

Know Your Faith:
An Exposition of the Christian Worldview

Volume 1 - Existence

Thomas J. Wespetal

Tulsa, OK

2022

Introduction

Forward to the Series *Know Your Faith*

The series *Know Your Faith: An Exposition of the Christian Worldview* is a detailed examination of apologetics, hermeneutics and theology reflecting an Evangelical-Pentecostal/Charismatic perspective. The present emphasis in the church on practical Christian living, which is certainly necessary, has at the same time created a void in the hearts and minds of believers for understanding the foundations of their faith, that is, what they believe and why. This lack of solid grounding in Christian truth can unfortunately lead to shallowness of commitment, lack of perseverance in trials and vulnerability to false teachings and “every wind of doctrine” that passes through the Church. This series is intended to provide believers with a deeper understanding of the foundations of their faith.

This series was first released in the Russian language under the title *Слово о Боге: Евангельское богословие для восточных христиан* (*A Word about God: Evangelical Theology for Eastern Christians*), with about 10,000 copies of the individual volumes presently in circulation, and multiple times more downloads of individual topics from the series (www.russiantheologicalresources.com).

Let us highlight some special features of these books that may distinguish them from other attempts to systematize Christian truth. First, this series gives special attention to the biblical teaching of the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a spiritual experience distinct from and subsequent to conversion, and to the full range of spiritual gifts available to the church today.

Second, the author has attempted to avoid a confessional-theology approach, but instead to employ a biblical-theology one. In the former approach, biblical material is gathered to support positions already defined by a confessional or denominational group. In the latter, a theme is traced chronologically from the beginning of the Bible to the end, allowing the Bible speak for itself and enabling us to investigate how the theme developed over time as God revealed more of His truth. In addition, material from the intertestamental period and the views of the Early Church are at times included in the investigation to demonstrate how post-prophetic Israel and post-apostolic Christianity understood God’s revelation in Scripture.

Third, this series describes and evaluates not only the Western (Catholic/Protestant) views on doctrinal questions, but the Eastern Orthodox understanding as well. The author of this series lived and taught for 20 years in countries of the former Soviet Union and is well versed in the special theological nuances of Eastern Christianity. Rarely do we find a resource where an objective evaluation of Eastern Orthodoxy is included in a systematic theology format.

Fourth, these books defend the Arminian view of predestination, which the author feels best represents the total biblical picture. Although this is not the only systematic theology text that holds that position, it is one of the few that does. We treat the topic with some depth, devoting three chapters of volume 3 to the issue.

Fifth, in volume 4, we utilize the theme “union with Christ” as an organizing center for discussing God’s salvation plan. In this discussion, we will discover that all the benefits of salvation are directly related to and entirely dependent upon the fact that God has placed us “in Christ.” One of the primary goals of this series is to reestablish the preeminence and priority of the long-neglected biblical concept of union with Christ as the all-inclusive principle for understanding and appropriating God’s grace in salvation.

Finally, in distinction from other treatments of systematic theology, we employ here an integrated approach of apologetics, hermeneutics and theology. We do this in order to present not only individual discussions of theological topics, but also a total Christian worldview, beginning with God’s existence, continuing with His revelation and nature, and concluding with an exposition of His plan, expounded under the rubric: faith, hope and love. The order and content of these five volumes progressively unfold the Christian worldview:

- Volume 1 – Existence: Does God exist? If so, who is He?
- Volume 2 – Revelation: How does God make Himself known? What has He revealed about Himself?
- Volume 3 – Nature: What is God like? What is His nature?
- Volumes 4-5 – Plan: What is God’s goal for humanity?

The material in volumes 4 and 5 is organized according to the Apostle Paul’s famous maxim: “But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). The section on “faith” details God’s plan of salvation and how to obtain it. The section on “hope” describes our future after death and at the end of time. “Love” concerns questions of practical Christian living, both individually and corporately in the context of the Church.

We express our heartfelt appreciation for the following tools used extensively in this series:

- Logos Bible Software (<https://www.logos.com>)
- New American Standard Bible: 1995 update. – LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.
- The Greek New Testament / Ed. by B. Aland, K. Aland, M. Black, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger, A. Wikgren. – 4th ed. – Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1993.
- Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: With Westminster Hebrew Morphology. – Stuttgart; Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 2001.
- Wikipedia.org

A final word of thanks to the editor of the Russian version of this series, Sergey Podnyuk, for his careful review of the text and his support in general, to my wife, Nancy, for her assistance and support, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Truth about whom we humbly seek to write.

Thomas Wespetal
tjwespetal@fastmail.com

About the Author

Dr. Thomas Wespetal was born in 1957 in the city of Racine, Wisconsin (USA). He received Christ at age 17 and the following year followed Him in water baptism. In that same year, he experienced the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, after which he began attending Pentecostal and Charismatic fellowships.

Dr. Wespetal studied medicine at Oral Roberts University, earning an M.D. degree. He practiced medicine for several years before answering God's call to the full-time ministry of the Word. He subsequently studied at the Assemblies of God Seminary, receiving a Master in Biblical Languages.

Dr. Wespetal completed his theological education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, earning a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology. His doctoral dissertation was on the topic of God's purpose in martyrdom. In 2008, in connection with his dissertation work, Dr. Wespetal participated in the Consultation of the World Evangelical Alliance in Bad Urach, Germany, on Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom, which subsequently published a summary of his dissertation.

Dr. Wespetal is an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God and served as pastor for four years before devoting himself to teaching ministry. From 1995 to 2022, he taught theology, apologetics, hermeneutics and biblical languages in the republics of the former Soviet Union, residing in Russia and Ukraine.

Introduction to Volume 1

The most essential question in life that every individual must answer is whether there exists a Higher Being, to whom one may turn for help, and to whom one must answer for his/her life. If such a Being does exist, then that being can affect our lives, for good or for ill, more than any other factor can. Therefore, one must ask, "Is there a God?"

It is essential to know not only about God's existence, but also about His nature. Is He one with the universe, or does He exist separately from it? Can a person contact God, or is He too distant from us? How many Gods are there? One or many? Finally, which of the great religious leaders of history is truly God's messenger: Muhammad, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Moses, Baha'u'llah, or all of them?

Clearly, in the religious world, we observe various, even contradictory claims about God's existence and nature. The question also arises, "Can a person know God at all?" Can we even know truth, or are we all slaves to our subjective perceptions of reality?

The goal of this volume is to successfully navigate the labyrinth of philosophical and religious views that exist in the world and, in the final analysis, come to a true understanding of God's existence and nature. We will progress sequentially through the questions posed above, beginning with the possibility of knowing truth at all. From there, we will discuss arguments for and against God's existence, and then His relationship to the universe. Following that, we will attempt to tackle the questions of how many Gods there might be, and finally, who is God's true messenger and representative on earth.

The final chapters investigate the claims of Christianity, in particular, the decisive question of whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead.

Contents

- I. [What is Truth?](#)
 - [Chapter 1: Can Truth Be Found?](#)
 - [Chapter 2: Should We Abandon the Search for Truth?](#)
 - II. [Is There an Ultimate?](#)
 - [Chapter 3: Evidence of the Ultimate's Existence](#)
 - [Chapter 4: Arguments against the Ultimate's Existence](#)
 - III. [Is the Ultimate a Force or a Being?](#)
 - [Chapter 5: Is the Force with Us? Episode 1](#)
 - [Chapter 6: Is the Force with Us? Episode 2](#)
 - [Chapter 7: The Ultimate as a Being](#)
 - IV. [How Many Gods?](#)
 - [Chapter 8: Pantheons of the Past](#)
 - [Chapter 9: Pantheons of the Present](#)
 - V. [God's Special Messenger](#)
 - [Chapter 10: Are a Few Heads Better than One?](#)
 - [Chapter 11: Under the Crescent Moon and Star](#)
 - [Chapter 12: Less Well-Known Contenders](#)
 - [Chapter 13: God's Chosen People](#)
 - VI. [The Way of the Cross](#)
 - [Chapter 14: Jesus: Myth or Messiah? The New Testament: Fact or Fantasy?](#)
 - [Chapter 15: Is He Risen?](#)
- Appendices:
- [Appendix A: Objections to Jesus as Messiah](#)
 - [Appendix B: Martyrdom of the Apostles](#)



Image by Kanenori from Pixabay

I. What Is Truth?

In the first century AD, the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, posed the question that has challenged thinking people of every age: “What is truth?” The discipline of philosophy, which has existed since the beginning of human civilization, arose precisely for this purpose – to discover the nature of reality. The multitude of varying philosophical and religious views, though, testifies to how difficult this task can be. Nonetheless, in order to attain to authentic living, we must tackle the question of the existence and nature of truth. Let us begin our Great Adventure!

Chapter 1: Can Truth Be Found?

A. The Existence and Definition of Truth

We will begin with a simple and straightforward definition of truth, to which, it seems, all may subscribe, and which we will defend and develop in the course of our study. Truth is the faithful description of reality, that is, the description of things as they really are.

Such an understanding of “truth” enjoys wide acceptance among philosophical thinkers. According to Aristotle, for example, truth is “saying of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not.”¹ John Feinberg proposes a similar definition, “If the state of affairs affirmed in the claim matches or corresponds to the way the world is, the sentence is said to be true in a correspondence sense.”²

Before we continue our investigation, we should stop to consider, whether reality really exists. If we define truth as the faithful description of reality, then the “truth” of truth depends on the “reality” of reality. If reality does not exist, then how can the truth describe it? Yet, the form of the question itself hints at its absurdity. Reality, by definition, is that which actually exists. Reality must exist. It cannot be “unreal.”

Still, some may object that “reality” is just an illusion. Nevertheless, they must consider that, by definition, an illusion is a distorted perception of reality. We define an illusion by its relation to reality. Therefore, one who believes that reality is an illusion indirectly confirms its reality. In fact, he/she actually makes a truth claim about the nature of reality – that it is an illusion. That is, the reality of the fact is that reality is an illusion!

Georg Hegel proposed a more developed form of the theory “reality as illusion.” He claimed that “reality” exists only in the mind of God, and that what we perceive in the world is God’s “imagination” at work. Yet, even Hegel must admit that he is making a truth claim about reality – that it exists in the mind of God. He is therefore confirming its existence. Another variant of this approach, idealism, postulates that “reality” exists not in the mind of God, but in the minds of people. Yet, we can easily refute a rejection of reality based on idealism by noting that the mind must exist in reality in order to imagine these “unreal” perceptions.

According to the Hindu worldview, the material world is illusory, or *maya*. The universe is a manifestation or expression of an all-encompassing, unifying factor called Brahman. Nonetheless, Hindus do not deny the existence of reality, but simply describe it as a manifestation of Brahman. When they describe reality in terms of Brahman, they sincerely feel that they are making a truth claim. Even Zen-Buddhists, who teach that at the center of reality lies “emptiness” or “nothing,” do not thereby deny the existence of reality, but simply describe it in terms of “emptiness.”

Next, we can probe into the means by which people are able to perceive reality. Several theories exist. Aristotle, for example, thought that objects in the world somehow reproduce themselves in people’s minds and thereby provide them with direct contact with the outside world. Others feel that the mind produces, with greater or lesser precision, its own image of the external reality. Still others conclude that people do not interface with the outside world at all, but simply correlate their inner impressions to create their own “inner reality.”

No matter how a person perceives reality, reality remains “real.” Beyond human perception lies an objective world that the mind, which itself is part of that reality, does not create, but in some form perceives. If someone accurately perceives reality and faithfully describes it, that person is speaking “truth.” In addition, one who claims that truth does not exist contradicts himself/herself. The claim, “truth does not exist,” is a claim to know the truth about truth – that it does not exist.³

¹Noted in Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. Handbook of Christian apologetics. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – P. 364.

²Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it’s true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. – P. 454-455.

³Geisler N. L., Bocchino P. Unshakable foundations. – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2001. – P. 24 (page number from Russian edition).

Other critics direct their attention to the subjective nature of truth. Although we will discuss subjectivity in knowledge more in detail later, it will be helpful to address it briefly here. Some think that claims that supposedly describe reality are simply accepted by faith by those who embrace those claims. In other words, in order for someone to accept a certain claim as “true” for himself/herself personally, he/she must simply agree with it. Therefore, “truth” is not the accurate description of reality, but simply a person’s agreement with a certain claim.

To this objection, Ronald Nash provides a convincing response.⁴ Those raising such an objection do not account for the difference between the truth of a claim and the personal conviction of the person accepting it. If a certain claim does, in fact, correspond to reality, then acceptance or rejection of it by a person has no effect on its truth-value. Regardless of people’s opinions, fact remains fact.

Let us sharpen our understanding of the nature of truth. Truth possess two component parts: (1) describing the elements of which reality consists, and (2) describing the actual relationships between those elements. Let us illustrate the second component. For example, the true relationship between smoking and quality of life is that, with few exceptions, the former will lead to disease and premature death. However, when we encounter advertisements for cigarettes, these ads characteristically depict attractive young people having a merry time while smoking cigarettes, which leaves the impression that smoking leads to a happy and satisfying life. This is an inaccurate description of the relationship between smoking and quality of life and therefore not “true.” Truth is the accurate depiction of reality.

B. Knowing the Truth: Theories of Knowledge

Throughout human history, serious thinkers have struggled with the question of how one can know truth with certainty. We even use a special philosophical term to describe the search for truth: epistemology, or, more simply, theories of knowledge. What we are trying to determine is how we know what we know, or what our knowledge is based on. How can we be sure that our knowledge corresponds to what really exists? To solve this dilemma people try several approaches.

Perhaps the most common approach is *tradition*. Consciously or unconsciously, people tend to embrace those ideas and values that their culture passes on to them from generation to generation. Others rely for their knowledge more on the opinion of experts or specialists. We call this approach *authoritarianism*. Everyone uses this approach to some degree, since we all cannot be experts about everything. Another popular theory, *rationalism*, accepts as truth only what is logical and reasonable.

Next, *empiricism* bases truth on sensory perception – what we can see, hear, touch, etc. *Mysticism* feels we connect with reality not through external stimuli, but through the inner perceptions of the heart. We know what is true by intuition. *Pragmatism* operates on the principle that truth works in real life. Whatever brings the best results must be true. Others, embracing *fideism*, feel no need to substantiate their knowledge, but simply believe in what they believe.

A relatively new system, called *systematic consistency*, compares various worldviews by the criteria of rationalism and pragmatism to determine which worldview is best and, consequently, true. Finally, some base their knowledge on *revelation* from God. This final theory, in fact, is a variant of *authoritarianism* – appealing to the authority of God.

1. Tradition

All people belong to a certain culture and, by living in it, adopt its values and worldview. As children, they learn these cultural ideals from those whom they consider trustworthy: parents, teachers, religious leaders, etc. Not knowing any better, they passively accept these ideas as truth. These convictions are strengthened by

⁴Noted in Nash R. H. *Is Jesus the only Savior?* – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – P. 63-64.

the fact that the majority of people in that culture embrace them, and that they have a long history of acceptance in that society. In addition, a person's status and position in a society substantially depends on the degree to which he/she conforms to these standards. If a member of society deviates from its norms, he/she is often considered a deviant or even a traitor to his/her social group. Thus, culture asserts a heavy influence on its members. Those wishing to seek truth independently from the influence of culture find it difficult to challenge the status quo.

An honest and thoughtful person, though, will find passively embracing the values and worldview of his/her culture unacceptable. The fact that the vast majority of members of a cultural group live by certain principles does not, in any way, guarantee their value. Just a brief glance at various cultures demonstrates a great variety of norms and values. Obviously, they cannot all be correct. We need transcultural criteria to evaluate the value of the cultural features of any society. It does not surprise us, then, that those who spend time in other cultures or study them often begin to challenge the principles of their own society.

2. Authoritarianism

As we said earlier, authoritarianism involves accepting as truth the opinions of specialists or people with authority. At one time or another, everyone employs this well-accepted approach, since no one person can know everything about everything. It is therefore convenient and sometimes imperative to appeal to those who devote their lives to acquiring knowledge and expertise in some specific area.

Nonetheless, this approach has its weak points as well. First, since there are numerous specialists in any field of endeavor, there will never be a final word as to the truth of any claim. One can always find another specialist who differs from the previous one. Citing specialists can become an endless process.⁵ Second, as already noted, specialists often disagree. Who is to say which one is correct? Several solutions are suggested. Maybe we should rely on the specialist with the best reputation. Maybe it is best to go with the majority opinion. Last of all, some feel that the opinion accepted over the longest period of time is best.⁶

Each of these solutions, though, can fail. There is no guarantee that the specialist with the best reputation is always right. In fact, from time to time, even the best of us makes mistakes. No one knows everything, even in his/her area of expertise. Going with the majority is also not always the best plan. For example, in the Middle Ages, the universal opinion was that the Sun revolved around the Earth. Yet a handful of scholars disproved that. Finally, if we go with the opinion that has the greatest longevity, we make no room for progress. Progress happens when certain people go against age-old traditions and insist on change. We are all grateful for such "radicals," who have introduced into the world something new and beneficial.

James Sire appropriately comments that the large following a leader may enjoy does not always indicate his/her competency, but may merely gauge his/her popularity.⁷ We should not forget that many cults operate on an exaggerated form of authoritarianism. In that case, the adherents blindly follow the leader's direction and may experience punishment for dissent. The results of such an arrangement can be tragic. Authoritarian government systems have often proven oppressive as well.

3. Empiricism

The most straightforward means to obtain knowledge is to draw from observation and experience. In this approach, known as empiricism, we accept as truth what we can perceive with our five senses or prove experimentally. Empiricism has a long history, but it became especially popular in the 17th-18th centuries in England. Its greatest proponents were John Locke and, at least for a time, David Hume.

⁵Geisler N., Feinberg P. Introduction to philosophy: a Christian perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980. – P. 105-106.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Sire J. Why should anyone believe anything at all? – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1994. – P. 65

We distinguish two types of empiricism: “soft empiricism” and “hard empiricism.” Soft empiricism claims that we do indeed receive information from our five senses. This claim seems self-evident. Hard empiricism teaches that we receive *all* our knowledge this way.⁸ According to hard empiricism, one may compare the condition of human reason at birth with a clean, empty slate. This is because the individual has yet to have any experiences or make any observations.⁹

In defense of soft empiricism, we must concur that people do indeed receive an abundance of knowledge through the five senses. R. C. Sproul comments that common sense and everyday existence demand that we use observation and perception to receive information: “We are creatures of sense perception; from this given there is no exit.”¹⁰

On the other hand, hard empiricism has no lack of weak points. Geisler and Feinberg point out several.¹¹ Empiricism alone, for example, cannot explain the origin of things. Nothing we can see is able to explain the universe’s appearance. It seems clear that the explanation of origins lies beyond the visible realm. In addition, such an approach can severely limit our scope of knowledge. For example, for many centuries Europeans knew nothing of the existence of America, since no one from that continent had ever seen it. This did not mean, however, that America did not exist. In addition, the fact that we have no contact with people after they die does not necessarily force the conclusion that they have ceased to exist. It appears that hard empiricism can deny us knowledge of many necessary elements of reality.

One of the strongest early proponents of empiricism, who eventually disavowed it, David Hume, advanced the following argument in its refutation. He observed that the universally held principle of “cause and effect” cannot be sustained empirically. One may note how two events can occur sequentially, but one cannot perceive the causal connect between them. Thus, hard empiricism excludes the existence of a principle that is, in fact, undeniable to any thinking person and thereby demonstrates its inadequacy as a comprehensive epistemological system.

Kreeft and Tacelli point out that the claims of hard empiricism do not even meet their own criteria. How can one empirically demonstrate that through observation and experience alone we can perceive *all* of reality?¹² Raymond adds the thought that empiricism assumes that our sense organs give us an accurate, objective view of reality. Yet, he adds, how can we be sure that this is true?¹³

Several theories attempt to describe how people perceive the outside world. The first theory, *realism*, teaches that with our sense organs we directly contact reality. *Dualism* denies that we have direct contact with the world, but theorizes that our minds create a corresponding mental image of what we observe. What we actually perceive is this idea produced by the mind. Idealism takes this thought even further and denies that the outside world exists at all, but that “reality” is simply a product of the mind and imagination.¹⁴

Yet, not one of these theories can provide us with full confidence that we objectively perceive reality. Concerning realism, we cannot fully exclude the possibility that we at times are seeing an illusion. As far as dualism goes, how can we confirm that the idea in our minds always corresponds to the objective world? David Hume commented that we simply *ascribe* the ideas in our head to objects in the real world.¹⁵ Finally, idealism runs counter to human consciousness. When we interact with people and objects in the world, it leaves us with the clear impression that, although our perceptions may not always be correct, something truly exists beyond ourselves.

⁸Noted in Geisler, Introduction to philosophy, p. 113-114.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Sproul R. P., Gerstner J., Lindsley A. Classical apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984. – P. 87.

¹¹Geisler, Introduction to philosophy, p. 114-115.

¹²Kreeft, p. 365.

¹³Reymond R. L. The Justification of knowledge. – Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1976. – P. 87; Geisler, Introduction to philosophy, p. 115.

¹⁴Geisler, Introduction to philosophy, p. 115.

¹⁵Grenz S. A primer on postmodernism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996. – P. 75.

In conclusion, we must keep in mind that people interpret their experiences differently. It is not enough to just observe or experience the world, one must accurately interpret those observations and experiences to discover their significance. Events do not interpret themselves, but require some outside source of knowledge to give them meaning.¹⁶

4. Rationalism

Rationalism is another method heavily relied on for discerning truth. “Simple logic” is Spock’s solution to every dilemma. In our discussion, we first need to distinguish rationality from rationalism. Rationality, or reason, is the ability of the human mind to evaluate data and reach conclusions. Rationalism, on the other hand, is the epistemological system that requires that we demonstrate and substantiate *all* knowledge by logic.¹⁷ In other words, if a certain claim is in accord with the principles of logic, we can accept it as true. In addition, rationalism claims that we can have complete confidence in the conclusions arrived at by means of logical deduction.¹⁸

Rationalists claim that if the logical argument meets the following criteria, its conclusion is certain: (1) all the terms in the propositions are clear and without ambiguity; (2) the content of the propositions is true; and (3) the propositions logically cohere (that is, they do not violate the laws of logic).¹⁹ The strength of this approach, according to Feinberg, is that “a demonstrably sound argument is coercive in the sense that anyone who wants to retain rationality must accept the argument.”²⁰ At the same time, the claim that a conclusion is totally valid is problematic. No matter how tight the logical argument may be, someone, it seems, will always be able to advance a counterargument.²¹

Several basic principles underline the whole system of rationalism. One of them is *foundationalism*. Here, we assume the existence of certain “first principles” or “axioms” that we discover by intuition. They are claimed to be self-evident and irrefutable, and serve as the basis for all other knowledge. Here are some examples:²²

- The laws of logic (explained below)
- Other self-evident claims
 - knowledge is possible
 - something exists
 - something cannot come from nothing
 - everything that exists has a reason for its existence
 - others

Critics of rationalism object that this system admits logical axioms without substantiation.²³ What if they are false? Can such a system provide a sure body of knowledge? In defense, adherents of rationalism respond that without a concept like “foundationalism” and the axioms that derive from it, knowledge is without foundation. If it is necessary to substantiate every claim, even those that appear self-evident, then we find ourselves in an endless regress of substantiation that can never provide certainty in knowledge. There must

¹⁶Story D. Christianity on the offense: Responding to the beliefs and assumptions of spiritual seekers. – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998. – P. 59.

¹⁷McGrath A. E. Intellectuals don’t need God. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993. – P. 147.

¹⁸Geisler N. L. Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999. – P. 633-634.

¹⁹Kreeft, p. 17-18.

²⁰Feinberg P. The cumulative case method // Gundry S. N. Five views on apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. – P. 121.

²¹Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976. – P. 45.

²²Story, p. 25.

²³Ibid, p. 57.

exist some starting point for rational thought, that is, we must accept certain facts without proof. Axioms serve that purpose.²⁴ In addition, for the most part, axioms are self-evident and therefore have no need of proof.

Another aspect of foundationalism consists of recognizing some truths *prima facie*. This Latin expression means “at first glance.” Here, if a claim initially appears to be obvious, we accept it as true, unless and until contrary evidence overturns that claim.²⁵ On the other hand, what may appear obvious to one individual may not be so obvious to another. In addition, rationalists sometimes disagree among themselves as to what is axiomatic and what is not.

Another basic principle of rationalism is *objectivism*. This refers to the conviction that human reason is capable of correctly perceiving reality and recognizing truth. Reality itself, it is felt, operates on logic. Still another foundational concept is *exclusivism*. Rationalists feel that logical contradictions do not exist in reality. “Facts” that logically contradict each other cannot coexist.²⁶

Aristotle, in his work *Logic*, identified so called “First Principles” that are now famous as the laws of logic. He considered these laws axiomatic and that we can base all other knowledge on them. The first law of logic is the “law of identity,” which states that every object in reality can be identified only in relation to itself, that is, it is different and distinct from all other objects in reality.

