

## OTHER WORLD RELIGIONS

Opening Questions:

- Can all God beliefs - if they have contradictory elements – be true?
- Can one religion contain more true beliefs than another?
- If religion has false beliefs or harmful practices, should it be “respected”?
- Does religion genuinely meet the real spiritual needs of individual human beings?
- If God/the Creator exists and he/she did send a Messenger to humankind to communicate, how could we identify that Messenger?
- If God did send a Messenger and a group of people hides that Messenger and his message, should they not be more accountable?

**K**arl Marx supposedly said, "Religion in the opiate of the masses." He actually said this, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people". The saying has been taken to mean that religion is like a drug that dulls people to the realities of the harsh world and keeps them inactive in trying to solve problems. If that is what he meant, then he is correct. Religion is the hope of people expressed in non-helpful or non-productive ways...often in ways that contradict some of the very religious/ethical principles the religious people proclaim. It can be the comfort of people, but comfort which often is selfish or comfort which is not based in reality. Christianity is not exempt from this correct observation of Marx, but this chapter will take a very brief and narrow view of other religions. (My using and clarifying a famous and often quoted saying of Marx in no way provides some blanket endorsement of his beliefs.)

Many people have come to believe and will say that if observable facts or occurrences cannot prove something, then it is not real, or at least it is not relevant to human existence. As we have seen, two observable facts strongly point to – in fact, demand – that a creator exists. First, is the physical complexity of the living organic beings that populate this planet. It is irrational to believe that natural forces created highly complex, DNA coded, replicating biological machines with inter-dependent sub-systems...as a legitimate analogy, it is unreasonable to encounter a computer or a robot and believe that natural forces built its hardware.

Second, human beings have a metaphysical “operating system,” if you will—the ability to reason is not physical; the desire and ability to forgive and to want forgiveness is not material; the ability to know right moral behavior from wrong is not physical; etc. Thus, our hardware has software.

So, a fair question is why I should believe “the creation narrative” and worldview of this Joshua of Nazareth instead of many other people or “religious” or existential claims or possibilities? The reason is threefold. Before I answer that directly, please understand these qualifying statements in response to the question. Joshua of Nazareth does not give any extensive, detailed “creation narrative.” Rather, he says that God created “male and female” human beings. So, there is quite a bit of room for speculation regarding how exactly God created human beings, and by inference, the rest of the life on this planet.

Now I will answer the question directly.

*First, because he defeated death to prove that what he said was true about himself and God – he is the only person in history to conquer death in an authentic, genuine way or context/narrative.* Read the accounts, and you will see. If you dismiss the accounts due to the miracles, that dismissal demonstrates that you are biased against a metaphysical reality even though the evidence of such is right in front of you as has been previously extensively revealed.

*Second, because Joshua of Nazareth is the only person in history whose views on the world best represent the reality that we human beings experience each day.* Human beings have both light and dark in them, but the dark in general rules and thus most of the causes of pain, suffering, hardship, and conflict are created by human beings. People also can do well, but their nature, in general, overrules their knowing what is right and consistently practicing it. Remember the second chapter in the book on the state of humankind which proves this point?

*Third, because he provides the solution to human kind's most significant needs and worst problems – leadership/guidance, truth, hope, and love.* The only person qualified to lead human beings is the One who taught and practiced, "Love your enemies."

This chapter will very briefly look at other major world religions with the goal of arriving at a reasonable conclusion that the other world religions do not provide the solutions to humankind's most vexing problems. Frankly, if one would apply reason well to world religion's claims, they would collapse fairly quickly or at least they would be found to have significant contradictions, inconsistencies or to waste time, energy and resources.

As stated earlier, the world religions are very much alike. While the monotheistic religions have different names for their gods, the people have pretty much the same view of God and live pretty much the same lives with the small exception of the nature of the religious rituals they partake in, which rituals do not significantly affect their life view or daily life behavior. In other words and in general, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindu's, etc. all live pretty much similar lives—they live and work for money and material security, and they are only willing to share their material things and daily lives with blood and legal relatives or family. Their religion is just a minor aspect of their social

life – it does not drive their basic everyday behavior; it does not overcome their desire to stay in the cage of fear, self-pride, and selfishness; it does not lead them to live lives of true love.

