. Creation was a product of male and female gods.

A descendant of the gods was sent to rule Japan, his descendants in turn became the Emperors. The leading families and Japanese people were the descendants of lesser gods living on the island.

Salvation/Cultus

The Shinto concept of salvation is based upon the belief that all living things have an essence, soul or spirit known as Kami. Kami lives among us rather than in a glorified state or in heaven.

The Shinto religion was primarily used to maintain and promote Japanese supremacy. Ancestor worship continues to be the main purpose and practice of their worship. Shrines and temples have prayer and offerings to past patriotic ideals and ancestors.

Scripture/Geography/Miscellaneous

Kojiki: Ancient legends of the formation of the island. Oracles containing religious ideas.

The Shinto religion exists only in Japan.

Before World War II, the Japanese saw themselves as a divine country, with a divine ruler and divine mission to rule the world. This divine destiny concept helps explain this nation's near suicidal attempt to win World War II. Japan was only dissuaded from this notion and continuing the war to achieve it when two atom bombs were dropped on their major cities by the American military.

Part of the Japanese surrender treaty required them to remove this idea from the Shinto religion and change the design of their flag which depicted their domination of the world.

Buddhism

One of three great missionary religions (Christianity and Islam). In 1932 a Buddhist conference in Ceylon declared, "Buddhism is the religion that begins without God and realizes that He is no longer necessary."

Founder/Origins

Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha/Enlightened One - 563-480 BC). A Hindu of the Kshatriya caste in Nepal, India. Stories of his life only surfaced 500 years after his death and so we have mystic accounts of his virgin birth where he declared as a baby that he would reach moksha in his lifetime.

He was dismayed as a young man seeing the world's suffering and proposed the "Middle Way" as the way of salvation (nirvana).

The difference in his teaching (from Hinduism) was that one could reach moksha while still alive (like Jainism).

He recruited disciples who continued his teachings, and with time gained deified status as his teachings and religion spread.

Deity/Mankind

No personal supreme being. Spirits and gods exist but they are all part of the great being.

The sum total of everything is in the process of becoming.

Man has no soul, he is a collection of interconnected "skandhas" (body, senses, feelings, desires, reason).

These dissolve at death and reform into another being. Like lighting a candle from another candle.

Salvation/Worship

Man's desire to have individual conscious life and all that it provides is what causes misery. Freedom from this endless cycle of desire is called "enlightenment" (one who desires nothing). One ceases to be and becomes - not being. By not being, one does not desire; without desire there is no misery.

State of nirvana - being within being. In other words, not yourself but part of the whole (e.g. Like a drop of water falling into the ocean).

There is a system of disciplines that lead one to this state. One must accept and live by:

1. The Threefold Truth:

1. Impermanence of all things
2. Sorrow is part of all individualities
3. Man has no soul (no individuality)

2. The Four Noble Signs:

1. All existence involves suffering
2. All suffering is caused by desire
3. Suffering ceases when desire does
4. Desire is destroyed when one follows the Eightfold Path (a series of instructions in "right living")

Temples and shrines built for offerings to Buddha, prayers and teachings. Buddhist monks live in community.

Scriptures/Geography/Miscellaneous

Tripiktas (250 BC): Collection of writings known as the "three baskets:"

- Discipline
- Teachings
- Metaphysical

Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha.

Began in India but almost extinct there (worldwide 200 million+).

Buddha seen in various ways:

1. Essential Buddha - Being
2. Nirvanic Buddha - Earthly, Buddha in blissful state after death
3. Earthly Buddha - His appearance on earth

Zen: Japanese Buddhists who stressed meditation.

Summary

You will have noticed three common things about these religions in comparison to Christianity which help demonstrate Christianity's superiority:

1. There were no prophecies (i.e. writings concerning the coming, work and influence of the founders before their appearance in history). Jesus, however, has a great body of prophecy describing His person, ministry and impact on the world far in advance of His actual birth.
2. None of these religions have a resurrected leader whose appearance was recorded by many different eye witnesses. Each one died and remains so to this day. Only Jesus can claim a historical and verified resurrection from the dead.
3. None have scriptures that have stood the test of fierce criticism for over 2000 years and continue to be influential today. Most of these others are not accessible. The Bible, however, has been translated into every language, open to investigation by all and continues to be relevant in every culture and time period.

There are other reasons why Christianity is a superior religion to these:

- A better hope for salvation (perfected conscious life forever).
- A greater result of good in history (impact for positive change).
- A more adaptable religion (not limited to one culture/ place).

Hopefully you have recognized Christianity's superiority in this brief study of major world religions. Praise God and His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and the King of kings forever.