The second law, the “law of noncontradiction,” affirms that an object cannot be A and not-A at the same time and in the same sense. For example, a person cannot be a student and a non-student, unless we are talking about different situations or times. A person in a concrete circumstance, though, cannot be a student and a non-student simultaneously. The third law, the “law of the excluded middle,” states that a claim must be either true or false. If we say that today is Tuesday, that statement is either true or false. There is no third option.

In summary, Aristotle’s laws of logic simply explicate the idea that there are no logical contradictions in reality. It is also important to note that Aristotle did not create the laws by which logic operates, but simply discovered the already existing order of things.

Rationalists hold divergent opinions concerning whether or not people can obtain true knowledge by means of sensory perception as well. Spinoza denied that possibility – truth finds verification only by reason. In ancient times, Plato held a similar view.²⁷ Other rationalists, however, allow that we do indeed gain knowledge through the senses as well.

Still other rationalists concede that reason alone is insufficient to verify all knowledge. Among those who admit reason’s limitations is the famous Christian theologian and medieval monk Thomas Aquinas. He taught that by means of logical argumentation, for example, a person can come to know that God exists and that He possesses certain moral qualities. Yet other aspects of the Divine Nature, such as His existence as a Trinity, must come by special revelation.²⁸

In conclusion, let us touch on other objections to rationalism. First, the logical validity of a statement does not necessarily mean that the statement actual describes reality. There is a famous example of this difficulty. We can imagine the existence of a perfect island, which has no defect whatsoever. We can describe this island in such a way, that we introduce no logical inconsistencies. Yet such a description of a perfect island in no way guarantees its existence. More “moderate” rationalists acknowledge this problem and suggest the following qualification. The logical validity of a statement does not always guarantee its relation to reality. Logic is more useful in excluding statements that cannot describe reality because they are illogical. In other words, all that exists must be logical, but not all that is logical must exist.²⁹

²⁴Geisler, Introduction to philosophy, p. 155.

²⁵Ibid, p. 156.

²⁶Story, p. 25.

²⁷Лера В. П. Тело и плоть: платоновское и христианское понимание. Евангельский интернет.

²⁸Story, p. 25.

²⁹Ibid.

Second, how do we know that reality really operates on logic? Maybe it does not obey the “laws” of logic at all. Yet this objection fails in that those who try to defeat the idea that reality operates on logic must use logic to accomplish that goal. We can illustrate this. Let us say that someone claims that reality is not logical, that is, that the laws of logic do not relate to reality. Yet, if someone claims that reality is illogical, at the same time he/she is rejecting the claim that reality is logical. It is unlikely that someone would claim both that reality is logical and illogical at the same time and in the same sense. Accepting one position excludes the other. Thus to prove that reality is illogical this individual is employing a law of logic, specifically, the law of noncontradiction.³⁰

5. Fideism

The next epistemological system for our investigation of how we discover truth is *fideism*. According to this approach, the basis for knowledge is faith. Adherents of this system accept a claim as true simply by faith without any confirmation or substantiation from logic, experience, authority or any other source.³¹

In this context, we will examine the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard,³² whose teaching, as we will see later, also contains elements of mysticism. Kierkegaard believed that in a person’s normal development he/she passes through three stages: esthetic, ethical and religious. In the esthetical stage, a person enjoys life and seeks to fulfill his/her desires for happiness and satisfaction with material pleasures. Although many individuals remain at this stage of development, more serious-minded people will eventually grow tired of such a life and move on.

The second stage, the ethical stage, involves devotion to law keeping and ethical living. Yet an honest person cannot remain at this stage long, because he/she must eventually admit that he/she cannot sufficiently fulfill the demands of law or consistently meet high ethical standards, and abandons this approach for the religious life.

The religious life consists of personal fellowship with God. In this stage, a person abandons law and all objective criteria for discerning truth, and makes a “leap of faith,” after which all knowledge finds verification in personal guidance and insight from God.³³ God personally leads the religious individual and reveals to him/her the nature of reality. A good example of Kierkegaard’s distinction between the ethical and religious life is the story of Abraham’s “sacrifice” of Isaac. In Genesis chapter 22, we read how God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, which proper ethical behavior would forbid. Yet Abraham is not an “ethical” person, but a “religious” person, whom God’s Spirit leads.³⁴

In his teaching, Kierkegaard emphasized that the proper object of faith is not a doctrine, but a Person – God Himself. According to Kierkegaard, the goal of life is not to understand God, but to submit to Him. Norman Geisler describes Kierkegaard’s thought in the following way, “Reality is not found in the objective world of universal reason but in the subjective realm of individual choice,”³⁵ and “(Truth) is *personal* and not impersonal; it is not something one has but what he *is*; it is not what one knows but what he *lives*.”³⁶ In the words of Kierkegaard:

³⁰Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 606

³¹Geisler, Apologetics, p. 47-64.

³²Ibid, p. 50-53.

³³In his day, Pascal also spoke of an “irrational leap of faith” (see Kreeft, p. 36).

³⁴Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 407.

³⁵Geisler, Apologetics, p. 50.

³⁶Ibid, p. 51.

In this way Christianity protests against every form of objectivity; it desires that the subject should be infinitely concerned about himself. It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists, if it exists at all; objectively Christianity has absolutely no existence.³⁷

It is important to keep in mind that Kierkegaard did not advance the type of subjectivism that claims that truth is relative. Like the typical Christian, he felt that objective truth did exist and found expression in Holy Scripture.³⁸ More precisely, he did not teach subjectivism, but subjectivity, which means that although objective truth exists, the subject must still personally experience that truth.³⁹

In defense of fideism, we can say the following. It is interesting to note that in other epistemological systems, faith plays a vital role. For example, as the famous 17th-century physicist and philosopher Blaise Pascal reminds us, rationalism is based on faith in axiomatic truths that are accepted at face value.⁴⁰ In addition, empiricism accepts unchallenged the postulate that our five senses do indeed give us an accurate picture of the outside world.⁴¹ We can say the same for authoritarianism, where people place their faith in the opinions of specialists.

Nonetheless, fideism encounters some serious problems. First, fideists cannot verify the truth claims they make. There are no objective criteria by which to measure them. The opposite claim is also true – there are no objective criteria that can *disprove* a fideistic claim. For this reason, some raise the objection that fideists attempt to avoid all attempts at refutation. Fideism cannot be proven or disproven!⁴² Second, due to the subjective nature of this approach, its adherents can easily fall into deception as to the true nature of reality.

Third, if fideists cannot somehow substantiate their position, it is very difficult for them to convince others of it. Yet if they try to prove or justify their system by means of arguments, they fall into an epistemological trap in that they indirectly confirm the value of logic, since they employ it in fideism's defense. Finally, it is imperative to differentiate faith and personal trust. Trust is a necessary element in forming personal convictions, but it does not require abandoning *reasons* to believe. Trust based on facts and evidence is stronger and more reliable than purely subjective trust.⁴³

6. Mysticism

For discerning truth, mysticism operates on inner feelings and intuition. Other words to describe this experience are an "encounter" or an "awareness." The mystic simply knows within himself/herself that something is so. There is no need for external substantiation of the truths discovered mystically – they are self-substantiating. Mystics feel that one acquires knowledge through the heart. The human mind is too limited to grasp reality's essence. Geisler comments, "Mystical experiences of God are noncognitive. They are not mediated through concepts or ideas. Rather, they are unmediated and intuitive.... they are not discursive. They involve no reasoning processes."⁴⁴

Consequently, human words are inadequate to describe reality. No one can comprehend or speak definitively of it. One can only personally experience it in an inexpressible mystical encounter. Again, Geisler comments, "Although many mystics have attempted descriptions of their experience, most hasten to say that words are inadequate to express it."⁴⁵

³⁷Kierkegaard S. Postscripts / Trans. D. F. Swenson, W. Lowrie. – Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944. – P. 116.

³⁸Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 406.

³⁹Ibid, p. 410.

⁴⁰Geisler, Apologetics, p. 47-64; Kreeft, p. 36.

⁴¹Noted in Sproul, p. 29.

⁴²Ibid, p. 28-29.

⁴³Geisler, Apologetics, p. 47-64; Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 246.

⁴⁴Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 516.

⁴⁵Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 516; Geisler, Apologetics, p. 65-81

Mysticism is typical of Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, which we will discuss in detail later. It is also prominent in Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Russian philosophy as well. Summarizing his study of Russian philosophical thought, B. Zenkovsky concludes, "Mysticism in general proved to be very stable. This persistence of mystical currents among Russian society ... cannot, of course, be explained by any foreign influences or external historical conditions. Obviously, there is some kind of need for this in the Russian soul."⁴⁶

Additionally, we also discover mystical experience in not a few Western, Christian thinkers. Among them, we can mention Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), founder of the theological movement "Romanticism." In his day, Schleiermacher's concern was that a rationalistic approach to Christianity hindered its acceptance. Therefore, instead of reason, he sought to base Christian truth on intuition.⁴⁷

Schleiermacher divided the disciplines of ethics, science and religion by the following criteria: ethics is the study of behavior, science is the study of thought, and religion is the study of inner feelings. He felt that true religion consisted of direct awareness of the Infinite. Yet this encounter defies description in words. Although people differ in interpreting their encounter with the Infinite, the common denominator in a true mystical experience is a feeling of dependence.⁴⁸

In distinction from Schleiermacher, Rudolph Otto (1869-1937) held that the earmark of true mystical experience is an overwhelming sense of God's holiness. This encounter at first produces a fearful awe and reverence, but also includes a fascination and attraction to Him. Additionally, in distinction from Schleiermacher, Otto believed one could in part conceptualize this encounter and in part verbally express it.⁴⁹

Although, along with Kierkegaard, he is often classed among fideists, Karl Barth's (1886-1968) "neo-orthodox" theology better corresponds to mystical theology. According to Barth, God is so transcendent (e.g. distinct from creation) that no point of contact exists between God and humanity.⁵⁰ In order for God to reveal Himself, He must take the initiative to "break in" to human consciousness. Thus, Barth's view has more in common with mysticism than fideism.⁵¹

As far as our evaluation of mysticism, first, we heartily recognize that a normal spiritual life has a "mystical" aspect. It involves not only study and reflection, but personal encounter as well.⁵² In addition, mysticism has the advantage of involving not only human reason, but human emotion as well.⁵³

On the other hand, if someone relies solely on his/her private spiritual experience, that person may easily fall into error. If a person does not avail himself/herself of objective measures to evaluate truth claims, he/she may accept as truth creations of his/her imagination or personal preference. Therefore, we see that the main weakness in mysticism is subjectivity.

In fact, if a person knows nothing about truth before this mystical encounter with it, then how can he/she know that he/she has really encountered truth? By what criteria can the mystic recognize that he/she has encountered God's Spirit, when all of his/her knowledge of Him depends on and derives from that encounter?

Moreover, we recall what we said about empiricism: an event cannot interpret itself. A mystical experience is an event that needs correct interpretation, and that requires reference to some external standard.⁵⁴ In addition, we cannot classify mystical experience as "true" or "false." Since mystical experience is an event, all we can say about it is whether it took place or not. The categories "true" and "false" apply only to the interpretation of the event and the knowledge that derives from it.

⁴⁶Зеньковский В. В. История русской философии (History of Russian philosophy). Аудио-серия.

⁴⁷Lundin R. The culture of interpretation: Christian faith and the postmodern world. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993. – P. 68-69.

⁴⁸Geisler, Apologetics, p. 65-81.

⁴⁹Ibid, p. 65-81.

⁵⁰Thiselton A. P. Hermeneutics and theology: The legitimacy and necessity of hermeneutics // McKim D. A guide to contemporary hermeneutics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986. – P. 147.

⁵¹Geisler, Apologetics, p. 47-64.

⁵²Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 516.

⁵³Geisler, Apologetics, p. 65-81.

⁵⁴Story, p. 65.

Furthermore, those who experience a mystical encounter often radically differ from one another in their perceptions and understanding of God, which shows how imperative it is to faithfully interpret this encounter.⁵⁵ Clark correctly concludes that the divergence among mystics from different religions about their basic understanding of God reveals a fatal inconsistency in the system itself. For example, the Muslim mystic will interpret his/her mystical experience in light of the Quran and come to corresponding conclusions about God's (Allah's) nature. The Kabbalist (Jew) or Christian mystic will interpret his/her mystical experience in light of the Bible and come to differing conclusions about God. Consequently, there is no "pure" mystical experience. Mystics, in truth, draw on a rationalistic basis for their faith – their religious and dogmatic convictions.⁵⁶

7. Pragmatism

Let us quickly survey the theory of knowledge known as pragmatism. Among the most famous adherents of pragmatism is William James (1842-1910).⁵⁷ According to this theory, truth is found in what actually works in life and produces positive results.

Yet, pragmatism has its shortcomings as well. First, all conclusions that the pragmatist arrives at about truth are at best preliminary and tentative. It is very possible that in the future, a certain practice will cease to work or even prove harmful. Consequently, this approach can provide no assurance of its truth claims.⁵⁸ In order to make pragmatism "work," a person would have to possess omniscience, which none of us possesses.

Second, what do we do if more than one practice seems to work equally well? Which one is "true?" Third, who has the right to determine what "works?" For whom does it "work"? What is gain for one person may be loss for another. It usually turns out that pragmatics favor a practice that is beneficial to the majority. Yet, what about the minority? They typically end up in a disadvantaged position.⁵⁹

Finally, Geisler notes that as a test of truth pragmatism is more helpful as a negative test than as a positive one. It is more accurate to say, not that all that "works" is true, but that all that is true will eventually "work." In other words, if a certain conviction or practice never produces any positive results in life, it is more than likely not true.⁶⁰ Although there is value in Geisler's assessment, here we still face the question of what it means that a conviction or practice "works," and who has the right to decide that it does.

8. Systematic Consistency

Edward Carnell championed a more contemporary approach to knowledge called systematic consistency.⁶¹ This theory differs from others in that we do not analyze individual truth claims as to their validity, but we compare whole worldviews with one another. The superior worldview becomes our source of truth in all individual questions. This means that if we accept a certain worldview as true, we accept all its component parts as true without objection or substantiation.⁶²

So, how do we evaluate the quality of various worldviews? Two tests are proposed. First is the absence of logical contradictions in the system. The first criterion, then, is rationalism. At the same time, we realize that, although the presence of logical inconsistencies will invalidate a system, their absence does not automatically

⁵⁵Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 517.

⁵⁶Clark D. K., Geisler N. L. *Apologetics in the new age: A Christian critique of pantheism*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990. – P. 168-174.

⁵⁷Geisler, *Apologetics*, p. 99-115.

⁵⁸Geisler, *Apologetics*, p. 99-115; Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 606.

⁵⁹*Ibid*.

⁶⁰Taken from Story, p. 56.

⁶¹Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 114.

⁶²Geisler, *Apologetics*, p. 116-131.

guarantee its validity. Therefore, we require a second criterion. Adherents of this system suggest a form of pragmatism – the worldview has to correspond to life in the “real” world. Carnell states, “Accept that revelation which, when examined, yields a system of thought which is horizontally self-consistent and which vertically fits the facts of history.”⁶³

Let us specify the characteristics of a quality worldview. It should possess comprehensiveness, consistency and cohesiveness. Comprehensiveness means the worldview captures all necessary elements of reality. Consistency is the lack of internal logical contradictions within the system. Cohesiveness relates to the interconnectedness of the elements of the system within itself. They should form a unified system. The worldview that scores the highest by these criteria is preferred, if, of course, it also is valuable for practical living.

Yet, we can point out weaknesses in this system as well. First, it is difficult to evaluate objectively other worldviews from within the context of one’s own. We tend to give preference to the worldview we already hold and look at other views more critically. In addition to that, we may find ourselves in a “viscous circle.” When we evaluate other worldviews as to their success in describing “reality,” we already have a preconceived notion as to what “reality” is, based on our present worldview. Thus, we will naturally prefer that worldview that corresponds best to our present understanding of reality.⁶⁴

We can restate here what we concluded about rationalism earlier. It seems that systematic consistency is more helpful in identifying weak worldviews, than in identifying the preferred one. If a worldview contains logical inconsistencies or contradictions, or fails to produce positive results over time, then, more than likely, is it incorrect.⁶⁵

9. Divine Revelation

Acquiring knowledge through Divine revelation is, in fact, a variant of the theory “authoritarianism.” According to this approach, we appeal for knowledge to what the ultimate authority, God, has revealed about Himself, our world and us.

At first glance, it appears that this theory has a lot to offer. Since God is faithful, true and all knowing, His revelation should provide us the best access to truth. On the other hand, this theory works off the assumption that God exists and, second, that we know which religion has preserved His revelation. We must somehow resolve these issues before we are ready with confidence to pursue this avenue to truth.

In addition, if we assume that God has revealed Himself in written records, then we face the issue of their proper interpretation. By what criteria can we determine which interpretations are correct? Must we appeal to rationalism, mysticism, pragmatism or some other means to confirm our interpretations? Story rightly claims that religions may claim to have Divine revelation, but those claims must be confirmed by other methods of determining truth.”⁶⁶

C. Conclusions

In summary, we must admit that among all the above-mentioned theories of knowledge, there is no perfect approach. All have their weak points, undermining their authority and subjecting them to criticism, or are dependent on other methods for their validity. In addition, the existence of such a multitude and variety of theories testifies to the inadequacy of each to provide a thoroughgoing basis for knowledge.

⁶³Carnell E. Introduction to Christian Apologetics, p. 190; noted in Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 117.

⁶⁴Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 120.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Story, p. 52.

The fact of human imperfections also complicates the picture, since they hinder our objective perception and interpretation of reality. We must also factor in the influence of culture and upbringing in the formation of our personal worldview.

Therefore, it should not surprise us that the dominant philosophical view in the modern world is skepticism, where people doubt that one can know truth at all. Along with this, many embrace relativism, which holds that every person has the right to determine their own “truth.” We will investigate this move toward skepticism and relativism in our next chapter.

Resources Used:

Carson D. A. The gagging of God: Christianity confronts pluralism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – 569 p.

Clark D. K., Geisler N. L. Apologetics in the new age: A Christian critique of pantheism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990. – 235 p.

Copan P. Why the world is not religiously ambiguous: A critique of religious pluralism // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013. – P. 139-159.

Erickson M. Evangelical interpretation. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993. – 125 p.

Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it's true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

Feinberg P. The cumulative case method // Gundry S. N. Five views on apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. – P. 147-173.

Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976.

_____. Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999.

Geisler N. L., Bocchino P. Unshakable Foundations. – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2001.

Geisler N. L., Feinberg P. D. Introduction to philosophy: A Christian perspective – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980. – 158 p.

Grenz S. J. A primer on postmodernism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996. – 174 p.

Kierkegaard S. Postscripts / Trans. D. F. Swenson, W. Lowrie. – Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944. 577 p.

Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. Handbook of Christian apologetics. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – 400 p.

Lundin R. The culture of interpretation: Christian faith and the postmodern world. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993. – 264 p.

Martin W. The new cults. – Ventura, CA: Regal, 1980. – 419 p.

McGrath A. E. Intellectuals don't need God. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993.

Nash R. H. Is Jesus the only savior? – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – 175 p.

Pinnock C. Reason enough: A case for the Christian Faith. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980.

Reymond R. L. The justification of knowledge. – Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1976.

Sire J. Why should anyone believe anything at all? – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1994. – 239 p.

Sproul R. C., Gerstner J., Lindsley A. Classical apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984. – 338 p.

Story D. Christianity on the offense: Responding to the beliefs and assumptions of spiritual seekers. – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998.

Stumpf S. E. Socrates to Sartre: A history of philosophy. – 4th ed. – New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

Thiselton A. C. Hermeneutics and theology: The legitimacy and necessity of hermeneutics // McKim D. A guide to contemporary hermeneutics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986