Let's take a small step back and review some important facts before we directly address other world religions. We observed that while spiritual things cannot be validated physically by observation - concepts, principles or beliefs can be verified as true or false using reason and logic. For example, consider this mathematical statement, "the sum of one plus one does not equal three." We need no physical things to validate that statement, but our mind, using reason, tells us that is a true statement.

Here is an example from the realm of God claims – "our God says love other people and we can harm them as well." The statement contains a contradiction and thus is false, e.g., loving other people and harming those people are contradictory or mutually exclusive – you cannot both love another person and at the same time intentionally hurt them. What are a few of the leading possibilities that could reasonably explain such a statement?

1. God does not exist, and a poorly reasoning person made the statement up;
2. God contradicts himself and cannot reason well;
3. God did communicate something, but the communication was unintentionally messed up;
4. God did communicate something, but the communication was intentionally messed up;
5. God said love one another and man added the harm clause;
6. God said harm one another and man added the love clause.

If people who hold to God beliefs applied reason more diligently to their God beliefs, there would be a whole lot fewer God-claims as well as less confusion and division.

Sadly, they do not, and there is a reason for that the Light identifies.

The normal mode for religious people is, "this is what I believe, and you are not going to change my mind" – a statement driven by self-pride and fear. *Religious people, in general, manifest the attributes of stubbornness, closed-mindedness and a healthy dislike of reason!* Ironically, most non-theists and some agnostics – while rejecting they possess a "religious view" – still have a worldview, and they hold to that worldview just as stubbornly as the religious people they mock or condemn. Of course, they will claim that their worldview is "scientific and provable (meaning physical) facts," even while they use the metaphysical elements and means of human beings called the mind and reason to argue so!

It is reasonable to conclude that if the Designer wanted to communicate to us, and for whatever reason, he or she could not do that directly:

- Due to some constraint like the Designer existing in a dimension that prevented direct communication that could be received or understood by the physical means we have, or;

- Some condition existed that was temporary or occasional that allowed the Designer to interact with our realm intermittently or temporarily;
- Due to some metaphysical constraint, like human's inability to receive the Designer's communications due to some problem with our nature, i.e., he/she gave us a two-way radio, but we broke it.

...then he or she would use the best indirect means possible to ensure his or her message was understood correctly. Generally speaking, face to face conversation with the other person is the best way to communicate something. If the Designer for whatever reason could not do that him or herself then sending or enabling a representative or messenger who could deliver his or her message would be best.

So that leaves us with trying to figure out whom, if anyone is that representative.

There have been, and are, millions of people who claimed, or currently claim, to speak for the Designer or God and many millions of God claims. Using observation and reason, we can eliminate many of those gods and the religion associated with them. For example, we can reject gods that cannot design and create the human race. We can eliminate gods who state contradictions, for they - at best and if they exist - would not be worthy of the designation "God."

Furthermore, we should reject any god claims that cannot pass the test of reason. For example, perhaps the paramount belief of many Christian sects is the trinity doctrine, which states that one god is three persons, or said more simply, that 1 equals 3. All the theological equivocation with the associated complex vocabulary used to hide the contradiction notwithstanding, one does not equal three. Thus the trinity belief ought to be rejected as false (we will look more closely at the trinity belief later).

Some of the earth's religions with many adherents include Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. There are hundreds of more beliefs and practices that people hold that could be considered religion, but the five mentioned above probably account for about 75% of the humans on the earth, so we will address those five.

In addition to the five major religions themselves, there are many hundreds of divisions in each of those five religions, so rational people should reject any pretense of unity. However, the central question is who is correct with their essential claims? Muslims says Mohammed is God's messenger. Buddhists look to Siddhartha Gautama. Jews look to Moses and their prophets as God's messengers. Christians say "Christ" but this author has found that the Christian's "Christ" does not represent the historical Joshua of Nazareth, and many Christians spend most of their time quoting everyone but him for their God beliefs, especially Paul and Moses.

In addition to those people who lived in the past, many living people say they are God's messengers. So again, who is correct? How can we validate claims? Is Christianity the only one which is a failure? Do they all speak for

God? What about the many contradictions between each of those supposed messengers and their messages? As we have seen and agreed, if something that can be evaluated by reason cannot pass the test of reason, then we will not consider it, for we should not be interested in believing things that are false.

So, getting back to someone representing God and our ability to know what the Designer is like, where do we go from here? God could be anything from a non-caring, apathetic distant being that sees his human creation as an afterthought, to a being passionate about his created beings. (Of course, there is the assumption there that the Creator would create beings that had attributes similar to himself/herself or with characteristics he/she cares about.) So, what is the Designer like? Remember we need a way to validate that the messenger is sent from, and accurately represents, the Designer. Anyone can claim anything, so how could we validate those claims?

A primary way to accomplish that validation would be if the Messenger had special powers that other people did not have. If the Designer's Messenger could do things that no one else could do, then that would be good evidence that that person's claims – if they also claimed to represent the Designer – were valid.

Other proofs the messenger could prove could include that he or she could see into the future, or if the messenger fulfilled prophecies that were communicated long ago - things they could not manipulate nor fulfill by their own will. Thus, they would have proof that they were not bound by time and therefore would be a likely candidate for someone who knows the Designer if the Designer exists outside of time or can see through time.

Perhaps the least objective and yet the most effective validation is if our conscience or our mind validate the messenger's message. That is to say that we know the things they teach or taught are true and right, for who can argue with true and right? Validating their sayings with our conscience becomes especially important with any God claims the supposed messengers made or make.

So, where does this leave us?

Let's add another layer of possibility to this puzzle of finding the Designer's spokesperson. What if the Designer's messenger said things that were so unpopular that people who heard them would naturally draw away and not want to consider or receive the message? For example, have you ever tried to communicate something to an arrogant teenager that went against what they wanted? How does that go? Do they "hear" you?

What if the Designer provided a singular messenger and a clear message that could not be reasonably misunderstood unless the people who heard it were afraid of the message and the message's implications on their lives? In other words, what if the Designer sent a messenger or messengers, but people, in general, don't want to hear the message? If that were so, then the human race would have a non-physical deafness so-to-speak that would work hard against identifying the messenger and the message. However, we are currently in the endeavor to identify a Messenger, not whether or not the intended recipients of the message were worthy or able to receive it.

As we have said, we need a way to validate if a person who claimed to represent the Designer did or does. I would suggest the following criteria for confirming messengers. Of the primary messengers who say they were representatives from the Creator of the human race, which one's message provides the best solution to humanity's problems, and which messenger validated their message with an event(s) that were a sure sign or "signature" from the Creator—an event(s) or feat(s) that would rise above normal human experience? Here is what I suggest are the basic validations that any messenger needs to pass to be considered as “The Messenger” from the Creator.

First, *they need to have claimed to speak directly for the Creator*. If the Creator wants to communicate with his created beings through a messenger, then that messenger would claim that they speak for the Creator. If the Messenger knew the Creator and knew they were sent by the Creator to provide his/her message, then they would convey and proclaim that essential truth as part of their message.

Criteria two or second, the messenger *needs to have provided and lived out the solution to humanity's most significant problems*. As we have identified, humankind's primary problem is fear, self-pride and selfishness causing us to take from, harm, unjustly rule over, harm, abuse, and neglect others. In other words, *we do not live by love*.

Third, *they needed to validate their person and message by an act(s) or event(s) that marks them as extraordinary and unique deliverers of the Designer's message*.

I would encourage the reader to consider these criteria and try and find fault with them. If you cannot, then you should be excited that by these three criteria, the Creator's messenger or messengers will be revealed.

Let me say that a brief chapter cannot possibly contain an in-depth analysis of this topic of the claims of messengers from the Designer, so you, reader, if you are not persuaded with the simple truths herein, will need to do some research to validate the claims made in this chapter.

## Messenger Search

In this chapter, we will only consider those alleged messengers from whom most of the people on the planet are looking (approximately 75%) to know God and his or her will—so let's do that now.

First, let's consider Islam's messenger, Muhammad since Islam is making some significant waves at this time across the globe. Does he pass the three criteria? Muhammad indeed claimed to speak for God, so he passes the first criteria.

What was his solution for humankind? It was to spread Islam – the teachings of Muhammad who claimed to speak for God - to all humans to get them to submit to Allah and his rules using whatever means necessary, including force or violence. Here are a few quotes of Muhammad from the Quran in that regard.

Qur'an 9:29-Fight against Christians and Jews until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low."