Van Til C. Christian apologetics. – Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 1976. – 99 p.

~~~~~

Зеньковский В. В. История русской философии. – Аудио-серия.

*Zenkovski V. V. History of Russian philosophy. – Audio series.*

Лега В. П. Тело и плоть: платоновское и христианское понимание. – Евангельский интернет.

*Lega V. P. Body and flesh: platonic and Christian understanding. – Evangelical Internet.*

Мень А. Христианство

*Men A. Christianity*

## Chapter 2: Should We Abandon the Search for Truth?

### A. Skepticism

As noted in the previous chapter, many people today doubt either the existence of truth, or people's ability to know it. Skeptics feel that diverging opinions about the nature of truth indicates that if truth exists at all, we cannot know it. They conclude that each person should embrace their personal convictions and values, and others must respect them, since no one knows which convictions and values actually correspond to reality. In general terms, this approach is called skepticism. There are two types of skepticism: agnosticism and postmodernism.

#### 1. Agnosticism

The term "agnosticism" comes from the Greek word *agnosis*, which is a combination of the word *gnosis*, or "knowledge," and the negative particle *a*. Thus, agnosticism is the absence of knowledge. In other words, according to adherents of this system the knowledge of truth is not attainable. Consequently, belief in God is senseless, since no one is able to prove His existence.

There are two types of agnosticism: "limited" and "unlimited." Limited agnosticism holds that people do not possess all knowledge. Unlimited agnosticism holds that people do not have any knowledge. No one would dispute the claims of limited agnosticism. Yet the claims of unlimited agnosticism, as we shall see, are highly exaggerated. Historically, names often associated with agnosticism are David Hume, Immanuel Kant and A. J. Ayre.

Since in the modern world, a new form of agnosticism, postmodernism, has eclipsed the original variety, we will proceed directly to a discussion of this new form. Our evaluation of postmodernism will serve as an evaluation of agnosticism and skepticism in general.

#### 2. Postmodernism

##### a. Definition of Postmodernism

Postmodernists also deny that a person can know truth. Yet in distinction from agnostics, they do not object to faith in the existence of a Higher Being. Many of them consider themselves believers in God. At the same time, they feel that faith operates purely in the subjective realm. In other words, one can believe in spiritual things, but he/she may not claim that his/her personal convictions are universally true.

Stanley Grenz generalizes postmodernism in the following way. Postmodernism "marks the end of a single, universal worldview. It replaces these with a respect for difference and a celebration of the local and particular. Postmodernism likewise entails a rejection of the emphasis on rational discovery through the scientific method."<sup>67</sup> Postmodernism strives not to subdue nature, but to cooperate with it. It takes into consideration the whole person, including emotions and intuition. It gives more attention to community.

There are two types of postmodernism: "hard" and "soft." "Hard" postmodernism rejects the existence of truth, while "soft" postmodernism concedes that truth many exist, but we cannot know it. We have already discussed and refuted the claim that truth does not exist. Therefore, in our following discussion, we will focus on the claim that truth cannot be known.

##### b. Origins of Postmodernism

---

<sup>67</sup>Grenz S. J. A Primer on postmodernism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996. – P. 12.

The term “postmodernism” first appeared in the 1930’s to describe a style of art characterized by variety. Later, in the 1970’s it appeared in the world of architecture to describe structures that “purposely explore and display incompatibilities of style, form, and texture.”<sup>68</sup> Now, the term relates to an entire philosophical movement, which has already captured modern philosophical thought. The literary work that likely launched this movement was an article in 1979 by Jean-Francois Lyotard entitled *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.<sup>69</sup>

The term “postmodernism” contains the prefix “post,” which implies the existence of an earlier epoch in the history of philosophy, namely “modernism.” Before modernism, the more ancient worldview “premodernism” prevailed. We will unpack the terms “premodernism” and “modernism,” in order to better illuminate the significance of the postmodern movement.

The era of premodernity stretched from antiquity to the time of the Enlightenment. During this period, people believed that one can know truth and accurately express it in human speech. People also believed in the existence of the spiritual realm and that history was moving in a linear fashion toward a predetermined goal. The main theory of knowledge embraced at that time was authoritarianism. J. Feinberg describes the era of premodernity (in the West) as follows, “The Roman Catholic Church fundamentally told people what was correct to believe, and if one was a Christian, one followed without question. Governments were absolutist, and common people had little choice but to do what leaders demanded.”<sup>70</sup>

As a result of the Enlightenment and the Protestant Reformation, however, thinkers in the West began to question the reliability of the main authority of the time – the Roman Catholic Church. Copernicus, for example, proved that the Church was incorrect in its view of planetary movements. Martin Luther proved it wrong even in religious matters.

As a result of premodernism’s failure, another worldview arose to replace it: modernism. In many ways, its views overlapped with premodernism, but it differed in that many modernists began to doubt that a spiritual realm existed or exerted an influence on life in this world. Erickson describes this phenomenon: “Modern persons were looking for all-inclusive explanations of events and of reality, but believed that this could be done without recourse to anything supernatural.”<sup>71</sup> This led to a movement called “reductionism,” which is the conviction that all knowledge is discovered through science.

Carson feels that a primary feature of modernism was confidence in methodology. This means that if we apply proper methodology for resolving any question, we can have full confidence that our results will be valid.<sup>72</sup> Grenz observes in this era “absolute faith in human rational capabilities.”<sup>73</sup>

The era of modernity saw the introduction of the theory of evolution as an alternative explanation of origins. In addition, humanism occupied center stage in sociology, meaning that attention became focused more on people’s interests than on God’s. Finally, empiricism and rationalism became the leading theories of knowledge, replacing authoritarianism.

Because of this paradigm shift, reason took preeminence over revelation. This meant that truth was based not on authoritative Divine revelation, but on scientific discovery and logical deduction. Correspondingly, deism encroached on theism, and natural law challenged the supremacy of God’s commandments. People no longer saw themselves as the crowning glory of God’s creation, but as just one of innumerable elements in an impersonal cosmos. Grenz expresses the mindset of modernity well: “The modern

---

<sup>68</sup>Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>70</sup>Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it’s true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. – C. 39.

<sup>71</sup>Erickson M. Postmodernizing the faith. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 16.

<sup>72</sup>Carson D. A. The gagging of God: Christianity confronts pluralism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – P. 61.

<sup>73</sup>Grenz, p. 4.

world turned out to be Newton's mechanistic universe populated by Descartes's autonomous, rational substance."<sup>74</sup>

Roy Clements comments on modernity's view of reality and its perception: "Modern thought is based on the presupposition that there is an absolute reality external to the human mind, and that the rational processes of the mind are sufficiently congruent with that reality to give us reliable knowledge of it."<sup>75</sup> In the modern period, people felt that reason can "grasp reality as a whole" and "devise a true and complete description of the way the world actually is."<sup>76</sup> Robert Solomon gives the following description of this period (paraphrased):

At its core, the Enlightenment held to a bedrock faith in the ability of the self to discover universal, binding truths of science, politics, and morality. Since it conceived of human nature as essentially rational, the Enlightenment could claim that every free individual would reach similar conclusions about the most crucial matters of civic, moral and intellectual life.<sup>77</sup>

In spite of this optimism for the triumph of reason, the era of modernity still witnessed differences of opinion and differing points of view among thinking people. Modernists explained this difficulty by positing that, although sound reason leads to unequivocal conclusions, not all people think clearly and rationally.<sup>78</sup>

Nonetheless, modernity seemed to fail on other accounts as well. First, rationalism and empiricism proved inadequate to provide a satisfying epistemological system that could encompass all of reality. Second, in the early years of modernity, people felt that, empowered by this new worldview, society would soon attain utopia. The sad record of modern history, including two tragic world wars, proved them wrong.<sup>79</sup> In summary, Thomas Oden characterizes modernity as "moral relativism, narcissistic hedonism, naturalistic reduction and autonomous individualism."<sup>80</sup> He also comments, "The rhetoric of unrestrained, individual freedom is the prominent earmark of the spirit of modernity."<sup>81</sup>

Since the 1990's, the prevailing worldview has been postmodernism. Main contributors to its rise include Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). Although Kant lived in the 18th century, his philosophy, nonetheless, contributed greatly to the development of the postmodern worldview. Donald Carson describes Kant's influence as follows. Kant "injected into modernity a seed that would grow and grow and ultimately destroy it... Kant argued for a position that has become an axiom of postmodernism."<sup>82</sup> Kant is famous for his publication *Critique of Pure Reason*, which delineates his view of knowledge and how we attain it.

Having noted the failure of previous theories of knowledge, Kant created a new epistemological system that combined features of empiricism and rationalism. He believed that people receive most of their knowledge through their five senses. Yet, information received from the senses undergoes processing by a person's rational facilities. In fact, reason has access to intuitive knowledge, by which it can carry out this processing of sensory input. Among the elements of this intuitive knowledge are such concepts as quality, relationship and time. Kant claimed that with the help of these features a person can make sense of what they perceive from the outside world.

---

<sup>74</sup>Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>75</sup>Clements R. Expository preaching in a postmodern world / Evangelical Review of Theology. 1999. 23. P. 174.

<sup>76</sup>Grenz, p. 41.

<sup>77</sup>Taken from Lundin R. The culture of interpretation: Christian faith and the postmodern world. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993. – P. 85

<sup>78</sup>Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>79</sup>Hodges Z. P. Post-Evangelicalism confronts the postmodern age: A review of the challenge of postmodernism / Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society. 1998. № 9. P. 4-5.

<sup>80</sup>Oden T. P. After modernity... what? – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992. – P. 46.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>82</sup>Carson, p. 66-67.

Kant's system, however, encountered a serious setback. If all a person knows is the picture of reality his/her mind presents him/her with, then he/she has no direct contact with reality. His/her knowledge depends totally on how his/her mind interprets sensory data. In other words, direct contact with the outside world is unattainable. Lundin comments on Kant, "By expressing those insights in a compelling manner, he helped to give birth to perspectivism and the culture of interpretation."<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Nietzsche believed that "all knowledge is a matter of perspective; that is, it is an issue of interpretation."<sup>84</sup>

We observe, then, that Kant's philosophy results in skepticism. If under Descartes people obtained a degree of certainty in their knowledge, under Kant they lost that confidence.<sup>85</sup> R. C. Sproul adds that according to Kant's teaching, faith in God is impossible to verify on rational grounds.<sup>86</sup> Yet, Kant considered faith in God beneficial from a practical point of view. Thus, two types of rationality emerge: "pure" and "practical" rationality. Religious faith falls into the second category.<sup>87</sup>

After Kant, other thinkers developed his views in a way that, according to Carson, would have shocked the German philosopher.<sup>88</sup> Kant taught that the categories of thought for processing data in the human mind were the same for all individuals. That means that if two people experience the same event in the world, they will perceive and interpret it the same way. This correspondence between minds makes possible what Kant termed "transcendental pretense," which enables the formation of a common basis for knowledge. His aim, then, was not to advance skepticism, but to provide a surer foundation for human knowledge.<sup>89</sup>

Yet, certain followers of Kant challenged his assertion about the correlation of all human thinking. They claimed that each person has his/her own system for interpreting input from the world. Culture, upbringing and experience exert a heavy influence on a person's worldview and basic convictions and, consequently, his/her perceptions of reality.

Consequently, such thinkers concluded that human subjectivity not only includes a lack of direct contact with the outside world, as Kant proposed, but extends also to interactions between individuals. Since each person views life from his/her own subjective point of view, he/she is prevented from having meaningful interaction with other people. In addition, postmodernists assert that isolation both from the world and from other people, caused by this subjective perception of reality, is insurmountable. In other words, a person cannot free himself/herself from the prison of subjectivity.<sup>90</sup>

Thus, according to postmodernism, every person perceives the world in his/her own way. Everyone has their own view of reality conditioned by their personal experience in life. Different people may experience the same event, but they interpret it differently. Consequently, every individual lives in isolation, both from reality, which he/she perceives only indirectly, and from other people.

After Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, whom Grenz considers the "father of postmodernism," also rejected the idea that a person is able to objectively perceive reality.<sup>91</sup> Every individual creates his/her own reality by the way he/she processes knowledge. Nietzsche believed (in the words of Grenz) that "we live in a constructed world that comes from our own perspective."<sup>92</sup> His view, known as "nihilism," is the belief that life has no meaning.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, there exist no objective criteria for establishing universal values or standards. Nietzsche calls this the "death of God." All people determine their own values and strive to actualize them and enforce them on others. He calls this phenomenon "will to power."

---

<sup>83</sup>Lundin, p. 53.

<sup>84</sup>Noted in Lundin, p. 38.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid, p. 49

<sup>86</sup>Sproul R. P., Gerstner J., Lindsley A. Classical apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984. – P. 30.

<sup>87</sup>Miller J. B. The emerging postmodern world // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 5.

<sup>88</sup>Carson, p. 67.

<sup>89</sup>Grenz, p. 76, 85.

<sup>90</sup>Geisler N. L. Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999. – P. 192.

<sup>91</sup>Grenz, p. 88-98.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>93</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich\\_Nietzsche#Death\\_of\\_God\\_and\\_nihilism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche#Death_of_God_and_nihilism)



Next, we will examine Wittgenstein's philosophy and its effect on the rise of postmodernity. Wittgenstein held to a theory called "logical positivism," an empirical worldview that advanced the idea of knowledge obtained through the five senses. Logical positivism, in turn, operated on the "verification principle," which claimed that a statement has meaning or significance only under one of the following conditions.

First, it can be a statement providing an irrefutable definition. For example, the statement "a triangle has three sides" is an irrefutable definition. In reality, it must be so. The second form of a meaningful statement is one that we can prove empirically, that is, by sensory perception. For example, the statement "the sky is blue" corresponds to our visual perception. On the other hand, a statement like, "God loves you," is not an irrefutable definition, nor can it be proven empirically. Therefore, it is not a meaningful statement, that is, it does not correspond to reality.

Yet, paradoxically, the verification principle excludes *itself* as a meaningful statement. First, it is not an irrefutable definition. Second, it cannot be confirmed by sensory perception. Therefore, the entire system of logical positivism suffers from the fatal flaw of internal contradiction and cannot serve as a basis for knowledge.

Although Wittgenstein held to logical positivism, he qualified the theory by saying that speech about God does have significance – not objectively, but subjectively. "God-speech" has value if it aids people in practical living. Yet, a believer in God should not claim that he/she knows objective truth about God.<sup>94</sup> Finally, Wittgenstein also advanced the philosophical concept of "language games," which we will discuss later.

### c. Further Description of Postmodernism

In this section, we will more fully describe the phenomenon of postmodernism and highlight the teachings of several of its modern proponents. We will begin with the concept "conventionalism."

According to the postmodern worldview, as we have seen before, every person lives in their private "bubble" of subjectivity in isolation from others. He/she interprets reality from his/her subjective point of view. When someone encounters some object or event in the world, he/she uses certain words to describe it. Yet, since people perceive reality differently, their use of the same words to describe these objects or events eventually leads to confusion in terminology. What a certain word means for one person will differ from what it means for another. We can thus define "conventionalism" by stating that all words that people use have a subjective meaning for that person alone, reflecting that person's personal perception of the surrounding world.<sup>95</sup>

Consequently, when someone reads a text, he/she ascribes to those words not the meaning the author intended, but his/her own personal meaning. Due to the element of subjectivity, the reader does not comprehend authorial intent. Thus, an insurmountable barrier exists between author and reader, which carries the designation "the death of the author," since the reader cannot know what the author originally had in mind.<sup>96</sup>

Clements summarizes the postmodern position concerning authorial intent: "The only question we are empowered to ask is 'what does this text mean to me and my community?' We cannot read out of a text the author's intention. We can only read into a text our own subjective response."<sup>97</sup> Therefore, as Miller claims, the reader does not discover knowledge, but creates it.<sup>98</sup> Postmodernists feel that this "new reading" does not

---

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>See Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 158, 192; Hodges, p. 5-9; Turnau T. A. III. Speaking in a broken tongue: Postmodernism, principled pluralism, and the rehabilitation of public moral discourse // Westminster Theological Journal Volume. 1994. № 56. P. 345, 348.

<sup>96</sup>See Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 158, 192; Hodges, p. 5-9; Turnau, p. 345, 348.

<sup>97</sup>Clements, p. 179.

<sup>98</sup>Miller, p. 11.

distort the text, but rather enriches it.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, in the words of Grenz, “A denial of the reality of a unified world as the object of our perception is at the heart of postmodernism”. In postmodernity, there is a replacement of “knowledge with interpretation.”<sup>100</sup>

Since adherents of postmodernism reject the idea that someone can know truth, they also reject the so-called “correspondence theory of truth” as described in chapter one: that our words really do concur with reality. Instead, they champion the “coherence theory of truth,” which states that human reasoning does not require an accurate description of reality, but simply internal consistency within the individual’s system of thought. In other words, if someone’s worldview is free of logical contradictions, he/she is able to successfully function in life, even if that worldview does not correspond to reality.<sup>101</sup>

Understanding the concept “conventionalism” allows us to move on to another key feature of postmodernism – the “language game.” Although everyone has their own subjective perception of reality, it appears that a group of individuals may still share a common understanding of certain ideas or even have a common worldview. For example, a group of people may share a common view of God’s nature. Because of their common view, they can meaningfully discuss among themselves their common understanding of God.

Still, according to postmodern thought, their “God-speech” is based purely on their common agreement about who God is. Their words about God have no value for describing objective reality, but simply serve the internal function of enabling fellowship between the members. In other words, they are playing among themselves a “language game.”<sup>102</sup> At the same time, it is worth noting that the inventor of the concept “language game,” Ludwig Wittgenstein, qualified his theory by saying that some “language games” do indeed relate to reality, namely, in the areas of logic and mathematics.<sup>103</sup>

In a more “highly developed” form of postmodernism, advanced by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and others, people not only interpret a text subjectively, but the text determines how that person perceives reality. The essence of Heidegger’s thought was that a culture’s language preserves and promotes all the values and views of that culture. A culture thus imposes these features on its members from generation to generation. When someone is born into a culture and internalizes its language, that language determines how that person will think, believe and act. In other words, language creates for that person his/her perception of reality.<sup>104</sup>

Therefore, although language began as simply the avenue for communicating the values and views of culture, in the final analysis, it usurps the place of culture and becomes its defining factor. In “conventionalism,” we say that language is the instrument of culture. However, in Heidegger’s theory, culture is subject to language.

Correspondingly, Ferdinand de Saussure taught that the speaker is “caught in the web of relationships spun by that language and by the social order that nourishes and sustains it.”<sup>105</sup> In Richard Rorty’s opinion, “No power outside language and the human will rules the world,” and Jacques Derrida felt that nothing exists “behind or beneath” language.<sup>106</sup> According to Wilhelm Dilthey, people inherit their worldview from tradition.<sup>107</sup> Lundin describes this view in the following words:

---

<sup>99</sup>Schneiders S. M. Does the Bible have a postmodern message // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 62.

<sup>100</sup>Grenz, p. 40.

<sup>101</sup>Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it’s true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. – P. 454-455; Geisler N. L., Feinberg P. D. Introduction to philosophy: A Christian perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980. – P. 163.

<sup>102</sup>Turnau, p. 345, 348.

<sup>103</sup>Feinberg J., p. 59-60.

<sup>104</sup>Discussion taken from Thiselton A. The new hermeneutic // McKim D. A guide to contemporary hermeneutics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986. – P. 85-92. Another adherent of this view is the French philosopher Paul Ricœur (noted in Lundin, p. 130).

<sup>105</sup>Lundin, p. 188.

<sup>106</sup>Noted in Lundin, p. 240, 192.

<sup>107</sup>Grenz, p. 100.

Every word that we use carries a history of associations and usages with it. When we appropriate language for our own use, we inherit the moral history of the words we employ, even if we are attempting to do nothing more than use those words to get what we want. Words do not simply influence our thinking; they undergird it, they shape it, and they direct it.<sup>108</sup>

Another key term in the postmodern system of thought is “metanarrative.” This is when someone insists that his/her view is true, and competing views are false. Postmodernists contend for the elimination of all metanarratives, since no one has the right to claim exclusive knowledge of the truth.<sup>109</sup> In addition, postmodernists categorically reject any so-called “great metanarrative,” which is a comprehensive worldview supposedly able to explain and define all elements of reality for all people.<sup>110</sup>

Postmodernists think to find support for their theory in new approaches to science, such as the “quantum theory” and “theory of relativity.” Researchers observe that in any scientific endeavor, there exists a certain degree of relativity and unpredictability. Grenz comments, “Certainty simply evaporates at the subatomic level, leaving us with little more than probability and paradoxes... reality does not seem to be composed of independently existing particles at all, but of dynamic relations.”<sup>111</sup>

Relativity in scientific observation finds expression in the widely accepted “Heisenberg Principle,” which states that “there is an essential indeterminacy about all phenomena that no kind or amount of observation can overcome.”<sup>112</sup> Miller adds the following: “The world has come to be seen not as a system of independent atomic parts linked together by external mechanical relations, but, instead, as a dynamic nexus of internal relatings, actual and potential,” and “it suggest that the core of reality is *mystery*.”<sup>113</sup> Bellah views science as a distinct culture, which, in the era of modernity, dominated human thought and compelled all to embrace its values and “facts.”<sup>114</sup> Now, Burnham concludes, “The cultural hegemony of science has ended. The fundamental characteristic of the new postmodern era is epistemological relativism.”<sup>115</sup>

Modern proponents of postmodern theory are numerous, but among the more notable are Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty.<sup>116</sup> In his philosophical reasoning, Derrida concentrated on the function of language, especially in written form. He concluded that once a text is written, it becomes independent from its author and “lives its own life.” In other words, the meaning of the text is not fixed by authorial intent, but the reader can freely interpret it. Conservative author Carl Henry describes Derrida’s thought as follows:

Deconstructionism strips reality and written texts of inherent meaning. It reduces language to but a social construct mirroring the interpreter’s personal perspective. Consequently, every interpreter is free to handle the text selectively, that is, to deconstruct it, and to refashion favored segments into fresh readings that reflect one’s own preferences without evident anchorage in the text.<sup>117</sup>

In many ways, the French philosopher Michel Foucault follows the thinking of Nietzsche, in particular, in rejecting universal standards or values – everything is relative. In addition, Foucault feels those who impose

---

<sup>108</sup>Lundin, p. 138.

<sup>109</sup>Clements, p. 175; Turnau, p. 349.

<sup>110</sup>Grenz, p. 45.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>113</sup>Miller, p. 9-10.

<sup>114</sup>Bellah R. N. Christian faithfulness in a pluralist world // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 75-76.

<sup>115</sup>Burnham F. Introduction // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. x.

<sup>116</sup>Grenz, p. 129-160.

<sup>117</sup>Henry C. F. H. Postmodernism: The new specter? TCOP. – P. 39. Taken from Hodges, p. 3.

their standards on others are practicing oppression. They use their knowledge to dominate others.<sup>118</sup> Postmodernists, in general, accuse adherents of modernity of totalitarianism and consider unacceptable any attempt to enforce personal values on others.

Finally, Richard Rorty embraces a pragmatic approach to life. Like Nietzsche, he rejects the existence of universal standards and values and, like Foucault, feels that people use language to serve their own purposes. In his opinion, the human is “a centerless and everchanging web of beliefs and desires that produces action.”<sup>119</sup> Due to the subjective and egocentric nature of life, Rorty advances the idea of a “pragmatic utopia,” where people learn cooperation and tolerance.

Thomas Oden suggests that the dominancy of relativism in the present age will eventually lead to a return to tradition, namely, to the teaching of the Church Fathers.<sup>120</sup> In fact, some Eastern Orthodox theologians already utilize postmodern teaching to advance this idea.

We will cite Russian Orthodox theologian Andrew Kuraev in this regard. He writes, “Whoever would comment on Scripture, comments more on himself, than on the Gospel... The choice of passages examined and the commentary itself ... depends on the commentator’s experience and cultural background.”<sup>121</sup> In addition, “Interpretation is unavoidable, but there is no absolutely faithful rendering.” Consequently, he accuses Protestants of subjectivity in interpretation: “What do Protestants preach? Just their own understanding of the Gospel.”<sup>122</sup>

Speaking from the Orthodox perspective, Kuraev proposes the following solution to the problem of subjectivity: “The appropriate interpretation of the Holy Text requires a certain internal spiritual experience. Those in the Church who have that experience, to the degree that a person can possess it, we call Saints.”<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, “Orthodoxy has carried through the ages the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, which it received from the initial, mostly Near Eastern generation of Christians.”<sup>124</sup> Finally, “It is illogical to expect religious revelation and religious instruction from a hedonistic, basically materialistic civilization. We are now living in such a hedonistic civilization.”<sup>125</sup>

Thus, Kuraev utilizes postmodern views to his advantage and thereby excludes any interpretation of Scripture by people of our day. In his opinion, only ancient interpreters, that is, the Church Fathers, are able to objectively interpret the Bible. Yet, in response to Kuraev, we ask how he can substantiate that the Church Fathers were not also subject to the influence of the culture of their times?

#### **d. Value of Postmodernism**

Before we attempt a refutation of postmodern thought, we can highlight a few positive contributions it makes. Most notable is that postmodernism forces us to admit that our presuppositions shape our worldview. It is true that culture, experience, education and upbringing exert an effect on our perception of reality. As Carson says, “Postmodernism gently applied rightly questions the arrogance of modernism.”<sup>126</sup> It may certainly also be true that we employ our views to control and manipulate others.<sup>127</sup>

Postmodernism also has value in motivating us to expand our horizons by examining other’s views and comparing them to our own, which can enrich our own understanding. Carson adds the thought that

---

<sup>118</sup>Grenz, p. 6.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid, p. 156.

<sup>120</sup>Oden, p. 34, 57.

<sup>121</sup>Кураев А. Протестантам о православии. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – р. 12.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid, p. 14, 48.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>126</sup>Carson, p. 544.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid, p. 101-102.

postmodernism may reduce “cultural prejudice, racial arrogance, and religious bigotry.”<sup>128</sup> Leslie Mark hopes that we can “rise above the nationalism, the ethnicity, the language, the culture which separates and that we deliberately incorporate people of diverse ethnicities into our family and fellowship. Such an action will not destroy us; it will purify and enrich us as a part of God’s great family.”<sup>129</sup>

Erickson points out another strong point. In the period of modernity, as was noted earlier, many doubted that the spiritual realm existed or that it had any effect on life in this world. However, in the postmodern era, where society no longer feels itself bound to scientific objectivity, people are more open to supernatural phenomena.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Allen refers to the element of “mystery” in postmodernity, which makes it more difficult to exclude the idea of God’s existence. In modernity, people felt more bound to a rationalistic and empirical frame of mind.<sup>131</sup>

Finally, Grenz adds the notion that in postmodernity we view people more wholistically, that is, we take into consideration not only their minds, but also their emotions. Additionally, he applauds postmodernity’s emphasis on community.<sup>132</sup>

### **e. Refutation of Postmodernism**

Although we were able to underscore several positive elements of postmodernism, nonetheless, we also encounter some serious deficiencies that have destructive consequences. We will begin with internal contradictions present in the system. It is highly interesting to note that in propagating their ideology, postmodernists do not hesitate to utilize human language. However, we must ask, “If, as postmodernists inform us, there exists an insurmountable barrier between author and reader, then how can postmodern authors expect us to understand their teachings?” Yet, this obvious contradiction does not prevent them from writing and publishing their materials.

With a note of sarcasm, Hodges writes, “To the postmodernist, all communication is theory-laden and can never point to ultimate reality of any kind. It is, however, interesting to note that *postmodernists continue to try to tell us this by using language*.”<sup>133</sup> Frame reasons likewise, “If postmodernists want to be consistent in denying objective truth, they should abandon the attempt to persuade others of the truth of their position.”<sup>134</sup> In addition, Geisler correctly notes that if postmodernists wish to conduct themselves in a way consistent with their philosophy, then all that remains for them to do is to imitate the behavior of the ancient philosopher Cratylus, who, in response to any question, would simply wiggle his finger to indicate that he heard it.<sup>135</sup>

Plantinga makes the insightful observation that the conviction of postmodernists, that all knowledge is culturally determined, is itself determined by postmodern culture. It follows, then, that the postmodern view of reality is also relative and, consequently, unsubstantial.<sup>136</sup>

Moreover, theoretically postmodernism gives no place to metanarratives. Yet, proponents of this view themselves champion the causes of social justice and support for minorities (which, of course, is praiseworthy). However, if postmodernists forbid others to establish universal directives, then how can they insist that we observe theirs?

In postmodern philosophy, we encounter other illogical elements as well. The fact is that it is impossible to deny the existence or knowability of truth. If a person claims that there is no truth, or that it cannot be known,

---

<sup>128</sup>Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>129</sup>Mark L. E The role of the church in a pluralistic society. – Direction. № 12. Apr. 1983. P. 13-14. Taken from Carson, p. 553.

<sup>130</sup>Erickson, Postmodernizing, p. 19.

<sup>131</sup>Allen D. Christian values in a post-Christian context // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 22.

<sup>132</sup>Taken from Erickson, Postmodernizing, p. 91-96.

<sup>133</sup>Hodges, p. 9.

<sup>134</sup>Frame J. M. The presupposition method // Gundry S. N. Five views on apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. – P. 227-228.

<sup>135</sup>Geisler, Introduction to philosophy, p. 84; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cratylus>.

<sup>136</sup>Noted in Feinberg J., p. 243.

he/she is actually confirming its existence. He/she considers it *true*, that truth does not exist or cannot be known.<sup>137</sup> In addition, concepts like “improvement” or “progress,” which all people accept, cannot exist without a universal standard (that is, a metanarrative). Words like “improvement” or “progress” imply the existence of a universal standard, which all people strive to attain.

In this connection, the following words of Schneiders are especially interesting: “The biblical worldview has ceased to be the going ideology and has become instead a dialogue partner worthy of respect only if it offers something better than what is attainable by other means.”<sup>138</sup> Yet, we must ask Schneiders, “If all truth is relative and there are no objective standards, then what exactly is ‘better,’ and who has the right to define it?”

If postmodernists claim that they do not believe in progress, even here they contradict themselves. The term “postmodernity” itself implies an improvement over “modernity.”<sup>139</sup> As John Feinberg notes, postmodernism is ready to allow different coexisting worldviews *within* its system, but is not ready to admit the coexistence of postmodernity and modernity. Postmodernity, of course, is “better.”<sup>140</sup>

Furthermore, postmodernists, along with Kant, assume that human reason distorts the information it receives from the five senses, resulting in an inaccurate picture of reality and loss of contact with the world. However, why is this necessarily so? Quite possibly, our mind gives us an accurate picture of external reality.<sup>141</sup>

Carson makes the helpful observation that postmodernists fail to make a distinction between the concepts of “true knowledge,” and “absolute knowledge.” They feel that if we are not able to perceive reality with absolute precision, that is, possess “absolute knowledge,” then we should place no reliance on our knowledge at all. However, the fact that our knowledge is partial and imperfect certainly does not mean that it does not correspond to reality in some fashion. It is far better to perfect the knowledge we have than to abandon the search for knowledge completely.<sup>142</sup>

Copan challenged Kant’s philosophy, questioning that if people have no direct contact with reality, then how does Kant know that the real (the so-called “noumenal”) world exists at all beyond the boundaries of human sensory perception (the so-called “phenomenal world”)? The philosopher Joann Fichte (1762-1814), in fact, challenged Kant’s conviction that the real world existed beyond the phenomenal at all.<sup>143</sup> In addition, how does Kant, trapped in his own “bubble” of subjectivity, know that the noumenal world is unknowable?<sup>144</sup>

Furthermore, the claims of postmodernism do not correspond to human experience. Our interactions with individuals and objects in our surroundings convincingly confirms that we indeed have contact with the world. Moreover, the reality, which we contact each day, operates on a logical basis. J. Feinberg writes, “In our world there just are not logically contradictory states of affairs.”<sup>145</sup>

Similarly, the lifestyle postmodernists lead is not consistent with their teaching. They live and deal with life issues as if they really do perceive reality. The distinguished 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher Francis Schaeffer aptly expressed this thought:

Each person is still in touch with the reality of the world... the more closely one lives out one’s presuppositions as a non-Christian, the further removed one is from the real world, and the more closely one lives in contact with the real world, the more inconsistent one is with one’s presuppositions.<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup>Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 158-159, 193, 783; Turnau, p. 363-364.

<sup>138</sup>Schneiders, p. 58.

<sup>139</sup>Erickson, Postmodernizing, p. 29.

<sup>140</sup>Feinberg J., p. 79.

<sup>141</sup>Turnau, p. 364.

<sup>142</sup>Carson, p. 103-107.

<sup>143</sup>Grenz, p. 87.

<sup>144</sup>Copan P. Why the world is not religiously ambiguous: A critique of religious pluralism // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN: 2013. – P. 139-159.

<sup>145</sup>Feinberg J., p. 87.

<sup>146</sup>Taken from Erickson, Postmodernizing, p. 77.

In addition, in the postmodern system we encounter serious practical problems. Without a universal standard (metanarrative), there is no basis for resolving conflicts between people or nations. Clearly, there must exist some universal and inviolable ethical values. Who would doubt, for example, that the holocaust was evil?<sup>147</sup> In the context of moral relativism, life is reduced to a struggle for survival, as Lundin describes:

Instead of appealing to authority outside ourselves, we can only seek to marshal our rhetorical abilities to wage the political battles necessary to protect our own preferences and to prohibit expressions of preference that threaten or annoy us.<sup>148</sup>

We also note, as Linbeck states, that without a recognition of universal standards, genuine discussions and debates lose their potency. Discussions and debates motivate society towards progress and improvement of living conditions. If reality is relative, though, who can prove that their position is “right?”<sup>149</sup> Along with that, we recall that modernism failed because it did not produce the expected utopian society. How about the condition of the world under postmodernism? Are we living in Paradise? It appears not. Carson points to the “intellectual, moral, and existential bankruptcy of the age.”<sup>150</sup>

In defense of faith in absolute truth (not defined as simple “agreement” between parties), we can appeal to the discipline of mathematics. Mathematics operates independently of culture, education or upbringing. Along with this, one cannot dispute the truth of certain natural phenomena.<sup>151</sup> Gravitational force, for example, is evident to all.

Furthermore, we must distinguish the *source* of knowledge from its *basis*. In other words, the fact that elementary education was the *source* of some of our knowledge (which some would call a “language game”) in no way means that the school necessarily created those facts. It is fully possible that those facts are *based* in reality.

Furthermore, we need to consider Carson’s suggestion that postmodernism may be exaggerating the influence of culture, education and upbringing on a person’s worldview. He writes, “Clearly the interpretive community, the nurturing community, the community of faith, plays an important role in an individual’s understanding, but it is not necessarily a determinative or decisive role.”<sup>152</sup> In other words, a person is not necessarily a slave of his/her culture, but may hold to views that markedly differ from it. In fact, history abounds with examples of reformers, who rejected the “status quo” of their times.<sup>153</sup>

We can note still another weakness in this view: postmodernists often practice what we may call “intolerant tolerance.” By that, we mean that in theory they should equally respect the convictions and values of others. Yet, what will they do with those who claim to preach absolute truth: such as conservative Muslims, Christians and Jews? These groups believe that they possess the truth and that all others must accept their teachings.

How, then, can postmodernism respect and affirm religions that reject other religions? In reality, among postmodernists often develops a negative, even hostile attitude toward conservative adherents of such religions. Yet how can one reconcile tolerance with hostility? It seems that postmodernism is tolerant in

---

<sup>147</sup>McGrath A. Explaining your faith. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – P. 129.

<sup>148</sup>Lundin, p. 25.

<sup>149</sup>Lindbeck G. A. The Church’s mission to a postmodern culture // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 49.

<sup>150</sup>Carson, p. 494.

<sup>151</sup>McGrath, p. 128.

<sup>152</sup>Carson, p. 126.

<sup>153</sup>Lundin, p. 139.

theory only, since at times it breeds rude intolerance.<sup>154</sup> Carson comments, “If any religion claims that in some measure other religions are wrong, a line has been crossed and resentment is immediately stirred up.”<sup>155</sup>

Finally, Allen correctly states that humans, by nature, seek significance and meaning in life. This need is best met by a worldview that claims knowledge of absolute truth.<sup>156</sup> Human striving to discover the meaning of life can serve as confirmation that one actually exists. People will not be content for long with a relativistic worldview that denies them meaning in life and the accompanying sense of significance and self-respect.

### 3. Conclusions

In conclusion, we can affirm the following. First, we freely admit that such factors as education, culture and upbringing can effect our perception of truth and can lead to its distortion. There is wisdom in Paul Ricœur’s counsel to maintain an attitude of “hermeneutical doubt,” which means that we are ready to test our views and submit them to criticism.<sup>157</sup>

On the other hand, in light of the many logical inconsistencies in postmodernism and problems in its practical application, we cannot affirm this view or recommend its acceptance. The fatal weakness in this view, it appears, is the claim that the barrier of subjectivity is insurmountable – that people are hopelessly trapped in it. While admitting the barrier of subjectivity exists, we resist the conclusion that a person cannot overcome it to a significant degree, at least to the degree that he/she can not only survive, but also thrive in a reality properly perceived and interpreted.

## B. Interpretive Judgments

In our investigation of the theories of knowledge, highlighted in Chapter 1, we discovered that not one of them meets our need for a substantial system and basis for knowledge. They all have significant weak points. Because of the failure of these systems, many thinkers today feel that truth cannot be known. As a result, skepticism is on the rise, especially in its modern form, postmodernism, which we have just examined. In conclusion, we will look at the system, “interpretive judgements,” which may produce more promising results.<sup>158</sup>

### 1. Description

The key element in this epistemology is the employment of human judgement, which operates in the following way. When we encounter a truth claim, that is, one that proposes to truly describe reality, the thinking person will gather sufficient information concerning the question, unveiling arguments for and against the validity of the claim. Then he/she evaluates the weight and quality of these arguments and on that basis decides whether or not to accept the claim. The more evidence he gathers, the more likely his/her conclusion is valid and the greater confidence he/she can have in the result. We will offer an example.

Let us say that Fred would like to know what time the football game he plans to attend begins. He looks online and also calls the stadium and discovers that it begins at 7:00. However, as he is leaving his home on the way to the field his neighbor interrupts him and states that the game starts not at 7:00, but at 8:00. Now Fred faces a decision. He must weigh and evaluate the evidence concerning the game’s starting time and then

---

<sup>154</sup>Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 158-159; Edwards B. L. Jr. Deconstruction and rehabilitation: P. S. Lewis’ defense of Western textuality / Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 1986. № 29. P. 205-214.

<sup>155</sup>Carson, p. 32.

<sup>156</sup>Allen, p. 22-23.

<sup>157</sup>Newport J. P. Contemporary philosophical, literary, and sociological hermeneutics // Corley B., Lemke S. Lovejoy G. Biblical hermeneutics. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996. – P. 143.

<sup>158</sup>This system is described in Evans P. S. Philosophy of religion: Thinking about faith. – Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1985.



decide how to act, which involves the use of human judgment. First, he knows that the more reliable sources have informed him of a 7:00 starting time. Second, he knows that his neighbor is often confused about times and dates. Based on these factors, he decides the game will start at 7:00 and, ignoring his neighbor's advice, is on his way.

Such a system of thought can apply to any question that may arise in our search for truth. Whenever we encounter various opinions on a subject, we can gather, weigh and evaluate evidences for and against competing claims and make a decision about their validity.

Let us look at the system in greater detail. First, we gather information. In distinction from other epistemological systems discussed earlier, here we can glean evidence from different sources: from logic, observation, experience, intuition, etc. Next, we weight the evidence. Here we consider two factors: the number of arguments for or against the claim and their quality. The number of arguments alone does not settle the question – some arguments are more compelling than others are.

Another key factor: in distinction from skepticism, at the end of our investigation we make a decision about the validity of the claim in question. Skeptics are content to just remain in ignorance. Yet, a responsible person, having looked into the matter, will make a decision and form his/her worldview accordingly. This system differs from skepticism in yet another way: we consider our decision to be “true,” even if we are not able to prove it beyond any possible doubt.

From our study of rationalism, we learned that it is impossible to attain absolute certainty in knowledge. Therefore, we must content ourselves with knowledge based not on absolute certainty, but on high probability. According to “interpretive judgments,” we will consider our conclusions true until and unless another, more convincing option appears. Yet here we must qualify our position. If our investigation leads to a highly probable result, we are free to consider our conclusion “true.” If the probability is not so high, it is better to regard it as “opinion.” We can note also that we can at any time reopen the question if new information or new arguments appear.

It is interesting to note that this is the common approach used in science and in the judicial system. Evidence is gathered, weighted, and then a decision or verdict is made.<sup>159</sup>

It will be helpful to compare interpretive judgments with other systems discussed above. In distinction from “systematic consistency,” we evaluate not entire worldviews at one time, but each truth claim individually. The advantage here is that systematic consistency assumes that all elements in the “best” worldview are true. Yet even the best worldview may contain incorrect features.

In distinction from rationalism, the theory of interpretive judgments does not require that we defend a position beyond all possible doubt. We can accept as true the claim that has the highest probability of truth. In addition, in interpretive judgments, as already mentioned, we may accept evidence from other sources besides logic. On the other hand, we note a common feature between the two systems: both utilize reason in the evaluation of truth claims.

Interpretive judgments excels over postmodernism in that, after investigating a question, we make a decision about the issue at hand. Postmodernists refuse to do this.

## **2. Answers to Objections**

At the same time, some raise objections to “interpretive judgments.” First, some question whether one can devote himself/herself to a “truth,” that he/she cannot prove beyond all possible doubt. Yet, in everyday life, we do this all the time. Whenever we make a decision, there always exists an element of doubt that we made the correct decision. This is true concerning very important life decisions as well. For example, we

---

<sup>159</sup>Story, p. 73.

choose our spouse not fully knowing whether or not it will be a good match. Yet, in order to live in the real world, one has to make choices.<sup>160</sup>

Others object that probability cannot lead to certainty. Let us try to explain. We measure probability by the ratio of positive factors to total factors considered. Yet, no matter how much we increase the denominator, we will never reach 100% certainty if at least one factor is negative. In response, we note that one can spot tendencies in results that will lend confidence to one's conclusions without needing to consider all possible factors. Moreover, we consider not only the number of factors considered, but also their weight or importance to the matter at hand. Finally, to increase confidence one can always increase the number of factors considered.

Let us further investigate the idea of certainty, since it exists in different degrees. *Apodictic certainty* is certainty at 100%. We find this level of confidence only in mathematics. Rationalists propose this level of certainty for their system, but, as we have already seen, they are unsuccessful in attaining it. Next, there is *psychological certainty*, where an individual is convinced that a certain position is true.<sup>161</sup> Investigative judgments offers not apodictic certainty, but psychological certainty. A person basis his/her knowledge on personal conviction. Yet his/her conclusions are not based merely on subjectivity or personal preference, but on a high level of probability derived from his/her investigation of the question.

In defense of investigative judgments, Dan Story writes the following, "Although probability leaves the door open for error, it is the closest we can come to absolute truth outside of self-evident or self-defining first principles. Probability conclusions, derived from objective evidence, are the most trustworthy method there is for acquiring and testing truth. They reveal the clearest and most logical choices between conflicting alternatives."<sup>162</sup>

William Craig, who champions the system "systematic consistency," nonetheless echoes Story's thoughts: "The fact that this type of knowledge cannot be absolutely certain should not discourage us, for virtually all our knowledge is based on probability, even the knowledge that other people exist or that the earth is round."<sup>163</sup> Clark Pinnock explains that we do not have access to a level of certainty beyond probability. He writes, "We will be dealing here with reasonable probabilities. No world view offers more than that."<sup>164</sup>

The citations above aid us in answering another objection. If we are not able to prove our position beyond all possible doubt, can we effectively convince others of our position, since they will always have room to raise objections to it?<sup>165</sup> As we have already stated, knowledge based on probability is the best we can do in this present life, and we must work within these limitations. Besides this, we can point out to our "opponent" the inadequacy of rationalism as a theory of knowledge in the hopes that, abandoning that system, he may find our arguments adequately convincing.

Another objection: "After we reach the decision point, can we still grow in knowledge? Does it now follow that after the decision is reached, one is no longer open to other possibilities? Not necessarily. A question can always be revisited, more evidence examined and a different conclusion reached. So then, interpretive judgments does allow growth in knowledge."<sup>166</sup>

Critics may also claim that when a person views evidences from within his/her worldview he/she is already prejudiced to favor that opinion that best coincides with that worldview. Certainly, this can be the case. We have already conceded that, in their perception of reality, people are affected by their presuppositions. Yet, as

---

<sup>160</sup>Evans P. S. *Philosophy of religion*.

<sup>161</sup>Geisler, *Philosophy*, p. 120.

<sup>162</sup>Story, p. 67.

<sup>163</sup>Craig W. L. *Apologetics: An introduction*. – Chicago, IL: Moody, 1984. – P. 22.

<sup>164</sup>Pinnock C. *Reason enough: A case for the Christian faith*. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980. – P. 18.

<sup>165</sup>Sproul, p. 148; Feinberg P. *The cumulative case method* // Gundry S. N. *Five views on apologetics*. – Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000. – P. 150. Thomas Aquinas anticipated this objection (see Craig, p. 8).

<sup>166</sup>Evans P. S. *Philosophy of religion*.

we also stated, human subjectivity is not insurmountable, and an honest observer will be able to handle the facts fairly.

Still others may object that in the system “interpretive judgments,” there is no philosophical basis for acceptance of a truth claim, only a practical, pragmatic one. We may establish a philosophical basis by seeking to substantiate every logical proposition in favor of the more plausible position. These substantiating propositions, in turn, can be substantiated by still others.

This seemingly endless process of substantiation, however, does have endpoints: (1) if we accept a certain proposition as axiomatic, or (2) if we accept a certain claim *prima facie*, that is, if a claim initially appears to be obvious, we accept it as true, unless and until contrary evidence overturns that claim. Such claims need no further substantiation.

Therefore, the more substantiation these propositions have, the greater the probability that the conclusion they lead to is valid. But here interpretive judgment fundamentally differs from rationalism. Only the latter system requires substantiation fully reduced to axiomatic statements. The former system only requires substantiation leading to a high degree of probability.

The last objection for our consideration is as follows. Kreeft sees an inconsistency in interpretive judgment’s claim that we should base our knowledge on probability. He wonders whether we can have full confidence, that is certainty, in a *system* based on probability?<sup>167</sup> It is a fair question. The fact is that interpretive judgment, since it operates on probability rather than certainty, cannot offer full assurance of the total reliability of the system itself. Yet, no other epistemological system can prove its reliability beyond all doubt either. Instead, in comparison with other epistemological systems we have discussed, interpretive judgment can make the claim to be *better* than competing theories of knowledge. In this section, we have convincingly demonstrated this claim.

Finally, the old adage rings true: “Time will tell.” Even if some of our interpretive judgements are in error, the mistake most likely will eventually become apparent in time.

## Resources Used:

Allen D. Christian values in a post-Christian context // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 20-36.

Bellah R. N. Christian faithfulness in a pluralist world // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 74-91.

Burnham F. Introduction // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – 111 p.

Carson D. A. The gagging of God: Christianity confronts pluralism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – 569 p.

Clements R. Expository preaching in a postmodern world / Evangelical Review of Theology. 1999. 23. P. 174-182.

Copan P. Why the world is not religiously ambiguous: A critique of religious pluralism // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 139-159.

Craig W. L. Apologetics: An introduction. – Chicago, IL: Moody, 1984.

---

<sup>167</sup>Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. Handbook of Christian apologetics. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – P. 367.

- Edwards B. L. Jr. Deconstruction and rehabilitation: C. S. Lewis' defense of Western textuality / Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 1986. № 29. P. 203-213.
- Ehrman B. D. The text of Mark in the hands of the orthodox // Burrows M.S., Rorem P. Biblical hermeneutics in historical perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991. – P. 20-21.
- Erickson M. Evangelical interpretation. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993. – 125 p.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Postmodernizing the faith. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – 157 p.
- Evans C. S. Philosophy of religion: Thinking about faith. – Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1985.
- Feinberg P. The cumulative case method // Gundry S. N. Five views on apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.
- Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it's true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. – 487 p.
- Frame J. M. The presupposition method // Gundry S. N. Five views on apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. – P. 208-232
- Geisler N. L. Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.
- Geisler N. L., Feinberg P. D. Introduction to philosophy: A Christian perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980.
- Goldingay J. Models for interpretation of Scripture. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.
- Grenz S. J. A primer on postmodernism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996. – 174 p.
- Hodges Z. C. Post-Evangelicalism confronts the postmodern age: A review of the challenge of postmodernism / Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society. 1998. № 9. P. 3-14.
- Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. Handbook of Christian apologetics. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994. – 400 p.
- Lindbeck G. A. The church's mission to a postmodern culture // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 37-55.
- Lundin R. The culture of interpretation: Christian faith and the postmodern world. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993. – 264 p.
- Mark L. E The role of the church in a pluralistic society. – Direction. № 12. Apr. 1983. P. 7-14.
- McGrath A. Explaining your faith. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – 152 p.

Miller J. B. The emerging postmodern world // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 1-19.

Newport J. P. Contemporary philosophical, literary, and sociological hermeneutics // Corley B., Lemke S. Lovejoy G. Biblical hermeneutics. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996.

Oden T. C. After modernity ... What? – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992. – 201 p.

Pinnock C. Reason enough: A case for the Christian faith. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980. – 126 p.

Schneiders S. M. Does the Bible have a postmodern message // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 56-73.

Sproul R. C., Gerstner J., Lindsley A. Classical apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984. – 338 p.

Story D. Christianity on the offense: Responding to the beliefs and assumptions of spiritual seekers. – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998.

Turnau T. A. III. Speaking in a broken tongue: Postmodernism, principled pluralism, and the rehabilitation of public moral discourse / Westminster Theological Journal. 1994. № 56. P. 345, 348.

Watson F. Text, Church and world: Biblical interpretation in theological perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

Williams R. D. Postmodern theology and the judgment of the world // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 92-111.