Qur'an 4:91- If the unbelievers do not offer you peace, kill them wherever you find them. Against such you are given clear warrant.

Qur'an 9:7-9-Don't make treaties with non-Muslims. They are all evildoers and should not be trusted.

Qur'an 9:12-14-Fight the disbelievers! Allah is on your side; he will give you victory.

Qur'an 9:5 - Kill the nonbelievers wherever you find them.

Qur'an 2:191-2-Kill disbelievers wherever you find them. If they attack you, then kill them. Such is the reward of disbelievers.

Qur'an (5:51) - "O you who believe! do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people."

Qur'an (2:65-66) Christians and Jews must believe what Allah has revealed to Muhammad or Allah will disfigure their faces or turn them into apes, as he did the Sabbath-breakers.

Well, as you can see, the solution Muhammad laid out for humanity seems a bit flawed! Using force and violence to accomplish one's goals – even if the end is said to be good – is wrong. Now, of course, the Muslim theologians will cry foul and cite other sayings of Mohammed that contradict the ones above – sayings about peace and love. However, that proves that the god Mohammad is supposedly speaking for contradicts itself, and thus is not worthy of believing.

Other teachings in the Quran, of course, provide for human leaders that the other followers of Allah must submit to, thus setting up a religious system controlled by men. Indeed claiming an angry God wants people to submit to him and that his followers are right to use force, threat and violence to achieve that end – hardly solves humankind's problems! In fact, that kind of belief is the cause of much of the hatred and violence in the world.

Just because many who take the religious label Muslim ignore, deny, cite contradictory sayings or seek ways to avoid the plain meaning of these verses in their holy book and uttered by their "prophet of God" in no way nullifies the fact that they do exist in the primary Muslim holy book, the Quran.

Nor does quoting sayings from the Quran which contradict with the ones cited above negate the fact that Allah supposedly said the above-quoted sayings through Mohammed. All the contradictions do is to demonstrate that "Allah" makes mistakes and is not clear on what he wants, thus disqualifying him as a worthy god.

Nor does the fact that many Muslims renounce violence and are not aggressive or violent people negate the fact that it is reasonable that other Muslims take those sayings of Muhammad in the Quran at face value and act upon them, thus the jihadists and those who empathize with, and support them.

Finally, what means or event did Muhammad use to validate he was a special messenger from the Designer? None, for he lived a normal life and died

in a normal way. Thus, the supposed messenger Muhammad fails two of the three tests.

For more on Islam, see *Appendix 6, Islam*.

OK, what about the Buddha, or Siddhartha Gautama? Did he claim to speak for the Creator? No, he did not; therefore, he is eliminated by the first criteria! Siddhartha had a good focus to his teachings – essentially the overcoming and alleviation of suffering - and he certainly did not teach that force or violence was justified to achieve those, or any, earthly ends, to his credit. His solution for humanity was far less flawed than Muhammad's, but it was still too narrow and did not explicitly address the root problems nor provide the answer. Since Siddhartha did not claim to speak for the Designer, he needn't have validated his person or message, and in fact, he lived a relatively normal life.

OK, what about Hinduism? Did it have a founder or a chief messenger? No, it does not. Instead, it is a set of existential or religious philosophies only. While some of Hinduism's beliefs and philosophies seem good and right and would help alleviate some of the problems in the world, those beliefs and views cannot be validated as having come from the Designer, nor do they address the root problems or supply the solution. There are also many conflicting claims and views in Hinduism, so it fails to present a unified worldview.

OK, what about Judaism? If you had to pick the chief messenger from Judaism's standpoint, it would have to be Moses. How does Moses do with our three criteria? He indeed claimed to have spoken for God, so he passes the first criteria.

What does Moses say is the Designer's solutions for humanity's problems? Many Christians and some Jews would argue the Ten Commandments. However, the Ten Commandments so-called do not address the root problems of fear, pride, and selfishness – they merely attempt to constrain some bad behavior. Furthermore, Moses teachings do not provide the critical element of the solution. Moses' Ten Commandments do try to restrain bad behavior, and that is good, but they do *not* lead to peace and love among people who are not "Jewish." Please consider the following in that regard.

Moses says, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge *against the sons of your people*, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD." (Leviticus 19:18) Note how the neighbor is qualified as having to be one of "the sons of your people." Here is what Moses says God says regarding people who are not "the sons of your people":

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered to your people. Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian to execute the Lord's vengeance on Midian. "A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war." So there were furnished from the



thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war.