~~~~~

Кураев А. Протестантам о православии. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003.
Kurayev A. To Protestants about Orthodoxy. – 7th ed. – Rostov-on-Don: Trinitarian Word, 2003.

~~~~~

wikipedia.org



Image by Daniel Reche from Pixabay

## II. Is There an Ultimate?

In our search for ultimate truth, the first and most important question we must ask is about the existence of a Supernatural Force or Higher Being or Beings. If such a Force or Being exists, its existence will affect our lives in every respect. Such a Being could be the cause of more good or more harm than any other could.

In their work, *Does God Exist?*, Moreland and Nielsen aptly express this thought: “The idea of God has guided or deluded more lives, changed more history, inspired more music and poetry and philosophy than anything else, real or imagined. It has made more of a difference to human life on this planet, both individually and collectively, than anything else ever has.”<sup>168</sup> Therefore, we must investigate the question, “Is there a God?”

---

<sup>168</sup>Moreland J. P., Nielsen K. *Does God exist?* – Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993 – P. 11.

## Chapter 3: Evidence of the Ultimate's Existence

Although we will be using the term “God,” that does not mean we are already ready to define His (or Her) nature. Possibly, the terms “Force” or “Gods” would be more appropriate. Yet, for convenience’s sake, for the time being we will speak of this Higher Force or Being(s) as “God.” Later we will discuss, if such a Being exists at all, what His nature might be like.

Philosophical thinkers have long recognized that it is impossible to prove the non-existence of something. Proving that God does not exist requires omniscience and omnipresence. One has to be in all places at all times throughout the universe and beyond in order to demonstrate that God is not there. Frame agrees, “You would need omniscience to know that there is not God anywhere in the universe.”<sup>169</sup> Nonetheless, believers in God are incumbent to show convincing proof of His real existence.<sup>170</sup>

Various proofs for God’s existence are offered: philosophical, scientific, psychological and historical. If these proofs are sufficiently weighty and convincing, then, according to our epistemological system, “interpretive judgments” (see chapter 2), faith in the Ultimate’s existence is both reasonable and acceptable.

### A. Philosophical Proofs

The philosophical proofs for God’s existence are the “cosmological argument” and the “teleological argument” (or, “intelligent design”). A third philosophical proof, the “ontological argument,” finds little support in philosophical thought today.

#### 1. Cosmological Argument

When asked how the universe arose, believers in God quickly respond that God created it. They argue that His existence is the best explanation for the origin of everything else. We call this the “cosmological argument.” There are, in fact, only three possible explanations for the appearance of the universe: it always existed, it spontaneously arose from nothing, or it was created by a Higher Power or is a manifestation of His Being.<sup>171</sup>

It is highly unlikely that the universe exists eternally. Nothing that we observe in nature is totally self-sustaining or free from change. Everything on planet Earth, for example, undergoes decay and deterioration. Nothing lasts forever. Even in space, we observe change. Stars, for example, undergo a definite lifecycle, then expire and disappear. According to our observations, nothing in the universe can sustain its own existence forever.

Furthermore, according to modern scientific theory, the universe was formed by a “big bang,” which shows that not only individual elements of the universe had a beginning, but also the universe itself had a starting point. Copan concludes, “Indeed, the big bang gives us very good reason for thinking that something independent of the universe brought it into existence.”<sup>172</sup>

Some posit an “oscillating universe,” where, after the “big bang,” the universe collapses into a mass, explodes, and another cycle begins. This theory, however, suffers from major difficulties. First, this process

---

<sup>169</sup>Frame J. M. The presupposition method // Gundry S. N. Five views on apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. – P. 224.

<sup>170</sup>Sproul R. P., Gerstner J., Lindsley A. Classical apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984. – P. 69.

<sup>171</sup>Sproul adds a fourth option: that all is illusionary (see Sproul, Apologetics, p. 115). However, we already discussed and refuted that variant in chapter 1.

<sup>172</sup>Copan P. Why the world is not religiously ambiguous: A critique of religious pluralism // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013. – P. 145.

cannot occur without a loss of energy, which would eventually cause the process to cease. Second, the mass of the universe is insufficient to generate enough gravitational force to collapse its expanding mass.<sup>173</sup>

According to the second option, the universe spontaneously appeared by itself. This is also highly improbable. It is hard to image that somehow the complex system of stars, planets and all they contain originated from nothing. Nothing cannot become something, since “nothing” does not possess any positive qualities, including the ability to produce “something.” Nothing remains “no-thing”. Copen concurs, “If something *begins* to exist, then it must come from being, not nonbeing. Something can’t come from nothing, since there is no *potential* for anything to begin existing.”<sup>174</sup>

Critics respond that in quantum mechanics a photon of light, supposedly, can arise from nothing – the so-called “quantum ghost.” However, it is likely that in this relatively new discipline of study, the origin of this phenomenon has not yet been discovered. In addition, this phenomenon is observed only on the subatomic level. It is hard to image that it can apply to the origin of the entire universe as well.<sup>175</sup>

Thus, there remains only one logical explanation for the origin of the universe and all that it contains – to posit the existence of a Higher Power or Being, who either is able to create the universe, or manifests Himself in it.

The origins of the cosmological argument trace back to antiquity, namely, to the philosophy of Aristotle. In the Middle Ages, it found support from both Christians and Moslems. A prominent adherent among the former was Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and among the latter – Al-Kindi (801-873).

The cosmological argument exists in three forms. The first consists of the following propositions: (1) if something exists, then something caused it to exist, and (2) this process of causation cannot go on without a beginning. Therefore, (3) there must exist a First Cause, who is uncaused.<sup>176</sup> Kreeft concurs that only an uncaused being that has existence can give existence to other beings.<sup>177</sup>

The English empiricist (and later skeptic) David Hume sharply criticized this variant of the cosmological argument. According to his empirical worldview, we must confirm every real phenomenon empirically, that is, by sensory perception. Yet, Hume noted that the principle of “cause and effect” did not pass the test of empirical verification, since someone may note how two events can occur sequentially, but he/she has no sensory perception of the causal connection between them. Therefore, we cannot view the universe as a “consequence” that has a cause, namely a “First Cause,” that gave rise to its existence.<sup>178</sup> Following Hume, atheists continue to appeal to an empirical worldview, as Sproul notes, “Twentieth-century atheism has followed largely along the same lines of restricting knowledge to the visible realm. In both existential and analytical philosophy, there has been a wholesale abandonment of metaphysical inquiry.”<sup>179</sup>

Yet, Hume’s objection is not insurmountable. As we saw earlier, empiricism alone cannot function as a comprehensive system of knowledge. It seems that an exclusive reliance on empiricism can severely limit our understanding of reality.

Hume further objects that even if one could establish the principle of “cause and effect,” he/she can do so only by observing multiple instances of corresponding events. The creation of the world, however, occurred only once. Therefore, Hume concludes, we cannot posit its causation. On the other hand, if we substantiate the *principle* of “cause and effect” by examining many examples, we can apply it to single occurrences as well, like the creation of the world. Without question, one can conclude that the principle of causation has been well established in human experience.

---

<sup>173</sup>Moreland J. P. *Scaling the secular city: A defense of Christianity*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987. – P. 33-34.

<sup>174</sup>Copen, p. 145.

<sup>175</sup>Moreland, p. 38-39; Sproul, *Apologetics*, p. 112.

<sup>176</sup>Little P. *Know why you believe*. – 4th ed. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000. – P. 24.

<sup>177</sup>Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. *Handbook of Christian apologetics*. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – P. 51.

<sup>178</sup>Geisler N. L. *Christian apologetics*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976. – P. 251ff.

<sup>179</sup>Sproul R.P. *If there's a God, why are there atheists?* – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1974. – P. 23.



The cosmological argument's second variant concerns the movement of bodies in the universe. Here we propose that if something is in movement, then something else caused it to move. Yet, that process must have a beginning. Therefore, there exists a "Prime Mover," whose movement is uncaused. Thomas Aquinas qualified this argument by pointing out that animate beings, such as humans, have no need of external stimuli, but are able to propel themselves. Nonetheless, one still has to explain the movement of inanimate objects. Therefore, there still exists a need for a "Prime Mover."<sup>180</sup>

Several objections exist to this form of the cosmological argument. First, the existence of a "Prime Mover" only forces the conclusion that such a Force or Being has sufficient power to launch the universe into motion. It does not prove the existence of an almighty, all-knowing God.<sup>181</sup> Second, this argument also fails to demonstrate God's unity. Maybe there are more than one "Prime Movers." Third, is it possible that, after creating the universe, this "Prime Mover" or "First Cause" exhausted all its energy and ceased to exist?<sup>182</sup>

In response, believers in God simply point out that the goal of the cosmological argument is not to prove the existence of the God of any certain religion. It simply seeks to demonstrate that a Higher Power(s) or Being(s) exists. Who that Power or Being turns out to be is demonstrated by other, subsequent considerations. Although the cosmological argument alone cannot prove a comprehensive description of God, nonetheless, we can reach certain conclusion about His nature based on it. Geivett states, "This agent must have sufficient power, intelligence, and motive for bringing into existence a universe such as ours."<sup>183</sup> Kreeft adds that this agent must also be personal, since an impersonal object has no motive or impulse to create.<sup>184</sup>

As far as this "Prime Mover" exhausting its power and ceasing to exist, it is highly unlikely that such a Being would commit "ontological suicide." The created universe would still need this Higher Being's support, and so the latter would likely desire to continue to exist. In addition, a Being with sufficient wisdom to create an impressively complex universe would know how to accomplish this without jeopardizing its own existence. Also in refutation, Kreeft asserts that a Being, which exists outside of time, cannot cease to exist, because there is no point in "time," when this could occur.<sup>185</sup>

The third variant of the cosmological argument works off the idea of necessity.<sup>186</sup> From our observations, there is no object in the universe that is absolutely necessary for the rest of the universe to exist. We could remove any single element, like plants, animals, people, even our sun, and the universe would continue to function without them. Therefore, there seems to be no "necessary" object or being, without whom the universe could not be. How, then, did the universe ever appear? Believers in God propose the existence of a "Necessary Being," upon whom all else depends, and who exists beyond our scope of observation. This "Necessary Being" they call God.

Critics of this argument suggest that somewhere in our vast universe, this "necessary element" might exist, but we have not discovered it yet. Yet, we recall that according to our present observations nothing in the universe has the quality of eternally sustaining its existence. Therefore, the burden of proof lies with those who assume the existence of this "necessary element." More likely, such an "element" exists beyond the limits of the universe in a realm beyond human perception.

We must address several final objections to the cosmological argument in general. First, some explain the origins of the universe not by a "First Cause," but by an infinite regress of causality. In other words, every

---

<sup>180</sup>Noted in Craig, p. 64.

<sup>181</sup>Dawkins R. *The God delusion*. – Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006. – P. 101 (paperback ed.).

<sup>182</sup>Reymond R. L. *The justification of knowledge*. – Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1976. – P. 120-122 (with reference to Carnell E. J. *An introduction to Christian apologetics*. – 4th ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952. – P. 129-134).

<sup>183</sup>Geivett R. D. *Religious diversity and the futility of neutrality* // Stewart R. B. *Can only one religion be true?* – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 190.

<sup>184</sup>Kreeft, p. 60; Moreland, p. 41-42.

<sup>185</sup>Kreeft, p. 60.

<sup>186</sup>This argument is found in the thinking of Leibniz as well (see Craig, p. 65-66).

effect has a cause, which, in turn, has a cause, etc., and this process has no starting point. Critics cite mathematics in support of this theory, where numbers and fractions go on to infinity.

One answer to this challenge is the existence of mathematical principles themselves. How did such a universal order arise that functions consistently with the laws of mathematics? Who or what established these principles? It must have a causal factor.

The Islamic philosopher Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) advanced an interesting argument to refute the idea of an infinite regress of causation.<sup>187</sup> He points out that without a starting point, history could not move forward to the present time. If there is no starting point, then there can be no sequence (one event following another). Thus, without the phenomenon of “sequence,” there can be no “history.” However, if an Eternal Being, existing outside of time, created the universe, then from that initial moment history, and time itself, may begin.<sup>188</sup>

Critics again object that if *everything* has a cause, then who caused God?<sup>189</sup> One may respond that logical necessity demands the existence of an eternal Being who has no beginning. This claim is much more plausible than to claim that impersonal matter, which has no means to support its own existence, exists eternally. A personal Being, however, can possess such a quality.

Finally, according to Kant’s epistemology, people have no direct contact with reality, but simply rely on the picture of reality presented by the mind. If this is true, then the principle of causation, essential for the cosmological argument, may simply be a fiction of human imagination.<sup>190</sup> On the other hand, earlier we discussed Kant’s skepticism and offered a convincing refutation of it. Therefore, one need not be troubled by human subjectivity undermining the cosmological argument.

In conclusion, Story gives the following excellent summary of the cosmological argument:

Everything in the universe is contingent; it depends on something else for its existence. A tree depends on minerals, water, and sunshine. Canyons depend on erosion. Living things depend on other living things from which they are born. This implies that there must be a first cause – something from which all else springs.... While everything has a cause for its existence, God is self-existing. He had no cause. He has no justification for His existence because He always existed and is the source of everything else.<sup>191</sup>

## 2. Teleological Argument (Intelligent Design)

The adjective “teleological” comes from the Greek term *telos*, which means “goal.” The thrust of this argument is that the order and harmony seen in nature’s operation proves God’s existence. Kreeft, for example, speaks of the “overwhelming pervasiveness of order and regularity” in the world.<sup>192</sup> He notes that how the elements of the universe “*exist and coexist* display an intricately beautiful order and regularity that can fill even the most casual observer with wonder.”<sup>193</sup> Believers in God conclude that random processes cannot explain the order and harmony seen in nature, but their presence requires faith in a “Great Designer,” who ordered all things according to a predetermined plan.

Like the cosmological argument, the origins of the teleological argument trace back to antiquity – to the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. In the Middle Ages, a prominent adherent was Thomas Aquinas. In 1804,

---

<sup>187</sup>See Craig, p. 63.

<sup>188</sup>Moreland, p. 34.

<sup>189</sup>Dawkins, p. 100 (paperback ed.).

<sup>190</sup>Noted in Sproul, *Apologetics*, p. 31.

<sup>191</sup>Story D. *Christianity on the offense: Responding to the beliefs and assumptions of spiritual seekers.* – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998. – P. 24.

<sup>192</sup>Kreeft, p. 56.

<sup>193</sup>*Ibid*, p. 55.

William Payne wrote the book *Natural Theology*, in which he introduced the now-famous illustration of a man finding a watch in a field and immediately concluding that a watchmaker had constructed it. In a similar way, any person observing the mastery of creation order would naturally conclude that someone had designed it.<sup>194</sup> In modern times, Moreland echoes this argument from analogy: “The world or some facet of it resembles human artifacts in order and movement toward an end, and since the latter are also designed by a mind, it is reasonable to see the former as designed by a mind as well.”<sup>195</sup>

Nonetheless, there exist two competing views to explain order in the universe. Either this harmony and mutual interdependence developed spontaneously, or a Great Designer created this order. These two views correspond to an atheistic and theistic worldview respectively. The latter is often known as the theory of “intelligent design.”

In defense of intelligent design, it seems clear that our planet was created for a specific goal – to support life. Numerous factors support this claim, such as the distance of the earth from the sun, the earth’s gravitation force, the speed of earth’s rotation, the composition of the atmosphere, and many others. The slightest deviation in these variants would make life on this planet impossible. Even atheist Richard Dawkins admits, “Physicists have calculated that, if the laws and constants of physics had been even slightly different, the universe would have developed in such a way that life would have been impossible.”<sup>196</sup> Consequently, Moreland claims, “The accidental coalescing of these factors is immensely improbable.”<sup>197</sup>

We may cite still more examples of order on the planet itself. Plants and animals seem perfectly adapted for their surroundings and are able not only to survive, but also to thrive. Plants receive their energy directly from the sun and release into the atmosphere oxygen, essential for the survival of animals and humans. Animals also demonstrate amazing abilities. A bat, for example, utilizes an ultrasound signal to identify its prey. The system works with such precision that a bat can distinguish a flying insect from a falling leaf. It appears that practically everything that we observe in nature fulfills some function: sometimes practical, sometime esthetical. Even simple items, such as a snowflake, are masterpieces of design.

Believers in God claim that God determined a plan for His creation, including a function for each element in it, and then created objects and creatures to fulfill those functions. In other words, first came the function, and then came the corresponding form. Non-believers, however, claim the opposite: first came the form, and then the function. They hold the view “natural selection,” which claims that through multiple random mutations new forms appeared. If these forms possessed features that enabled their survival, then they persisted (“survival of the fittest”). Dawkins writes, “Evolution by natural selection produces an excellent simulacrum of design, mounting prodigious heights of complexity and excellence.”<sup>198</sup>

However, several factors force us to conclude that “function” preceded “form.” First, nearly everything that we see in nature exactly corresponds to its conditions. If these forms spontaneously evolved, then we should expect to see, along with positive features, a large number of non-beneficial features, which have appeared, but have not yet been eliminated by natural selection. Yet, such features are rarely encountered, if at all.

Second, the science of taxonomy supports the preeminence of “function” over “form.” Taxonomists classify all organisms by specific genera and species. However, if all organisms spontaneously and progressively evolved, then we would see a large number of intermediate forms as one genus or species evolved into another. Yet, one rarely discovers intermediate forms, even in fossil remains.

Third, atheistic evolution encounters a serious setback in regard to probability. In light of the incredible complexity of the universe, it is highly unlikely that all these intricate processes and interactions, which

---

<sup>194</sup>Craig, p. 67-69.

<sup>195</sup>Moreland, p. 58.

<sup>196</sup>Dawkins, p. 169 (paperback ed.)

<sup>197</sup>Moreland, p. 55.

<sup>198</sup>Dawkins, p. 103 (hardback ed.).

proceed in perfect balance and harmony, spontaneously evolved, even in the course of billions of years. The statistical improbability of the evolution of even one feature, such as the human eye, boggles the mind.

In response to the question of probability, adherents of natural selection appeal to the so-called “anthropic principle.” According to this theory, the improbability of atheistic evolution makes no difference. The fact that conditions conducive to life exist and life itself exists proves that, though improbable, natural selection is not impossible. If it were not possible, we would not be here. Our existence proves that it is possible. Dawkins claims, “However improbable the origin of life might be, we know it happened on Earth because we are here.”<sup>199</sup>

The anthropic principle, however, proves nothing. The fact that we are here and exist in these ideal conditions in no way address the crucial question of *how* these conditions ensued. Believers in God also freely admit that conditions on our planet are ideal for life, but offer an entirely different explanation as to how they came about. Concerning the question as to *how* this all happened, Dawkins himself admits the improbability of natural selection when he writes, “However improbable the origin of life might be...” In addition, in spite of the scientific axiom that the option with the highest probability is preferred, he still claims, “...*we know* it happened on Earth” (*italics mine*).

Critics attempt another approach by proposing that the universe contains a nearly innumerable number of planets. If the number of planets approaches the statistical probability of natural selection, then one would expect that at least one of them would produce life by that means.<sup>200</sup> On the other hand, although we have observed a multitude of stars, we have no data confirming how many of them have planets, if any. Also, even if billions of planets do exist, can we assume that this number is sufficient to overcome the statistical improbability of atheistic evolution?

Maybe for this reason, some atheists propose an alternative explanation. They assume the existence of billions of universes that exist parallel to one another or sequentially in an oscillating universe. They further assume that the exact number of these “parallel universes” is sufficient to overcome the statistical improbability of natural selection.<sup>201</sup> Dawkins comments, “With so many universes, it is not unlikely that one would just happen to have the precise conditions needed for the evolution of intelligent, civilized life forms.”<sup>202</sup> Yet, this borders on the absurd. The only reason atheists imagine the existence of billions of universes is to avoid the obvious fact that our planet was specially designed to support life. No scientific data exist to support such a fabrication.

Natural selection encounters still another serious logical dilemma. According to this theory, inanimate objects gave rise to animate life forms, non-cognitive forms to cognitive, impersonal forms to personal. It is far more logically compelling to claim that an animate, cognitive, personal Being gave rise to other animate, cognitive, personal beings.<sup>203</sup>

The molecular structure of DNA provides extremely strong support for intelligent design. DNA contains a specific code that, when translated, sets in motion the production of protein in the cell. However, for DNA to function it must work in tandem with a molecule of RNA that precisely corresponds to its DNA-partner’s code. This means that to begin the process of protein production, a molecule of RNA, in exact correspondence to a DNA molecule, must spontaneously evolve in the same cell at the same time. Such a combination of factors cannot occur by chance. Moreland rightly concludes, “The information in the genetic code existed prior to and outside the parts of that code, and that information was imposed on those parts by a Mind.”<sup>204</sup>

---

<sup>199</sup>Ibid, p. 163-164 (paperback ed.)

<sup>200</sup>Ibid, p. 165.

<sup>201</sup>Ibid, p. 172-174.

<sup>202</sup>Noted in Johnson P. E., Reynolds J. M. Against all Gods: What’s right and wrong about the new atheism. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010. – P. 16.

<sup>203</sup>Geisler, p. 234; Апологетика: учебное пособие / BEE International. – Луцьк: Християнське життя, 1999. – Р. 185.

<sup>204</sup>Moreland, p. 52.

Serious thinkers also marvel at the origin of language. Even atheistic evolutionists wonder how animals learned to talk. Between the language of animals and human language, a huge gulf exists. In addition, how can one explain the appearance of multiple languages? The spontaneous evolution of only one language would be an incredible miracle. Additionally, one cannot claim that more “primitive” human languages are closer to animal talk. Their complexity far exceeds the most complex sub-human communication.

One must also consider that nature not only supplies us with the necessities for survival, but also provides abundant opportunities for enjoying pleasure. It is difficult to ascribe the awesome beauty of nature and the manifold pleasures it affords to impersonal, random processes. It is more logical to posit the existence of One, who loves His creation and endows it with every good thing.<sup>205</sup>

Moreland offers the following scientific evidence for intelligent design – the second law of thermodynamics. According to that universal natural law, every system moves towards equilibrium, which means that in the process of time every system becomes less orderly and, consequently, less efficient. Without external support, every system will eventually cease to function. This means that in the course of 14 billion years, the supposed age of the universe, we would have expected its cessation by now. Yet, the universe continues to operate, which testifies of the influence of an external Power.<sup>206</sup>

Furthermore, Moreland raises the question of the dualistic nature of human beings.<sup>207</sup> In other words, how does the evolutionary model account for the human soul? Atheists reject dualism and embrace monism, the conviction that humans possess only a body and that all psychological processes are functions of the brain.<sup>208</sup> Consequently, when the body dies, the human “soul” ceases to exist.

Yet, Moreland challenges this view. First, the quality of “self-awareness,” that is, the ability to look at oneself as an object, detached from the self, is hard to explain by purely physical processes. Second, evolution struggles to explain human free will. How can the ability to choose between options, not instinctively, but intentionally, arise through spontaneous processes? What about moral decisions? If we concede that physical processes predetermine human decisions, we encounter another problem. This would equal a denial of free will. A person’s choices are already “fixed” by the physical composition with which that person was born.

In conclusion, we will make quick mention of a hotly disputed item in the debate over design: the question of “irreducible complexity.” This means that certain systems in living organisms are so complex that the gradual development of their component parts is thought impossible. They must have been created in their entirety, that is, in their fully functioning form. Yet, Dawkins objects, “Do not just declare things to be irreducibly complex; the chances are you haven’t looked carefully enough at the details, or thought carefully enough about them.”<sup>209</sup> So, the debate on this point continues.

### 3. Ontological Argument

Although scholars today rarely use the ontological argument in the theistic debates, it nonetheless has importance from a historical point of view. The first theologian to advance the theory was Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). His argument proceeds as follows. First, a person can image the existence of a Being greater than all other Beings. Second, this Being exists either in reality, or else just in the mind of this person imagining it. Third, a Being existing in reality is greater than one existing only in the mind. Finally, since this Being is greater than all, it must exist not only in the mind, but also in reality. Therefore, this Being, that is God, must exist.

Critics, though, have proven this approach faulty. The fact that we can image something does not necessarily mean that it exists. We could imagine and even minutely describe, for example, a unicorn, but it

---

<sup>205</sup>Pinnock C. Reason enough: A case for the Christian Faith. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980. – P. 65.

<sup>206</sup>Moreland, p. 35-37.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid, p. 78-102.

<sup>208</sup>Dawkins, p. 24 (hard back edition).

<sup>209</sup>Ibid, p. 150.

does not follow that a unicorn exists. Anselm considered “existence” one of the attributes of this Higher Being, and since this Being must possess only the highest attributes, then it must possess existence. However, “existence” is not an attribute.<sup>210</sup> The question of existence is separate from the question of attributes.

A second variant of the ontological argument goes as follows. The attributes of a perfect Being include “necessity.” Next, a necessary Being, by definition, must exist. Therefore, this perfect Being exists. On the other hand, one may challenge whether “necessity” is really an attribute.

A final attempt at the ontological argument contains the follow propositions. It states that it is impossible to deny the “being” of a Higher “Being.” If something has the quality of “being,” then it must exist. The difficulty here, though, is obvious. We are already assuming the existence of this Higher Being by calling it a “Being,” thus we are “begging the question,” or beginning the argument with its conclusion.

#### **4. The Argument of “Degrees of Perfection”**

As was mentioned above, a number of the philosophical arguments used in defense of God’s existence were popularized by Thomas Aquinas. Therefore, in conclusion, we will address a final philosophical proof advanced by Aquinas: the argument of “degrees of perfection.”

The argument contains the following claims. First, people are naturally aware of the concepts “better” and “worse.” Yet, the existence of these conceptions implies the existence of a “best” and “worst.” This is the nature of comparison – we compare items with the ideal. Therefore, there must exist a “Best” or “Highest” Being, that is, God.

On the other hand, skeptics object that we cannot define in which direction the “best” is found. Maybe criminals are closer to the ideal than saints are. Who has the right to say, what is “better,” and what is “worse?”<sup>211</sup> Yet, the idea that evil is “better” contradicts human awareness and ambition. The great majority of people feel that good is “better,” than evil, and strive towards it. People characteristically consider evil a deviation from the norm.

Others object that our defining “better” and “worse” is purely subjective. What is “better” for one may be “worse” for another. However, Kreeft points out that in contrasting “objective” with “subjective” and preferring the former, such critics are already utilizing the categories “better” and “worse.” For them, objectivity is “better” than subjectivity.<sup>212</sup> Thus, they defeat their own argument.

### **B. Scientific Proofs**

In the previous section, we already examined several arguments from science in favor of God’s existence. Others will be addressed in the following chapter of this book in connection with the theory of evolution. In this section, we will only give a brief treatment of some general themes.

First, one must examine the general relationship between (atheistic) science and religion. Atheists hold the conviction that God is “necessary” only when we encounter phenomena that do not correspond to known natural laws. In other words, we need God only to close the “gaps” in our knowledge. Correspondingly, He is called the “God of the gaps.” Atheists foresee the day when our knowledge of natural law advances to the point where we can explain all phenomena by them and thus close all the “gaps.” Then, we will no longer need God.

Nonetheless, many researchers admit that science cannot close all the “gaps,” even for explaining common natural phenomena. For example, at the atomic level we discover much that is unclear and unpredictable. The claim that someday we will explain everything scientifically seems far-fetched. In addition, believers in God

---

<sup>210</sup>Kant also supported this view. Noted in Sproul, *Apologetics*, p. 31.

<sup>211</sup>Reymond, p. 122.

<sup>212</sup>Kreeft, p. 55.

claim that He not only was active in creating the world, but is still active in sustaining its natural processes as well. In addition, atheists remain perplexed as to the origin of the world, which science explores, and of the natural laws by which it operates.

Finally, some scientists, who embrace atheism, appear to be prejudiced in their opinions. They refuse to recognize scientists who believe in God and defend His existence as “real” scientists. In this case, atheistic naturalism becomes its own religion, which is, in the words of Baggett, “closed to considering new evidence.”<sup>213</sup>

## C. Psychological Proofs

Among the psychological proofs in favor of God’s existence, we may list the following: the existence of a universal moral standard, the general human awareness of God’s existence, and the human need for God. We will examine each item separately.

### 1. The Universal Moral Standard

Believers in God claim to find evidence of His existence not only in the scientific world, but also in the inner human consciousness. There we encounter a trait that is common to all humans – the conscience, which disturbs us when we do not act correctly. This universal characteristic testifies of the existence of a universal moral standard.

People often have a sense of how they should act, even when no law exists to prescribe that behavior. When they fail to behave accordingly, they experience feelings of shame and guilt. When experiencing these feelings, people seldom challenge the standard, but instead make excuses. They try to explain why they were not able to perform the required deed. In addition, when people argue, they attempt to prove that they are right and the other is wrong. However, arguments are possible only when both parties agree as to the existence of a common standard, to which they can both appeal.

Another evidence is the idea of “offense.” People get offended when someone acts towards them in an inappropriate way. However, the expectation that the other should act in a specific way testifies of the existence of a universal standard, which applies to all. Therefore, whenever someone experiences a sense of duty, has feelings of shame or guilt, makes excuses, argues or gets offended, he/she is testifying to the existence of a general code of proper behavior.

The existence of this internal standard, or conscience, is indisputable. A more difficult question is where that inner sense comes from. People often feel that we learn these norms and assimilate them at home or in school. These norms thus become our personal values. Therefore, this moral standard is simply an expression of cultural or social norms.

Yet, one must take into consideration that the *source* of knowledge may differ from the *basis* of that knowledge. The fact that we learn something at home or at school does not necessarily mean that our parents or teachers created that knowledge. It is certainly possible that those ideas reflect what is true in reality. One may cite, for example, mathematics, which is true regardless of where one learns it and does not depend on culture, education or upbringing.<sup>214</sup>

In addition, if moral standards are culturally determined, then we have no right to expect from people of other cultures behavior that conforms to our cultural values. Yet, we all expect that people of all cultures need to observe certain norms, and we condemn cultures that do not. We condemn, for example, what the Nazis did in World War II, and what terrorists do today. If a person claims that standards are purely culturally

---

<sup>213</sup>Baggett D. Did the resurrection happen: A conversation with Gary Habermas and Antony Flew. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009. – Kindle edition, 1391.

<sup>214</sup>Lewis C. S. Mere Christianity. – San Francisco: Harper, 1952. – P. 12.

determined, then how can we claim that what terrorists do is wrong? Maybe in that culture terrorism is praiseworthy. If all norms come from culture, then do we have the right to judge others? We may say that we do not like that certain behavior, but we cannot call it “wrong.” Yet, we do so instinctively. It seems that we all sense the existence of cross-cultural norms, which apply to all.<sup>215</sup>

Let us take another example: the civil war in Yugoslavia. It seems that the Serbs were persecuting minorities in their territories. The United Nations intervened and declared that the Serbs must not persecute minorities, or else they would intervene. It is interesting that this situation did not pose any international threat, but was purely an internal affair. If standards depend on culture, then what right did the United Nations have for interfering? Should they not have respected the cultural values of the Serbs?

Instead, the UN adopted the position that the Serbs must observe the standard of the majority of its constituent nations and stop the persecution. It is as if they said, “We, the majority of nations, agree that persecution of minorities is wrong. Therefore, we, the majority of nations, will persecute you Serbs, the minority, because your majority is persecuting a minority. The principle the UN was actually and unconsciously operating on was the sense that discrimination violates a cross-cultural norm, and therefore should cease.

Believers also seek to demonstrate that this standard is from God. Some claim that we evolved from lower forms of life. Plants became lower forms of animal life, which became fish, which became amphibians, etc., until humans appeared. If that is so, then we have attained the highest point of development in our history. If we have reached our highpoint, then why do we sense the existence of a standard yet higher? Why do we strive for a quality of life that our race has supposedly never experienced?

Does this not indicate that earlier in history humans lived by a higher standard, and then subsequently fell from it? The existence of a standard superior to how we live now testifies that we are fallen creatures. We lost a quality of life that we are striving to recover. Believers find the best explanation of our present condition in the biblical teaching of humanity’s fall from the perfection in which God created it.<sup>216</sup>

Furthermore, if humans have created this inner standard, then why can no one keep it? Everyone admits to failures in his/her life. Why would people create a standard that no one can keep? Human failure to perfectly observe this internal standard testifies of the existence of a Higher Moral Power who gave it. In addition, if the standard is of human origin, then why do people experience feelings of guilt and impending punishment for its violation, even when this inner standard does not correspond to human laws that are enforced by punishment?

Nonetheless, if there is a universal moral standard, why are there differences between people’s perception of it? One might answer that even between different individuals and cultures many features of the moral standard are the same. For example, the overwhelming majority would be in favor of showing kindness to one’s children. Still, we do admit that some differences exist. William Sorely insightfully notes that although differences do exist between cultures, all cultures acknowledge the existence of a standard of proper behavior. One must wonder, then, from where this *idea* of a standard came.<sup>217</sup>

It seems that instead of living by God’s standard, people attempt to lower it to the level of their abilities. Everyone lowers God’s standards, but some do more than others do. Hence, slightly different cultural standards appear. Yet, there is enough commonality between them to testify to the existence of a universal standard.

Although humans constantly seek to lower God’s standard, it is never completely lost. From time to time, God intervenes to preserve or restore His standard. This is the perceived mission of nearly every great religious leader. Buddha, who claimed to have received “enlightenment” under the Bodhi tree, advanced morality through his “Eightfold Path.” Muhammad, claiming revelation from the angel Gabriel, did the same in his Quran. Similarly, in Hindu thought, Vishnu, one of the lower manifestations of the impersonal Brahman,

---

<sup>215</sup>Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid, p. ?.

<sup>217</sup>Noted in Craig, p. 71-72.



periodically incarnates himself in the form of an *avatar*, ten of which reportedly have appeared in history or have yet to appear. Vishnu commissions an avatar for each age to restore true *dharma* (teaching).<sup>218</sup> In Judaism, the restorers of God's moral standard were Moses and the Prophets. Christianity adds to the Old Testament witness the teachings of Jesus and his apostles.

Bertrand Russell makes the following objection. He states that if God established his standard arbitrarily, then we could not call Him good, since His standard would be based on His will and He could define "goodness" anyway He pleased. On the other hand, if God's standard was not based on His will, but on something else, then the basis of His standard would be higher than Him, and God would cease to be the Highest Being.<sup>219</sup> Yet, another option to consider is that God's standard is based not on His will, nor on something higher than Him, but on His holy nature. God's commandments are such, because He is such. His laws simply reflect His character and nature. They describe how He Himself acts.<sup>220</sup>

In conclusion, we will examine objections advanced by the well-known atheist Richard Dawkins.<sup>221</sup> He explains the existence of a moral standard in accordance with the evolutionary model. Over time, primitive people discovered that it was advantageous to develop certain character traits and observe certain moral norms. They noticed that when people in a society all act in personal interest alone, chaos results. Dawkins also posits that in time people grew accustomed to these norms, so that even when they were no longer beneficial individually, people continued to observe them out of habit. Eventually, because of interaction between cultures, these standards became universal.

Furthermore, Dawkins argues that honorable behavior, such as unselfishness and generosity, is not always performed with pure motives. Often people use such means to control or manipulate others. Dawkins also rejects the idea that religions offer a better system. If a person is obedient out of fear of punishment, then he/she is not necessarily a moral person, but is still acting out of self-interest.

Dawkins feels that, in light of the progress human civilization has made, morality will continue to improve. He cites in support of this idea the defense of women's rights, the decrease of racism, and the increase of ecological awareness. Dawkins ascribes this improvement to a mysterious element, which he calls *Zeitgeist*, which translates, "the spirit of the times." He writes, "In any society there exists a somewhat mysterious consciousness, which changes over the decades."<sup>222</sup> Societal leaders, reformers and higher educational levels promote this upward trend.

Believers in God respond to Dawkins as follows. The beneficial nature of a moral society harmonizes not only with an evolutionary model, but also with a creation one. It is clear that the Creator would create a system in the best interest of individual and society alike. In addition, the evolutionary model has a hard time explaining acts of heroism, performed at personal cost, when those sacrificial acts do not benefit the individual himself/herself. Furthermore, when Dawkins criticizes religion in its use of a fear motivation, he does not consider that, in some faith systems, the primary motive for obedience is not fear, but love. In the context of evolution, genuine, sacrificial love cannot develop.

As for the improvement of morality in the world, not everyone shares Dawkins' optimism. For example, people today have to protect themselves from many more threats than were present just a generation or two ago, when one could walk on a plane without inspection, eat food products or take medications without protective labeling, take bags into public venues, etc. It is also curious that in explaining moral progress, Dawkins appeals to a mysterious influence *Zeitgeist*, which suggests a metaphysical reality. Is Dawkins himself admitting the need for some sort of outside influence for the success of moral progress in the world?

---

<sup>218</sup>Hiltebeitel A. C. Hinduism // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale, 2005. – V. 6. – P. 4000; Davis R. Religions of India in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 1999. – P. 52.

<sup>219</sup>Russel B. Why I am not a Christian.

<sup>220</sup>Erickson M. J. Christian theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998. – P. 313.

<sup>221</sup>Dawkins, p. 245-262, 298-307 (paperback ed.)

<sup>222</sup>Ibid, p. 300.

## 2. The Religious Nature of Humans

Another important facet of the argument from psychology in favor of God's existence is the inherent religiosity of humans. Throughout the course of history, the great majority of people have believed in God. Even in modern times, when entire generations have been subjected to intense mental programming by secular authorities, only 5% of the world's population are confirmed atheists, along with another 15%, who identify themselves as "non-religious." Even in the former Soviet Union and Communist China, which have aggressively promoted atheistic ideology, believers in God number in the hundreds of millions.

Sproul comments that secularism anticipates that religion will die "the quiet death of irrelevance."<sup>223</sup> However, as seen above, statistics do not support that expectation. We recall the well-known proverb that humans are "incurably religious." This shows that no matter how hard opponents may try, they cannot extinguish faith in God. This fact testifies to an inherent awareness in human consciousness of God's existence.

The fact that the majority of people believe in God is surprising, considering that sinful people, which we all are, would likely prefer that He did not exist. Then, they could conduct themselves as they pleased without fear of Divine retribution. Yet, in spite of the fact that most people's lifestyles do not correspond to God's commandments, the majority, nonetheless, still believe in Him. This, again, provides a convincing testimony to an inherent awareness in human consciousness of God's existence. Even the atheist Jean-Paul Sartre once admitted, "God is silent, and that I cannot possibly deny – everything in myself calls for God and that I cannot forget... As a matter of fact, this experience can be found in one form or another in most contemporary authors."<sup>224</sup>

Another famous atheist, Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach (1723-1789), claimed that the so-called "inherent human awareness of God's existence" does not, in fact, exist at all. He felt that this phenomenon resulted from fear of the destructive powers of nature: "The universal assent to God's existence may mean nothing more than universal terror before natural calamities together with ignorance of natural laws."<sup>225</sup> d'Holbach hoped that progress in education would eliminate this unfounded fear and, along with it, faith in God.

Nonetheless, d'Holbach's theory is insufficient to explain the persistence of religious faith among its adherents. True people of faith believe in God not only in times of crisis, but also live consistently with their faith in every area of life. In addition, people do not believe in God only to escape pain, but sometimes just the opposite: they often suffer for their convictions. Finally, increased levels of education have not seen a corresponding increase of atheism in the world. Possibly the result has been the opposite. Discovering the grandeur of God's creation may not discourage faith, but actually encourage it.

## 3. The Human Need for God

Next, we can speak of the human need for God. There exist certain basic human needs that will go unmet without faith in God. For example, people need a sense of value and importance. People need to know that their lives have significance. We are all conscious of the fact that many who reach the pinnacle of success in this world remain unfulfilled in spite of their accomplishments. Even Jean-Paul Sartre admits, "There comes a time when one asks, even of Shakespeare, even of Beethoven, 'is that all there is?'"<sup>226</sup> Only God can provide the fulfillment humans seek.

In addition, people need hope. They do not know what to expect after death. Only faith in God can comfort the heart concerning one's future destiny. In addition, all people experience guilt from past mistakes. Only through God can they find forgiveness and liberation from guilt.<sup>227</sup> Faith in God is also necessary in

---

<sup>223</sup>Sproul, *Apologetics*, p. 4

<sup>224</sup>Glicksberg P. I. *Literature and religion* – Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University, 1960. – P. 221-222.

<sup>225</sup>Noted in Sproul, *Why are there atheists*, p. 21.

<sup>226</sup>Noted in Kreeft, p. 78.

<sup>227</sup>Little, p. 134; Pinnock, p. 70.

forming ethical norms. We must have appeal to a Higher Being to define right and wrong. Kant felt this way, even though he rejected the possibility of objective knowledge. Nonetheless, he taught, “We must live as though there were a God.”<sup>228</sup>

C. S. Lewis describes the human need for God in the following way:

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.<sup>229</sup>

Richard Dawkins, of course, disagrees.<sup>230</sup> He assumes that humans can indeed find fulfillment in various ways: in science, art, friendship, nature or life itself. He writes, “Our life is as full, as meaningful, as wonderful, as we choose to make it,” and, “The knowledge that we have only one life should make it all the more precious.”<sup>231</sup>

Yet, Dawkins fails to appreciate that, for this very reason, the problem of “unfulfillment” exists: people have all of these pleasures to enjoy, but are still not satisfied. They want something more than life in this world can offer them.

Dawkins also suggests that, if there is no meaning in life, then why expect there to be one? Possibly, human unfulfillment is simply a remnant from the evolution of human consciousness. Yet, here Dawkins is misguided. Evolution teaches that humans are at the pinnacle of their development. Where did we get the idea, then, that there is still something more to life? Russian Orthodox priest Alexander Men shows the contradictory nature of denying meaning in life:

Certain modern authors, like Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others, often spoke of the frightening absurdity of being... It is true, I admit, that these writers, romanticists, dramatists and philosophers spoke from an atheistic point of view: Sartre was an existentialist and Camus – an atheist. Yet, they overlooked one thing. When they say that the world is absurd, that it is nonsensical, they are aware of that only because inherent to humans is the opposite conception: sense. One who does not know what “sense” is, never will appreciate or understand what absurdity is. They will never object to or oppose the absurd. They will coexist with it, like a fish in water. The fact that people resist the absurd, resist nonsensical existence, weighs in favor of the existence of sense.<sup>232</sup>

Furthermore, Dawkins observes that not all believers are happy, and not all unbelievers are miserable. He also claims, “Religion’s power to console doesn’t make it true.”<sup>233</sup> He also asks the question, why believers do not welcome death – it is their time to meet God!

Believers respond that the experience of happiness in one person or several persons does not reflect the general level of happiness in the entire group. It is true that “religion’s power to console does not make it true,” but the opposite is also true: “religion’s power to console” does not make it untrue. Finally, people by nature fear death. Death is an unnatural phenomenon that repulses everyone: believers and unbelievers. At the time of death, however, believers in God find courage in their faith to depart from this world, a courage which atheism does not provide.

---

<sup>228</sup>Sproul, *Why are there atheists*, p. 23.

<sup>229</sup>Lewis C. S. *Mere Christianity*. – Rev. ed. – New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001. – P. 136.

<sup>230</sup>Dawkins, p. 388-404 (paperback ed.)

<sup>231</sup>*Ibid*, p. 404.

<sup>232</sup>Мень А. *Христианство*. Лекция 8 сентября 1990 г.

<sup>233</sup>Dawkins, p. 394 (paperback ed.)

In conclusion, we will cite the following authors about the human need for God. Clark Pinnock writes, “It would be a strange world indeed where the people in it required water and food and neither existed to fulfill their need... We are being asked to believe that there is no fulfillment for our evident human need to transcend ourselves.”<sup>234</sup> Kreeft shares this view: “No one has ever found one case of an innate desire for a non-existent object.”<sup>235</sup> Craig comes to the following conclusion: “If God does not exist, then life is futile. If the God of the Bible does exist, then life is meaningful. Only the second of these two alternatives enables man to live happily and consistently.”<sup>236</sup>

#### **D. Historical Arguments**

Our final appeal is to historical evidence. Believers in God testify of His real intervention in their lives. They sense His presence and enjoy personal relationship with Him. Their lives are transformed, and many testify of experiencing miracles. These are not isolated instances among a certain class of people, but are found in people of all races, nationalities, educational levels, and levels of society.<sup>237</sup>

Although critics may regard all these testimonies as subjective religious experience, having no relation to objective reality,<sup>238</sup> nonetheless, the testimony of millions of believers over thousands of years cannot be ignored.

#### **Resources Used:**

Baggett D. Did the resurrection happen: A conversation with Gary Habermas and Antony Flew. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009, Kindle edition.

Carson D. A. The gagging of God: Christianity confronts pluralism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

Copan P. Why the world is not religiously ambiguous: A critique of religious pluralism // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013.

Craig W. L. Apologetics: An introduction. – Chicago, IL: Moody, 1984. – 210 p.

Dawkins R. The God delusion. – Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006. – 374 p.

Davis R. Religions of India in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 1999.

Erickson M. J. Christian theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998.

Frame J. M. The presupposition method // Gundry S. N. Five views on apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1976.

---

<sup>234</sup>Pinnock, p. 53.

<sup>235</sup>Kreeft. p. 78.

<sup>236</sup>Craig, p. 52.

<sup>237</sup>Moreland, p. 233.

<sup>238</sup>See Dawkins, p. 111-114 (paperback ed.).

Geivett R. D. Religious diversity and the futility of neutrality // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013.

Glicksberg P. I. Literature and religion – Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University, 1960.

Hiltebeitel A. C. Hinduism // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale, 2005.

Johnson P. E., Reynolds J. M. Against all Gods: What's right and wrong about the new atheism. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010. – 116 p.

Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. Handbook of Christian apologetics. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – 400 p.

Lewis C. S. Mere Christianity. – San Francisco: Harper, 1952; Rev. ed. – New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001.

Little P. Know why you believe. – 4th ed. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000. – 189 p.

Moreland J. P. Scaling the secular city: A defense of Christianity. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987. – 258 p.

Moreland J.P., Nielsen K. Does God Exist? – Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993.

Pinnock C. Reason enough: A case for the Christian Faith. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980. – 126 p.

Ramm L. B. A Christian appeal to reason. – Brussels, Belgium: International Correspondence Institute, 1972.

Reymond R. L. The justification of knowledge. – Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1976.

Russel B. Why I am not a Christian.

Sproul R.C. If there's a God, why are there atheists? – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1974. – 166 p.

Sproul R. C., Gerstner J., Lindsley A. Classical apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984. – 338 p.

Story D. Christianity on the offense: Responding to the beliefs and assumptions of spiritual seekers. – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998.

~~~~~

Апологетика: учебное пособие / BEE International. – Луцьк: Християнське життя, 1999.

Apologetics: workbook / BEE International. – Lutsk: Christian living, 1999.

Мень А. Христианство. Лекция 8 сентября 1990 г.

Men A. Christianity. – Lecture, Sept. 8, 1990.

Chapter 4: Arguments Against the Ultimate's Existence

Along with evidences in favor of God's existence, one must also consider those factors that count against it. In this chapter, we will examine the following: the problem of evil, the theory of evolution, alleged contradictions in God's nature, God as a figment of human imagination, and the principle of falsification.

A. The Problem of Evil

The thorniest dilemma in the world of theology is undoubtedly the so-called "problem of evil," which questions why a perfect God would allow evil and suffering to exist in His creation. This objection is typically used to substantiate a claim for God's non-existence. The argument proceeds as follows:

- If God is all-powerful, he *could* eliminate evil.
- If God is all-powerful and good, he *would* eliminate evil.
- Evil and suffering exist in the world.
- Conclusion: an all-powerful, good God does not exist.

This argument finds expression in another form:

- Let us assume the existence of an all-powerful, good God.
- There is no reason why such a God would allow evil.
- Evil exists.
- Conclusion: an all-powerful, good God does not exist.

To this quandary, believers in God propose a number of solutions. First, God may permit evil out of respect for human free will. He gave humans freedom of choice in spite of the negative consequences that might follow. Second, suffering sometimes comes as a punishment for violation of God's laws. Third, some desirable character qualities, like courage, compassion, and patience, cannot develop in a world without troubles. Fourth, evil spirits cause much suffering and affliction. Finally, evil is only a temporary situation, and someday God will eliminate it. We will investigate each aspect of this multi-factorial response separately.

1. Respect for Human Freedom

The believer's usual response to the problem of evil is that God permits evil and suffering out of respect for human freedom. God endowed humanity with the quality of freedom of choice and, as a rule, He does not intervene to prevent negative consequences that might result from these choices. If negative results ensue, God is not at fault, but the person making the choice.

Critics voice several objections to this view. An all-powerful God could intervene to prevent negative consequences from occurring. On the other hand, can we still consider this true freedom? It seems that true freedom of choice would involve allowing the consequences of free choices to stand.

Next, could not an all-powerful God create free human beings in a way that they would freely not make bad choices? Still, we encounter the same difficulty: is this true freedom? If a person is unable to do evil, is he/she truly able to do good? Does not doing the "good" require the rejection of evil? True freedom, it seems, will always include the potential of doing wrong.

2. Punishment for Sin

According to many faith traditions, God does indeed apply corporal punishment to transgressors of his laws. This may explain many, but not all, instances of suffering. Furthermore, the Judeo-Christian faith teaches that our world is under a curse because of the original sin of Adam, from which come the destructive forces in nature. The key verse relating this idea is Genesis 3:17. The Lord said to Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you.” In other words, the forces of nature, which God originally intended to benefit humans, now cause them grief as well.

At the same time, some object that the degree of punishment experienced does not seem to correspond to the severity of the offense. People who appear to lead moral lives sometimes suffer more than those who flagrantly sin. Here believers in God introduce the concept of God’s “general providence.” When God created the world, He equipped it with a certain degree of autonomy. Because of the action of natural laws, nature can, to a certain degree, operate independently of God (taking into consideration, of course, that God remains the ultimate source of power for the operation of these laws).²³⁹

Although the laws of nature can, in a sense, operate independently from God, their operation is nonetheless called God’s “general providence.” It is “providence” in the sense that through the regular and seemingly “automatic” operation of natural law, God accomplishes a certain goal. Regularity in nature creates the conditions in which free creatures, that is, people, can make decisions and predict the results of those decisions. Without this stability in nature, it would be impossible to exercise true freedom of choice. Thus, “general providence” is crucial in God attaining His goal of granting humans genuine freedom.

Consequently, we must make room in our thinking for the concept of “chance.” If natural laws possess a certain independence in their operation, then certain events can take place that are simply the result of the actions and interactions of these laws, and have no relation to God’s “special providence,” or direct intervention. Thus, calamities can occur, as Langford expresses it, “from the autonomy of nature,” affecting people regardless of their personal behavior.²⁴⁰

3. Development of the Soul

Suffering may serve to promote development of several valuable character traits, which could never develop without encountering difficulties and conflict: traits such as bravery, compassion and patience. This theory concerning the “purpose for pain” is called “development of the soul.”

This theory, however, cannot explain all instances of suffering or answer all questions concerning it. For example, not all suffering can be beneficial for the individual, such as the suffering of infants. What benefit do they derive from it? Some also question why it takes so much suffering to instill these qualities. Clearly, the theory “development of the soul,” although valuable, can only serve as one aspect of a multifactorial response to the problem of evil.

As part of our inquiry here, we must examine the concept of the “best possible world.” The German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz postulated that God created the best possible world He could, including in it evil and suffering. This was the only means by which He could accomplish His purpose for humanity.

Other thinkers qualify Leibniz’s proposal.²⁴¹ They suggest that our present world is not the “best possible world,” but the world that best prepares us for a world that God has yet to create. In this present world, we learn lessons and acquire character traits that would be impossible for us to obtain in ideal conditions. This world, then, is a vital prerequisite for those who will someday inherit the “best possible world.”

4. The Activity of Evil Spirits

²³⁹Thomas Aquinas shared this view.

²⁴⁰A further discussion of God’s “general providence” is found in volume 3 of this series, chapter 15.

²⁴¹Geisler N. L., Bocchino P. Unshakable foundations. – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2001. – P. 228 (page number from Russian edition).

When considering the problem of evil, people of faith keep in mind the presence of evil spirits in the world, a fact accepted by adherents of nearly all religions, who ascribe many of the evils we experience to these spiritual beings. Many faith traditions recognize a chief among the evil spirits, whom some call “Iblis,” and others call the “Devil” or “Satan.”

People of faith insist that evil spirits are not equal to God in strength. At any time, God can stop them and He does, in fact, limit their activity. Still, God allows evil spirits some degree of freedom. Why? He does so likely to accomplish one of the ends described elsewhere in this section: to develop character or test it, to punish sin, etc. Therefore, the activity of evil spirits can only serve as one aspect of a multifactorial response to the problem of evil.

5. Other Proposals

Several other options for resolving the problem of evil are worth mentioning. Looking at the question from a practical point of view, one may conclude that faith in God is the best hope for deliverance from the power of evil. Those who reject God’s existence forfeit the chance to benefit from His intervention in their lives – to deliver them both from evil in the world, and evil within themselves.²⁴² In addition, according to Christian teaching, God Himself came down from heaven in the person of Jesus Christ and experienced suffering. It follows that God is not indifferent to human suffering, but is personally acquainted with it.²⁴³

Next, we can revisit the form of the problem of evil that claims that there is no reason why a good, all-powerful God would allow evil. It is highly probable that such a reason (beyond what we listed above) does exist, but we may not always know it.²⁴⁴ If we are dealing with a Being of infinite wisdom, it should not surprise us if we do not understand all His dealings with people.

Several writers comment on this idea, ascribing the problem of evil to God’s “secret” will. Helm writes, “For reasons fully known only to himself, God did not create or sustain those conditions which would have ensured that no sin occurred.”²⁴⁵ In the words of John of Damascus (7th-8th c.), “The Providence of God is beyond our ken and comprehension.”²⁴⁶ Carson, however, offers hope that someday we will more fully understand God’s plan: “Some answers we are not going to receive here; we shall have to wait for the Lord’s return before justice is completely done, and seen to be done.”²⁴⁷ Helseth calls believers to trust God: “We are called to place our confidence in the character and promises of our Father, even when we have no idea precisely what he is doing as he works out the particulars of his sovereign will.”²⁴⁸

Finally, faith traditions hold that suffering is only a temporary phenomenon, and that in the future God will eliminate it, at least for those faithful to Him. Therefore, in answer to the question, why a good, all-powerful God does not destroy evil, people of faith reply, “The time simply has not yet come.”

6. Conclusion

In summary, one must admit that none of the above offered explanations, taken in isolation, will serve to fully respond to the challenge the problem of evil presents, or explain every painful event in human experience. Yet, a combination of these factors can provide an adequate response to the presence and activity

²⁴²Geisler, *Unshakable foundations*, p. 241 (page number from Russian edition)

²⁴³Little P. *Know why you believe*. – 4th ed. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000. – P. 139-140.

²⁴⁴Idea taken from Daniel Howard-Snyder.

²⁴⁵Helm P. *The providence of God*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993. – P. 212.