Moses sent them, a thousand from each tribe, to the war, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war with them, and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand. So they made war against Midian, just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed every male. They killed the kings of Midian along with the rest of their slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword. The sons of Israel captured the women of Midian and their little ones; and all their cattle and all their flocks and all their goods they plundered. Then they burned all their cities where they lived and all their camps with fire. They took all the spoil and all the prey, both of man and of beast.

They brought the captives and the prey and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the sons of Israel, to the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by the Jordan opposite Jericho. Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them outside the camp. Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. And Moses said to them, "Have you spared all the women? "Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD. *"Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. "But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves.* (Numbers 31:1-18)

So, as you can see, some part of Moses was a merciless religious guy who used his fear and God as his justification to kill many people. Vengeance never leads to peace; it only works hard to perpetuate more violence and conflict.

Jesus of Nazareth later provided an improved version of the Ten Commandments, thus demonstrating the original commandments were imperfect and incomplete and therefore not from a perfect being (see Matt. 5). On these bases, Moses does not pass the second criteria.

What about the third criteria? Moses indeed did allegedly perform – or call upon God to work - miracles to validate his message to the Egyptian leadership. *But notice who the validating signs were directed at - the Egyptian people at large and not constrained to the leadership responsible for the injustices to the Hebrew people.* The alleged miracles performed by the god of Moses were of the nature of destruction and killing...of violence and force. In this way, they vary very little from the Muslim's God's way.

Destructive acts against the Egyptian leadership – not acts against the common Egyptian people – could be justified from the viewpoint of the oppressed seeking relief from the unjust oppressor. However, the violence of

the Hebrew god was against the innocent children of the ordinary citizens of Egypt instead of against the guilty Egyptian leadership. That is unjust and morally wrong.

Furthermore, is violence the only way or the best way to achieve relief from oppression? No, it is not. See the stories Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. to validate that truth. Or better yet, see the story of the Savior of humankind!

If we assume that the Designer is above some of our more base desires – like harming others to get our way – then we should reject the possibility that the Designer would use or advocate or approve of violence to achieve various ends, even just ones. So, while Moses did allegedly perform things that would seem to validate that a super being was behind his words and actions, the unjust and immoral acts of destructive violence against innocent people themselves disqualify Moses and the god he represented.

As we will see in more detail, Christianity fails the test because Christians don't listen to Joshua of Nazareth, they look to Paul or Moses or their favorite religious leaders.

All religions are not equal. Some provide better ethics than others thus accounting for the different general behaviors of Muslims versus Jews, for example. Stated another way, some religions have fewer ethical contradictions and fewer immoral teachings than others, and thus present a better moral framework or principles for humankind than others.

*Many others throughout history claimed to speak for God, but none of them met all three criteria except one. And no one except one provided The Ethical Principle that could solve most human conflict problems, and that principle is "love even your enemies."*

I think we have built an adequate framework to evaluate whether and why Christianity is a successful failure, with one exception, which we will take care of in the next chapter. In the next section, we will examine the primary beliefs and practices of Christians to evaluate whether or not it is successful according to the teachings of the historical person of Joshua of Nazareth.

#### Chapter Summary:

- The four largest religions are Christianity, Islam, Secular/Non-Theist, and Hinduism – their adherents account for about 86% of the people on the planet, or about 6 billion human beings;
- Religions and their God claims can be evaluated using reason and logic by finding contradictions within their religious claims/belief or by identifying non-factual claims of those religions against facts established by everyday observation and experience;
- All religions are the same concerning trying unsuccessfully to meet the real spiritual needs of people;
- If you sort through the claims of the main person, originator or founder of religions on these three bases:
  - They claimed to speak for and represent the Creator;

- They lived out and provided the solution(s) to humanity's most significant problems/needs;
- They performed extraordinary or miraculous works as evidence to back up their claims that they represent the Creator;
- ...all fail except for one;
- Religions other than Christianity have as many or more problems, errors, falsehoods, destructive ethical principles or contradictory claims as Christianity;
- Christians are more accountable for their erroneous religious beliefs and practices since they use the Creator's Messenger for their selfish purposes instead of listening to him and doing what he asks, as we shall see.