²⁴⁶John Damascene. *An exact exposition of the Orthodox Faith* // Ed. Schaff P., Wace H. S., Trans. Salmond D. F. – New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899. – 2.29.

²⁴⁷Carson D. A. *How long, O Lord?* – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006. – P. 44.

²⁴⁸Helseth P. K. *God causes all things* // Boyd G. A., Craig W. L., Helseth P. K., Highfield R., Jowers D. *Four views on divine providence*. – Zondervan, Kindle Edition, 814-816.

of evil in the world, depending on the situation at hand. Therefore, the problem of evil should not unsettle faith in God or in His goodness.²⁴⁹

B. The Theory of Evolution

Because of the volume and complexity of the discussion on evolution, instead of attempting a detailed account of the debate we will recommend the writings of the following authors, who can inform us on the question: Henry Morris, Kenneth Ham and Duane Gish. Also helpful are the online resources from the Institute for Creation Research (www.icr.org/article/Creationism-Principles). These authors defend the thesis that the Genesis account of creation is accurate and that the earth is young. Their work stands in contrast to atheistic evolution, which claims an old earth and development through natural selection without the aid of a supernatural power.

In this discussion, it is important to distinguish atheistic evolution from “progressive creationism” and “theistic evolution.” Progressive creationism teaches that God created all things in stages. Billions of years ago, He created the heavens and the earth. Then after a long period of inactivity, He resumed His work and formed the atmosphere and simple life forms. Again, after a long pause, He continued and eventually completed His work of creation. This approach allows for an old age of the earth and the universe.

Theistic evolution claims that God used the process of evolution to create the world and all it contains. Theistic evolution differs from progressive creationism in that the latter theory allows for large gaps of Divine inactivity in this process, whereas the former does not.

Whether one holds to the theory of a young earth or an old earth, the important point here is that scientific evidence for an old earth or the process of evolution in no way rules out God’s existence. The theories of progressive creationism and theistic evolution are totally consistent with both modern scientific claims and faith in God. They actually provide a more convincing account of origins than atheistic evolution does. A fuller discussion of the young earth/old earth debate can be found in volume 3 of this series, chapter 12.

C. Contradictions in God’s Nature

Non-believers in God charge that several logical inconsistencies render the existence of such a Being, as He is typically understood, impossible. We will investigate these claims.

1. God’s Omnipotence and the “Big Rock”

Concerning God’s omnipotence, the somewhat comical question arises whether God can create a rock that He Himself cannot lift. It seems that either answer, yes or no, will lead to a denial of God’s omnipotence. If God cannot create such a thing, then He is not omnipotent. If He can create it, but cannot lift it, again He is not omnipotent. In response, we simply need to ask a further question: “How large must this rock be, so that God cannot lift it? The only possible answer is a rock of unlimited proportions, since an infinite God would be able to lift any other object. Yet, since a rock, by definition, is a finite object, it is a logical absurdity to propose the existence of an infinite, finite rock. Therefore, the question itself is logically absurd.”²⁵⁰

2. God’s Love and His Wrath

²⁴⁹Geisler, *Unshakable foundations*, p. 232-234 (page numbers from Russian edition); Аполлогетика, учебное пособие, p. 241.

²⁵⁰Geisler, *Unshakeable foundations*, p. 353-357 (page numbers from Russian edition).

Another seeming contradiction in God's nature concerns the juxtaposition of His love and His wrath. How can a loving God eternally damn the lost? Believers in God respond that, along with love, there are other qualities in God's nature, namely His righteousness and justice. All of God's attributes interface with each other in such a way that none of them suffers compromise. Therefore, a loving God must act in a way consistent with His holiness. God manifests His love to the degree that the other aspects of His nature "allow" it.²⁵¹

Richard Dawkins characterizes the God of the Old Testament as "the most unpleasant character of all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser."²⁵² Dawkins does not consider, however, that God does not manifest His wrath arbitrarily, but against sin. In fact, the same negative feelings Dawkins has against such a description of God are the same violent feelings God has toward the kind of behavior Dawkins attributes to Him! If Dawkins thus justifies his hatred toward God, to whom he ascribes these qualities, then why can God not express His anger toward those who actually behave this way?

3. God's Goodness and His Freedom

The question also arises about the relationship between God's goodness and His freedom. If God must always be "good," then He must not be truly free. A free being has the ability to be good or evil.²⁵³ Yet again, we have to look at God's nature holistically. God's nature is holy. Consequently, acting in harmony with His holy character, He will always use His freedom to do good. There is no virtue in choosing evil. The highest use of freedom is freedom not for evil, but from evil.

4. God's Goodness and His Sovereignty

The problem here is that if God, in His goodness, must conform to a moral standard, then that standard must be higher than God Himself, since He is obliged to keep it. Two answers are suggested here: "voluntarism" and "essentialism."

Voluntarism means that God's standard of righteousness is based on His will. God simply chose which traits are good, and which are evil. He could have created a different standard had He desired to. Essentialism advances the idea that God's moral standard is based not on His will, but on His nature. God commands us to do that which corresponds to His holy nature.

Several points weigh in favor of voluntarism. First, God, as the "First Cause," defines the conditions in which all things exist and function, which means He has the right and freedom to establish any order He pleases. He could have made a moral standard different from the one He did establish. Morals are based on the choice of His will. Second, one may draw a parallel between God establishing His law and His act of creation. Both took place without any coercion, but as free acts. Just as creation was a free act of God, He established His law by Divine decree as well.

Third, adherents of voluntarism echo the objection of atheists, noted above, that God, by definition, must exceed all else in power and authority. Consequently, no one or no thing can be higher than He can. Yet, if God must conduct Himself in a certain way, then the standard He follows must be greater than He is. In the words of Pink, "God is sovereign. His will is supreme. So far from God being under any law of 'right,' He is a law unto Himself, so that whatsoever *He does is right*."²⁵⁴

We find essentialism, however, more convincing. God's standard is not higher than He is, but is an expression of His nature. God does not submit to some external standard, but simply acts in accordance with

²⁵¹Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1976. – P. 229-230.

²⁵²Dawkins R. The God Delusion. – Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006. – P. 31 (hardback edition)

²⁵³Noted in Hodge P. Systematic theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1940. – V. 1. – P. 415.

²⁵⁴Pink A. W. The attributes of God. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975. – P. 34.

His holy nature, as expressed in His laws. It is interesting to note that, according to the Bible, God *cannot* sin (see 1 Jn 1:5; Heb 6:18; Tit 1:2; Jam 1:13). God's nature will not allow Him to act in contradiction to the laws which are based on that nature. Thus, no other standard can exist except for the one that now exists. Erickson concurs, "The law of God, being a true expression of his nature, is as perfect as he is."²⁵⁵ Strong writes, "God's being and God's will eternally conform to each other."²⁵⁶

5. God's Sovereignty and the Creation of Free Creatures

Some challenge the idea that a sovereign God could create truly free creatures. When free creatures make decisions contrary to God's will, does not that limit God's authority and control over creation? Yet, in reality, the creation of free creatures does not limit, but demonstrates God's sovereignty. A sovereign God can do all that He pleases, including create free creatures.

6. God's Omniscience and Human Freedom

Similar to the previous point, some claim that human freedom cannot coexist with God's nature in yet another respect. If God is omniscient, then He knows each decision people will make. Yet, if God knows people's decisions beforehand, then can they make a decision contrary to the one that God foreknew? It seems, then, that people are not truly free. They must choose what God has foreknown they will choose. Therefore, to preserve the idea of human freedom, we must exclude the possibility of God's existence.²⁵⁷

One may respond that God's omniscience and foreknowledge do not compel people to make one decision or another. God, for example, foreknows all of His personal decisions, but His choices, of course, are truly free. His foreknowledge of His own decisions does not compel Him to make them. In a similar way, His foreknowledge of human decisions does not in any way diminish their freedom.²⁵⁸ Nash expresses this thought well. Just as a person observing an event does not cause that event to occur, when God, from His eternal perspective, "observes" an event in history (whether past, present or future from our point of view), His "observation" does not cause the event to happen.²⁵⁹

Therefore, it seems clear that when someone makes a decision, he/she, in fact, exercises his/her own will. That decision is determined not by the will of God, but by that person's will. The fact that God knew about that decision ahead of time in no way interferes with the free expression of human choice.²⁶⁰

Francis Pieper states, "Though the omniscience of God extends over all things without exception, it is not the efficient cause of the things which it knows."²⁶¹ Henry Thiessen aptly writes, "Free actions do not take place because they are foreseen, but they are foreseen because they will take place."²⁶² In the opinion of Charles Hodge, "If an act may be certain as to its occurrence, and yet free as to the mode of its occurrence, the difficulty vanishes."²⁶³ William Shedd concurs, "It is knowledge that is confined to divine understanding and never causes an act of the will."²⁶⁴

7. Poor Behavior of Believers

²⁵⁵Erickson M. J. Christian theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998. – P. 313.

²⁵⁶Strong A. H. Systematic theology. – 1886. – P. 273.

²⁵⁷Noted in Henry P. God, revelation, and authority. – Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976-1983. – V. 5. – P. 280.

²⁵⁸Shedd W., Thayer G., Gomes A. W. Dogmatic theology. – 3rd ed. – Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003. – P. 287; Strong, p. 284.

²⁵⁹Nash R. H. The concept of God. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983. – P. 52-53.

²⁶⁰Henry, v. 5, p. 282.

²⁶¹Pieper F. Christian dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1953. – V. 1. – P. 450.

²⁶²Thiessen H. C. Lectures in systematic theology / Ed. V. D. Doerksen. – Rev. ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979. – P. 82.

²⁶³Hodge, v. 1, p. 401.

²⁶⁴Shedd, p. 287. The same line of argumentation can apply to a question posed by Dawkins, whether or not God can change something He foreknew (see Dawkins R. The God delusion. – Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006. – P. 101, paperback edition).

The last objection that we will consider, also voiced by Dawkins, concerns not inconsistencies in God's nature, but inconsistencies between the stated faith of believers in God and the actual moral quality of their lives. The behavior of some, it appears, does not correspond to the tenants of their religion.

Dawkins draws on examples both in Scripture and in contemporary history.²⁶⁵ In the Bible, for example, the daughters of Lot had children by their father; the men of Gibeah raped the concubine of a certain Levite; Abraham lied, and also planned to commit human sacrifice; Jephthah apparently did so to his daughter, etc. In modern times, we witness wars between so-called Christian nations, terrorist attacks from religious extremists, capital punishment for violations of religious law, various scandals involving religious leaders, etc.

However, such behavior from the adherents of religion does not contradict, but rather confirm the teachings of faiths that claim that people are sinful and need salvation. Even people committed to God are still undergoing life transformation, a process that does not immediately reach its desired goal. In addition, one may challenge the assumption that sincere believers in the true God performed all of the acts mentioned by Dawkins above. Finally, people generally regard religion as a positive force in humanity and feel that, as a rule, it makes people not less, but more moral. Exceptional occurrences do not overthrow this position.

D. Faith in God as Human Imagination

Some atheists, such as Karl Marx, advanced the idea that faith in God is simply a figment of human imagination. Out of feelings of personal insecurity, people image God's existence in order to feel more secure and to believe that their lives have significance. Religion is a "crutch" for weak people. On the other hand, this view has no substantiation. No evidence is advanced to prove it. In fact, one may with equal veracity advance the counterargument that unbelievers imagine God's non-existence in order to escape living under His authority.²⁶⁶ Moreland adds that even if people do sometimes imagine God's existence, that does not force the conclusion that He does not, in fact, really exist.²⁶⁷

E. The Principle of Falsification

Anthony Flew advanced a somewhat more sophisticated approach for denying God's existence under the title "the principle of falsification." He asks, "By means of which arguments could one convince believers in God to reject their faith?" The expected response would be, "By no means!" True believers will not renounce their faith, no matter what. Then Flew responds that if nothing can be counted as evidence *against* God's existence, then nothing can be counted as evidence *in favor* of it as well. Thus, it is impossible on these grounds to defend the existence of God.

Here we are dealing with a question of epistemology. According to our discussion of "interpretive judgments" in chapter two, believers, holding to such an epistemology, *are* ready to admit evidences against God's existence. They are even ready to admit that some carry weight and have some plausibility. However, in the light of all the evidence examined and weighed in this chapter and the previous one, the most probable option seems clear: there is a God.

F. Conclusion

²⁶⁵Dawkins, p. 271-287, 341-365 (paperback edition)

²⁶⁶Geisler, p. 232.

²⁶⁷Moreland J. P. *Scaling the secular city: A defense of Christianity*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987. – P. 229.

In summary, the arguments employed to reject God's existence are insufficiently convincing to justify that view. Faith in God is the more rational option. An honest and objective look at the total picture will support the conclusion that God, in fact, does indeed exist.

Resources Used:

Carson D. A. How long, O Lord? – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006

Dawkins R. The God delusion. – Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006. – 374 p.

Erickson M. J. Christian theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998.

Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976.

Geisler N. L., Bocchino P. Unshakable foundations. – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2001.

Helm P. The providence of God. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993.

Helseth P. K. God causes all things // Boyd G. A., Craig W. L., Helseth P. K., Highfield R., Jowers D. Four views on Divine providence. – Zondervan, MI: Kindle Edition.

Henry C. God, revelation, and authority. – Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976-1983.

Hodge C. Systematic theology. – In 3 vols. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1940.

John Damascene. An exact exposition of the Orthodox Faith // Ed. Schaff P., Wace H. S., Trans. Salmond D. F. – New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899.

Langford M. J. Providence. – London: SCM Press, 1981.

Little P. Know why you believe. – 4th ed. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000. – 189 p.

Moreland J. P. Scaling the secular city: A defense of Christianity. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987. – 258 p.

Nash R. H. The concept of God. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983. – 115 p.

Pieper F. Christian dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1953.

Pink A. W. The attributes of God. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975.

Shedd W., Thayer G., Gomes A. W. Dogmatic theology. – 3rd ed. – Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003.

Strong A. H. Systematic theology. – 1886.

Thiessen H. C. Lectures in systematic theology / Ed. V. D. Doerksen. – Rev. ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979.



Image by Norbert Pietsch from Pixabay

III. Is the Ultimate a Force or a Being?

Having established the existence of God, next we must examine the question, “Who is He?” The world of religion abounds in views on God, which radically differ from one another and often contradict each another. How can we know which religious teaching is true? To answer this question, we will need to look closely at several aspects of God’s nature, beginning with the fundamental question of the nature of His being: is He an impersonal force, or personal being? Is He like the “Force” in Star Wars, or does He possess personhood?

In technical terms, we will be discussing God’s transcendence and His immanence. God’s transcendence refers to his distinctness from His creation. For example, pantheism (Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) holds that God is an impersonal force who is one with the universe, which means that He does not exist apart from or in distinction from it. In other words, God is not “transcendent.” This will be our discussion in chapters 5-6. On the other hand, deism teaches a personal God who is not only distinct from creation, but is so far removed from it that we have no contact with Him. In other words, deists emphasize, even exaggerate God’s transcendence. This is the topic of chapter 7.

A related concept, “God’s immanence,” refers to God’s closeness to His creation, that is, the fact that He intervenes in the affairs of the world, and people can connect with Him. As described above, pantheism emphasizes God’s immanence to the point where He and the universe merge into one. On the other hand, in deism, God is not immanent at all, since He has no direct dealings with creation.

Along with the above-mentioned views, which emphasize either God’s transcendence or immanence to the exclusion of the other, we will consider views that acknowledge, at least nominally, both His transcendence and immanence: the relatively new view, “panentheism,” and theism (also discussed in chapter 7).

Chapter 5: Is the Force with Us? Episode 1

Pantheism is a worldview claiming complete identification of God with the universe. In other words, God is everything, and everything is God. God and the universe are one, and the universe manifests God. Beyond the limits of the universe, God does not exist. Thus, pantheism emphasizes God's immanence to the exclusion of His transcendence.

Pantheism, which is characteristic of most Eastern religions, has representation in the West as well in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). He felt that God could be identified with "Nature," an impersonal force, which directs all things. In Spinoza's teaching, Nature manifests (or "extends itself") in all existing things. The goal of life is for people to accept and reconcile to the fact that they are a manifestation of this impersonal Force and learn to live in harmony with it. Yet, Spinoza insisted that, although everything is defined and directed by Nature, which is above and beyond the categories of good and evil, from a practical point of view people should still strive to live moral lives.

The most extensive manifestation of pantheism is Hinduism and its related faiths: Buddhism, New Age and others. In this chapter, we will examine Hinduism.

A. General Information

Hinduism is one of the most influential religions in the world today, including its modern form "New Age." Hindus make up 15 percent of the world's population (1.1 billion people). Eighty seven percent of Hindus live in India. The vast majority of India's population is Hindu – up to 80 percent. Proportionally, Nepal, whose state religion is Hinduism, has even a higher percentage – 81 percent.²⁶⁸

Hindus themselves call their religion *Sanātana Dharma*, which means "eternal law" or "eternal way." The term "Hindu" itself has an interesting history.²⁶⁹ It comes from Sanskrit and originally served as the name of the Indus River. During the Persian Empire, it designated the region beyond the Indus and its inhabitants. Greeks, Romans and Moslems used it in the same sense. Finally, when India was under British rule, the term designated all non-Moslem inhabitants of India. So then, the term "Hindu" had more of an ethnic than a religious connotation.

Since the term "Hindu" came to designate all non-Moslem inhabitants of India, it became associated with no single, but all indigenous faiths of India. Nigosian comments, "Hinduism is not a single or unified, coherent religion, but a system of many religions that are tolerated within the social framework of Hindu society."²⁷⁰ However, there exist enough common features between the indigenous religions of India to group them, for purposes of study, under one designation: "Hinduism."²⁷¹

The variety present in Hinduism allows its adherents a certain freedom in their philosophical views and personal religious devotion. The emphasis on devotion to a certain manifestation of the Ultimate results in the majority of Hindus worshipping only one god. In practice, then, Hinduism often resembles monotheistic faiths.

²⁶⁸Halverson D. C. Hinduism // Halverson D. C. The compact guide to world religions. – Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1996. – P. 87; Narayanan T. Hinduism // Taylor B. R. Encyclopedia of religion and nature. – London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005. – V. 1 – P. 762; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#Demographics>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#Demographics>.

²⁶⁹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism>; Hammer R. Hinduism // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 170; Baumann M. Hinduism // Melton J. G., Baumann M. Religions of the world. – Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010. – V. 3. – P. 1322-1331; Hexham I. Understanding world religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. – P. 118; Davis R. Religions of India in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 1999. – P. 9-10.

²⁷⁰Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – P. 79.

²⁷¹Clark relates that the nature of Hinduism is under discussion. "Centralists" feel that Hinduism is, in essence, one religion, united by a common priesthood and scripture. "Pluralists," on the other hand, accentuate the variety in Hinduism (see Clark D. K., Geisler N. L. Apologetics in the new age: A Christian critique of pantheism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990. – P. 10-11).

We may also note that Hinduism lacks both a founder and a concrete system of administration.²⁷² Nonetheless, in modern times we observe an effort to unify Hindu thought. For example, national Hindu Councils represent the Hindu faith in various countries of the world. In addition, the World Hindu Conference has assembled since 1975.²⁷³

B. History of Hinduism

1. Beginnings

How did Hinduism begin?²⁷⁴ Hinduism traces its history to the second millennium BC, when the polytheistic inhabitants of the Indus River valley, the Dravidians, succumbed to the invading Arians in 1500 BC.²⁷⁵ The Arians were a warlike people, whose religion supported their warlike agenda. For example, although their priests brought sacrifices to various gods (Arians, too, were polytheistic), they honored most of all Indra, the god of war and storm. Another of their primary gods, Agni, the god of fire, received these sacrifices.

“Soma” is one of the most interesting gods of Arian worship. He is associated with the moon, and also with a plant by the same name. The extract of that plant is hallucinogenic and is considered useful for receiving divine inspiration. We also note that in the early Arian literature (i.e. Vedas), Vishnu and Shiva, leading figures in later Hindu cosmology, occupy an insignificant position.²⁷⁶

Another of the primary gods, Varuna, was responsible for moral and natural laws. In theory, Varuna held the highest position in the Arian pantheon, since he belonged to the class of gods “*asura*,” among whom he was chief. In practice, though, priests paid more honor to the lower class of gods, “*deva*,” headed by Indra. Also notable is the conviction, held by Arians, that above all the gods stood the “cosmic order,” that is, impersonal forces, among whom Rta was head.

Arian priests authored a collection of scriptures called Vedas, which describe the order for sacrifices, recount victories in battle, and preserve hymns sung by priests for worship. Initially the hymns were called *brahman*. More specifically, *brahman* was the power inherent in holy speech. Later, this term denoted the priests, who read them. Finally, the term *brahman* designated the priests, who brought sacrifices. These sacrificial priests eventually surpassed in dignity the priests who read the hymns.²⁷⁷

2. Classical Hinduism

In the eighth and seventh centuries BC, a revolt occurred among the Arians against the priests, who had been dominating the people. Consequently, instead of appealing to the gods by means of rituals performed by the priests, people began putting more emphasis on personal contact with the gods through meditation. Development of this new form of Hinduism, now called “classical Hinduism,” continued up to the fourth century AD.²⁷⁸

²⁷²Braswell G. W. Understanding world religions. – Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. – P. 22; Renou L. ed. Hinduism. – New York, NY: George Braziller, 1962. – P. 36. Also see Corduan W. A Tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – P. 227; Davis, p. 9.

²⁷³Esposito J.L., Fasching D. J., Lewis T. World religions today. – New York, NY: Oxford, 2002. – P. 342;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Hindi_Conference.

²⁷⁴Hiltebeitel A. P. Hinduism // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale, 2005. – V. 6. – P. 3990-3991; Baumann, v. 3, p. 1323; Hexham, p. 118-119, 138; Braswell, p. 22-23; Davis, p. 12-15; Renou, p. 21-34.

²⁷⁵There are other views, namely, that the Dravidians died out before the Arians arrived (Baumann, v. 3, p. 1323; Hexham, p. 123), or that the Arians were the original inhabitants of India (Hammer, p. 763).

²⁷⁶Davis, p. 14-15; Narayanan, v. 1, p. 765; Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3990.

²⁷⁷Hexham, p. 118; Davis, p. 15; Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3991.

²⁷⁸Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3994.

With the appearing of new sacred writings, namely the *Upanishads*, arose also a new religious consciousness – that reality, in essence, is one, and that all elements of reality are manifestations of a single all-encompassing Unity. People referred to this Unity using the already well-known designation “Brahman.”²⁷⁹ Yet, this Unity manifested itself in the many “lower” gods that the people worshipped.

As time went on, several factors led to the weakening of Hindu faith among the inhabitants of India. First was the Moslem conquest of India, followed by its occupation by Great Britain and British missionary activity. In recent centuries, however, Hinduism has experienced a “rebirth” in India, due to the efforts of Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), who worked to restore (with some modifications) classical Hinduism, and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), who worked toward liberation of India from British rule and the caste system in Indian society. In addition, the meditation techniques of Ramakrishna (1836-1886) have spread worldwide.²⁸⁰

From the fourth to the sixth centuries AD, a new and unique form of Hinduism arose: Tantric Hinduism.²⁸¹ Its distinguishing mark is the employment of physical stimuli, namely sexual, for attaining higher levels of enlightenment. Adherents feel that sexual activity is “a way of reenacting creation, bringing the practitioner in harmony with the forces of the cosmos.”²⁸² Correspondingly, the main god (more precisely, “goddess”) in this system is Shakti, a cohort of Shiva. She represents to her devotees the source of cosmic energy.²⁸³

Along with sexual activity, adherents of Tantric Hinduism seek enlightenment through a special diet of fish, meat, wine and grains. This form of Hinduism enjoyed great popularity during the Moslem occupation of India, but its popularity has waned since.²⁸⁴ At the present time, the most popular form of Hinduism is *bhakti*, which we will discuss later.²⁸⁵

C. Scriptures of Hinduism

1. *Śruti*

The sacred scriptures of Hinduism exist in two groupings. The first, *Śruti*, which means “things heard,” carry authority for defining Hindu faith. Narayanan, though, makes this qualification: “While some texts and some deities are accepted by many, there is no single text, single deity, or single teacher that all Hindus would deem authoritative or supreme.”²⁸⁶ Untaught Hindus, in fact, may not know these writings at all.²⁸⁷

The *Śruti* include the Vedas, which translates as “knowledge.” Davis comments, “This entire corpus of sacred literature came to be portrayed by its proponents as revelation, something that was only ‘heard’ and not composed by human beings.”²⁸⁸ Hindus also consider them “eternal sacred knowledge,” received by wise men from Brahman in antiquity.²⁸⁹ They also consider that the “hearing” of the Vedas by those who received them did not result in the corruption of their truth. Consequently, the Vedas have no human author, but are the “self-revelation of the impersonal Brahman.”²⁹⁰

The Vedas consist in four parts, each of which expounds on the same four themes. The four parts are the *Rigveda*, the *Yajurveda*, the *Samaveda* and the *Atharvaveda*. The four themes repeated in these four parts are as follows: (1) *Samhitas*, hymns for rituals, (2) *Brahmanas*, explanations of the “sacred power” of the hymns,

²⁷⁹Halverson, p. 88.

²⁸⁰Hexham, p. 121; Esposito, p. 312-319.

²⁸¹Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 4003; Davis, p. 45.

²⁸²Davis, p. 45.

²⁸³Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 4003; Davis, p. 45.

²⁸⁴Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 4003; Davis, p. 44.

²⁸⁵Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 4006.

²⁸⁶Narayanan, v. 1, p. 763.

²⁸⁷Ibid.

²⁸⁸Davis, p. 12.

²⁸⁹Nigosian, p. 77

²⁹⁰Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3994. Also see Hammer, p. 174.

(3) *Aranyakas* (Book of the Forest), more reflections on the hymns, and (4) the later-added *Upanishads*, revelations of the mystical meaning of the hymns.²⁹¹ The first section of the Vedas, the *Samhitas*, dates (in written form) from the 12th to the 11th centuries BC, and the final section, the *Upanishads*, – from the eighth to the fifth centuries BC.²⁹²

The *Upanishads* are considered the “highest teaching” of the Vedas. In them, we first encounter the teachings on *karma*, *moksha*, *samsara*, *Atman* and Brahman (as an all-encompassing reality).²⁹³ Narayanan writes concerning them, “The quest for a unifying truth is a distinctive feature of the *Upanishads*.”²⁹⁴ In them, we observe the transition from sacrificial ritual, emphasized in the early parts of the Vedas, to personal religious experience through meditation, or as Hiltebeitel writes, “an experimental knowledge of the self as one with ultimate reality.”²⁹⁵

2. *Smriti*

A second group of writing is the so-called *Smriti*, which translates as “things remembered.” Hindus recognize human authors for these books, but consider them inspired nonetheless, yet not on the same level as the *Śruti*. Even though they are less authoritative than the *Śruti*, the *Smriti* enjoy great popularity, even more than the *Śruti*. Although Hindu scholars may not contradict the *Smriti*, they nonetheless exercise great freedom in their interpretations of it.²⁹⁶

Among the *Smriti*, enjoy greatest popularity: *Ramayana* (written sometime between the fifth and first centuries BC) and *Mahabharata* (written sequentially between the fourth century BC and the fourth century AD). The latter contains myths about the *avatars*, that is, various incarnations of Vishnu. It also contains the highly popular myth *Bhagavad Gita*, i.e. the myth of Krishna, in which Krishna reveals himself as the chief god and promises liberation to his devotees. *Ramayana* tells the story of another incarnation of Vishnu, Rama, and how he recovers his captive wife Sita.²⁹⁷

From the third century BC to the 10th century AD, a voluminous work developed called the *Puranas*. In these pages, we find numerous topics: theology, cosmology, rituals for Shiva and Vishnu, legends, myths and stories of creation. They are considered “the scriptures of the common folk, since they are available to everyone – including women.”²⁹⁸ In distinction from the Vedas, in which Vishnu and Shiva play less important roles, in the *Puranas* they are central. There we also learn the teaching about Brahma, the god of creation, and of the cohorts of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma.²⁹⁹

The *Smriti* also contain the work *Manusmriti*, or the “Laws of Manu,” certain sacred laws. They were penned in the second century BC, allegedly by Manu, the father of humanity. Here we discover the Hindu teachings regarding the caste system and the retributive system *karma*.³⁰⁰

Other writings highly regarded in Hinduism include the *Sutra*, which describe offerings for sacrifice and rules for society in the form of aphorisms. Famous commentators on the *Sutra* include Adi Shankara (788-820 AD), Ramanuja (1017-1137 AD) and Madhva (1197-1276 AD). These three belong to the *Vedanta* school of thought, one of the six philosophical movements in Hinduism (see below).³⁰¹

²⁹¹The term *Upanishads* means “sit alongside” (Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3993).

²⁹²Baumann, v. 3, p. 1323-1324; Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3989-3993.

²⁹³Davis, p. 16-17; Clark, p. 39.

²⁹⁴Narayanan, v. 1, p. 765.

²⁹⁵Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3993.

²⁹⁶Narayanan, v. 1, p. 765; Corduan, p. 67; Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3995.

²⁹⁷Davis, p. 27-28; Nigosian, p. 78; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valmiki>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahabharata>.

²⁹⁸Nigosian, p. 79.

²⁹⁹Davis, p. 28-30, Nigosian, p. 78-79; Narayanan, v. 1, p. 765-766.

³⁰⁰Nigosian, p. 78; Braswell, p. 26.

³⁰¹Clark, p. 39, 58.

D. Beliefs of Hinduism

1. The Concept of Brahman and Its Manifestations

Hinduism, in its classical form, is a pantheistic worldview that teaches the existence of a unified reality – Brahman, which encompasses all things in itself. All that exists is an expression or a manifestation of this one reality. The apparent variation in the universe is, in fact, only an illusion, or *maya*. We must, supposedly, break out of this illusion, in order to perceive the inherent oneness of reality. Brahman is beyond all distinctions. It is not good or evil. It simply exists.³⁰²

Furthermore, Hindu cosmology makes a distinction between the concepts of “nirguna-Brahman” and “saguna-Brahman.” The first makes up the essence of reality and exists in an impersonal form. It is beyond understanding and defies description in words.³⁰³ Brahman on a more “superficial” level manifests itself as saguna-Brahman, also known as Ishvara, who does possess personal qualities.

In addition, saguna-Brahman, or Ishvara, manifests itself in three specific ways, the so-called *Trimurti*, which correspond to various forces of nature: Brahma is saguna-Brahman as creator, Vishnu is saguna-Brahman as guardian, and Shiva is saguna-Brahman as destroyer. This triad replaces the earlier Hindu triad of Varuna, Indra and Agni.³⁰⁴

Vishnu, in turn, manifests himself in various *avatars*, that is incarnations: Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-Lion, Dwarf, Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and the eschatological figure Kalki. Supposedly, Vishnu commissions an *avatar* for each age to restore true *dharma* (teaching).³⁰⁵ Braswell describes it thus: “Vishnu resides in heaven, rules over the earth as preserver, champions all good causes, and at times assumes human form.”³⁰⁶ Davis gives this description of Shiva:

In contrast to the sociable Vishnu, Shiva is an outsider. Residing typically in the highest Himalayan Mountains, he is the lord and role model for yogis, less concerned with instituting *dharma* on earth than with leading souls toward *moksha*. Second, Shiva has a dual nature, conjoining what are to us antithetical attributes. Not only is he both malevolent and benevolent, he is also both ascetic and erotic, hermit and family man, an immobile mediator and an unruly dancer.³⁰⁷

Unlike Vishnu, Shiva has no *avatars*. He is famous for his iconic representation, the “dancing Shiva,” and is considered the lord of the dance. The cohorts of Shiva include Shakti and the infamous Kali.³⁰⁸

In the subsequent development of *Sanātana Dharma* (Hinduism), its adherents devoted more and more attention to individual manifestations of Brahman, considering this or that manifestation the primary one.³⁰⁹ The most prominent among these movements is Vaishnavism (or Vishnuism), which recognizes Vishnu as the primary manifestation of Brahman. Other movements give pride of place to other gods: Shaivism or Shivaism (Shiva), Shaktism (Shakti), and Smartism, where five gods are worshipped equally: Vishnu, Shiva, Surya, Ganesh, and Devi (Shakti).

³⁰²Halverson, p. 88-89.

³⁰³Tennent refers to the “principle of Arundhati,” which is an attempt to describe nirguna-Brahman. Arundhati is a star, identified by association with brighter, neighboring stars. In a similar way, attributing positive attributes to nirguna-Brahman only approximates its true, yet still unknowable nature (Tennent T. P. Christianity at the religious roundtable. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 42-43).

³⁰⁴Braswell, p. 23.

³⁰⁵Hiltebeitel A. C. Hinduism // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale, 2005. – V. 6. – P. 4000; Davis R. Religions of India in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 1999. – P. 52; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu#Avatars>.

³⁰⁶Braswell, p. 24.

³⁰⁷Davis, p. 29.

³⁰⁸Narayanan, v. 1, p. 766; Nigosian, p. 81; Braswell, p. 24.

³⁰⁹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaishnavism>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shivism>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaktism>;

The “goddess” concept in Hinduism is confusing. Sometimes the term “goddess” (who is also considered “Mother Earth”) denotes all the individual Hindu goddess grouped together as one. At other times, the term denotes only one of them: Devi, Kali, Shakti, Durga, etc. The designation Devi is also variable. Sometimes she is the unifying goddess herself, and sometimes she is just one of the individual goddesses.³¹⁰

2. Salvation in Hinduism

For what should a Hindu strive? In short, the attainment of unification with Brahman. More precisely, the Hindu must discover his/her already existing unity with Brahman, since Brahman encompasses all of reality. Halverson describes this condition thus: ‘The goal of *enlightenment* is for the individual self to lose its separate identity in the universal Self.’³¹¹ So then, salvation, that is *moksha*, involves liberation from the illusionary world (*maya*), and unification with Brahman. Latter Hindu literature also employs the Buddhist term for salvation – *nirvana*.³¹²

Three “paths” supposedly lead to salvation: *jnana-marga*, or “the path of knowledge,” *bhakti-marga*, or “the path of devotion,” and *karma-marga*, or “the path of action.”³¹³ By means of any one of these paths, the Hindu hopes to attain *moksha* (salvation).

Two other concepts, *karma* and *samsara*, are important elements in this system. *Samsara* is the cycle of reincarnations the Hindu expects to undergo. People’s *karma*, that is, the quality of their behavior, determines their status and condition in the next reincarnation. Depending on the *karma* from their previous life, they will find themselves in a position either closer to, or farther away from *moksha*.

In summary, salvation (*moksha*) consists of liberation from the cycle of reincarnation (*samsara*) and the illusionary world with the perception of individual existence (*maya*), and unification with Brahman. In the words of Corduan, “The nature of salvation consists of release from the bondage of phenomenal existence.”³¹⁴ *Moksha* is even reflected on the flag of India, which displays a wheel, the symbol of the cycle of reincarnation (*samsara*), from which the Hindu seeks release.

Attainment of *moksha* is possible only for Indian males. Foreigners or Indian women must be reincarnated as Indian men in order to progress on to salvation. Correspondingly, women tend to hold a lower status in Indian culture.³¹⁵

In addition, traditional Indian culture practices the caste system, which determines both one’s status in society and one’s nearness to attaining *moksha*. The lowest caste, the *shudras*, consist of slaves and various common workers. The next higher class, the *vaishyas*, consists of merchants, herdsman and farmers. The *kshatriyas* are warriors and administrators. The highest class are the *brahmins* – priests and the intelligentsia. Only the highest caste can attain *moksha* in the subsequent reincarnation.

3. The Great Tradition (The Path of Action and the Path of Knowledge)

a. The Path of Action

Of the three above-mentioned paths to *moksha*, two of them make up the “Great Tradition”: *karma-marga*, “the path of action,” and *jnana-marga*, “the path of knowledge.”³¹⁶ *Karma-marga* (the path of action) involves fulfilling various societal obligations, observing rituals and ceremonies for certain gods, and doing

³¹⁰Baumann, v. 3, p. 1326.

³¹¹Halverson, p. 91.

³¹²<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana>.

³¹³Halverson, p. 91.

³¹⁴Corduan, p. 114.

³¹⁵Nigosian, p. 92.

³¹⁶Braswell, p. 35-36.

good works.³¹⁷ These activities lead to liberation from *samsara* in that for his/her good behavior the practitioner receives good *karma*. Proper behavior is defined by *dharma*, or “teaching.” Yet, these standards vary depending on which caste a person belongs to, and in which stage of life one is in (see below).

b. The Path of Knowledge

The “path of knowledge” teaches that a person is alienated from Brahman because of ignorance. He/she simply does not understand that he/she is already one with Brahman and is an expression of its being. In this “path,” the practitioner’s goal is to perceive that everything except Brahman is *maya*, that is, an illusion.³¹⁸

A key factor in the “path of knowledge” is *Atman*, an inner aspect of human nature that has direct contact with Brahman. By means of this internal *Atman*, a person has access to the ultimate reality. More precisely, *Atman* is Brahman itself, dwelling in the human constitution in a special way. In one’s *Atman*, a person does not relate to Brahman as subject to object, but identifies fully with it.³¹⁹ Through meditative techniques, a person can supposedly increase awareness of his/her oneness with Brahman.

The path of knowledge enjoyed great popularity from the sixth century BC until the tenth century AD. In modern times, Ramana Maharshi has inspired interest in it again, having spend his life on a mountaintop meditating on Brahman. He followed a strict ascetic regime and continually asked himself the question, “Who am I?” He claims to have attained awareness of his oneness with Brahman.

Among adherents of *jnana-marga* exists a long-standing dispute about the nature of Brahman and reality itself. The six schools of thought are *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Samkhya*, *Yoga* and two others, still practiced today: *Mimamas* and *Venanta*. The latter translates “the end of the *Vedas*” in honor of the *Upanishads*, from which its teachings come.³²⁰

The *Venanta* school of thought hosts three distinct views concerning the nature of *maya*. The classical view is *advaita* (non-dualistic) *venanta*, which states that Brahman is the only component of reality, and all else is illusion. A second view, *vishishadvaita venanta*, holds that the material world is also real, but only as an expression of Brahman. The last view, *dvaita* (dualistic) *venanta*, is closer to theism in that it teaches that the universe is real and distinct in essence from Brahman.³²¹

The leading teacher of the classical view, *advaita venanta*, was Adi Shankara (788-820 AD), who championed absolute, non-dualistic pantheism.³²² The term “non-dualistic” means that Brahman and the world are not contrasting realities that exist separate from one another, but are in essence a unity. Shankara distinguishes nirguna-Brahman from saguna-Brahman, ascribing concrete personality traits only to the latter. Clark describes Shankara’s belief concerning the essential Brahman, i.e. nirguna-Brahman:

The best that can be done is to deny every attribute of Brahman... Language cannot touch Brahman... The Self of all possesses the character of intelligence, but it lacks any distinctions and transcends all language. Thus, it can be described only negatively, by the denial of attributes.³²³

This contrasts with saguna-Brahman, which Tennent describes: “Nothing that is characterized as saguna has any ultimate or certain reality, since it serves as a mere pointer or indicator of the one Brahman who remains beyond any description.”³²⁴

³¹⁷Nigosian, p. 91; Braswell, p. 32.

³¹⁸Nigosian, p. 93.

³¹⁹Ibid, p. 85.

³²⁰Hiltebeitel, p. 3997.

³²¹Halverson, p. 88.

³²²Braswell, p. 22; Clark, p. 40-55.

³²³Clark, p. 47.

³²⁴Tennent, p. 42.

According to Shankara, people may contact Brahman through their *Atman* and by cultivating the awareness that they are already one with ultimate reality. Awareness of one's *Atman*, in turn, is developed intuitively in the realm of feeling. The Hindu can also contact Brahman by reading the Vedas, of which Brahman is allegedly the source.

Moksha, then, occurs when a person reaches full awareness that he/she is one with Brahman. In the words of Shankara: "Once the soul realizes that it is and always has been Brahman, this life passes away like a dream."³²⁵ Nigosian describes it this way: *Moksha* is realized by "total identification of one's individual self with the universal Self (Brahman-Atman)."³²⁶ Therefore, in Shankara's system meditation is key. Good works do not merit *moksha*, yet they may provide good *karma* for the next reincarnation. Rituals have little value.

Although, similar to *advaita venanta*, *vishishadvaita venanta* also recognizes Brahman as the ultimate reality, it differs in recognizing the reality of the world as well, as an expression of Brahman. The world is not illusionary (*maya*). Tennent describes it thus: "Brahman is one, but contains within himself all of the plurality and differentiation of the universe."³²⁷ Ramanuja (1017-1137 AD) was the leading teacher of this view, also known as "modified non-dualism."³²⁸

Ramanuja did not recognize the distinction between nirguna-Brahman and saguna-Brahman, but considered Brahman a personal god, whom one can describe, and with whom one may have personal contact. Another key feature of this system is the complete identification of Brahman with Vishnu. Consequently, Vishnu is the chief god. Also in distinction from classical Hinduism, Ramanuja taught that, although Brahman (that is, Vishnu) contained the universe in himself, he exists in part separate from the universe as well. So then, Vishnu has a transcendent aspect to his nature.³²⁹

In summary, the goal for the Hindu in Ramanuja's teaching is personal fellowship with Vishnu, characterized by total consecration to him and simple trust in him.³³⁰ In the words of Narayanan, a Hindu strives to attain "the intuitive, total and joyful realization of the soul's relationship with the lord."³³¹

The third and least influential movement in *Vendata* is *dvaita venanta*, founded in the 13th century by the philosopher Madhva. Similar to Ramanuja, he embraced *Vaishnavism*, i.e. faith in Vishnu as the ultimate god. His views differed from those of other branches of *Vendata*, however, in teaching dualism – that Brahman, people and the world are different and distinct aspects of reality.³³²

4. The Little Tradition (The Path of Devotion)

At present, the most popular branch of Hinduism is *bhakti-marga*, the "path of devotion." The term *bhakti* means "devotion," and its adherents devote themselves to and worship one god, that is, one of the manifestations of Brahman. Popular objects of worship include Vishnu, Shiva, Indra, Brahma, the Goddess and others. In addition, some worship so-called "impure gods," such as one's family, caste or village. These "impure gods" cannot supply *moksha*, but are thought to bring earthly blessings. Some even feel that Jesus Christ is one of the manifestations of saguna-Brahman.³³³

³²⁵Noted in Narayanan, v. 1, p. 772.

³²⁶Nigosian, p. 88.

³²⁷Tennent, p. 44, also see Nigosian, p. 96.

³²⁸Tennent, p. 39.

³²⁹Tennent, p. 39; Narayanan, v. 1, p. 772.

³³⁰Tennent, p. 45.

³³¹Narayanan, v. 1, p. 772. The teachings of the contemporary Hindu philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) in many ways correspond with the views of *vishishadvaita venanta*. He taught that Brahman manifests itself in the material world, yet the world is real as well. More specifically, he proposed four levels of reality: Brahman, Ishvara (the personal Brahman), Hiranya-garbha (the World Soul) and Viraj (the material world). Yet, Radhakrishnan (along with Sankara) differs from Ramanuja in that he recognizes the distinction between nirguna-Brahman and saguna-Brahman and rejects *Vaishnavism* (Clark, p. 57-73).

³³²Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 4005; Baumann, v. 3, p. 1330.

³³³Narayanan, v. 1, p. 766; Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3998-3999, 4006; Davis, p. 33; Tennent, p. 53

Worshippers seek to relate to their “patron” god or goddess in different ways: (1) as lower being to higher, (2) as slave to master, (3) as child to mother, (4) as friend to friend, (5) as beloved to lover.³³⁴ Some regard their god’s idol as the god himself/herself, while others simply see it as his/her habitation. Renou states, “For some, perhaps for the majority, the idol is the god himself... for others... the sacred incarnate in some concrete form.”³³⁵ Worshippers also express devotion by practicing *pūja* (see below).

Unlike the paths of knowledge and action, where success depends totally on personal effort, *bhakti-marga* offers “grace,” especially among adherents of *Vaishnavism*. The devotee’s patron god/goddess, it is supposed, may reward devotion with the removal of bad *karma* and accelerate the process of attaining *moksha*.³³⁶

This “grace” is understood in two ways. The first is the “school of the cat,” since the patron god “carries” the worshipper in his/her mouth, much as a cat carries her kitten. Hammer writes, “Salvation is not the result of human striving, but is seen as a gift from God.”³³⁷ The recipient of grace does good works to express gratitude to the god. The second is the “school of the monkey.” Although the mother monkey also carries her young, at the same time the young must hold onto her. Therefore, the devotee is an active participant in his/her salvation.

Several other features of *bhakti-marga* merit attention. Since one of the characteristics of Shiva is madness, his worshippers may consider madness a sign of spiritual attainment. Some devotees claim to have visions of their “patron” god/goddess. Sometime they value intimacy with their patron god/goddess more than the attainment of *moksha*.³³⁸

5. The Origin and Fate of the World

In the *Rigveda*, the story is told of a certain god, Purusa, who was sacrificed at the dawn of this world, and from whom all humans came in accordance with their caste distinctions. The *brahmins* (priests and the intelligentsia) arose from his mouth, the *kshatriyas* (warriors and administrators) derived from his arms, the *vaishyas* (merchants, herdsmen and farmers) – from his legs, and the *shudras* (slaves and various common workers) – from his feet.³³⁹

Furthermore, from Purusa, supposedly, came the inanimate world as well. The sun is from his eyes, the moon came from his mind, the wind is his breath, the atmosphere – his naval, heaven – his head. Some believe that certain gods arose from Purusa as well: Vishnu, Brahma, Indra and Agni.³⁴⁰ At the same time, the world has no beginning. An eternal cycle of creations and destructions mark history. The present universe is just one epoch in this history, which has no beginning or end.

Hindus measure time in a unique way.³⁴¹ The world proceeds through four periods of time, called *yugas*. The four *yugas* together take 12,000 years to complete. Yet, these units are not human, but divine. A divine year equals 360 human years. So then, these four *yugas* take over 4 million human years to complete.

Each successive *yuga* is shorter than the previous one, and hosts greater disorder and evil. We now allegedly live in a final (evil) *yuga*, which began in 3000 BC. At the end of this period, the tenth and final incarnation of Vishnu, Kalki, is said to appear to restore *dharma* (teaching), convert people to its truths, destroy the world, eliminate death and begin a new cycle of *yugas*, at which time a new Manu (the prototypical human) appears to repopulate the world.

³³⁴Davis, p. 43-44.

³³⁵Renou, p. 30-31. Also see Hammer, p. 195; Braswell, p. 32.

³³⁶Hammer, p. 189; Corduan, p. 97, 121-122.

³³⁷Hammer, p. 192.

³³⁸Matriciana P. Gods of the New Age. – Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985. – P. 48; Corduan, p. 131; Davis, p. 42-43.

³³⁹Davis, p. 15; Renou, p. 22.

³⁴⁰Stutley M., Stutley J. Harpers dictionary of Hinduism. – New York: Harper & Row, 1977. – P. 238-239; Hildebeitel, v. 6, p. 3992; Narayanan, v. 1, p. 764.

³⁴¹Hildebeitel, v. 6, p. 3999-4000; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuga>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalpa_\(aeon\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalpa_(aeon)); Corduan, p. 177-187; Narayanan, v. 1, p. 767.

Moreover, 1000 cycles of *yugas* makes up one *kalpa*, which equals 4.32 million years. A *kalpa* makes up one day in the lifespan of Brahma, i.e. Brahman as creator. The subsequent *kalpa* is his night. Thus, two *kalpas* equals 24 hours in Brahma's lifespan. Brahma lives 100 such years, or 72,000 *kaplas*, then he dies. Another god (Vishnu, the Goddess, or Shiva) destroys the universe, creates a new Brahma, and the cycle begins anew. So then, the lifespan of Brahma is 311 trillion, 40 million human years. Supposedly, he lives and acts within an "egg," prepared for him by Vishnu or Shiva. The universe and all it contains are within Brahma's "egg."

6. Summary

Mark Albrecht provides this fine summary of the main elements of Hindu faith:³⁴²

1. God – God is usually perceived in an impersonal sense, as law, energy, or creative force.
2. Humanity – People are regarded as part of the Divine, or essentially God. Since the universe itself is divine, as pantheism and monism presume, each person is also a spark of the universal fire, or a wave in the divine ocean. The body is usually seen as a separate reality, a temporal dwelling.
3. The world – The world is often viewed as illusory, a temporary playground which one must not become attached to, since worlds and universes are continually recycled. Matter is but a gross manifestation or emanation from pure spirit, and will dissolve and reappear again an infinite number of times.
4. Salvation – Salvation (in the spiritual sense) is accomplished via enlightenment, or being liberated from attachment to the world and the mind. In other words, realizing that you are really God – or a part of God – and then experiencing that unity through specific techniques and rituals. Some form of reincarnation is usually adhered to, and the process of achieving salvation is dependent upon self-effort and usually takes many incarnations.
5. Good and evil – Goodness is usually synonymous with the aforementioned enlightenment, and evil is associated with ignorance

In conclusion, it is important to note a final aspect of Hindu thought. It does not disturb the practitioner of Hinduism if we observe in his/her faith inconsistencies or logical contradictions. Hindus do not expect that one can describe the Indescribable or know the Unknowable without encountering some logically irreconcilable aspects of its nature. Nigosian explains, "Inconsistency or contradiction is not an issue in Hindu theology, so long as one understands the ineffability of infinity."³⁴³

Concerning other religions, Hindus are ready to acknowledge them, since they understand them to be other expressions of the universal reality, i.e. Brahman. Nonetheless, they qualify this acknowledgement by saying that other religions are inferior to Hinduism in regard to the proper view of reality and in true worship.³⁴⁴

E. The Hindus' Life

1. Meditation and Guidance of the Gury

The guidance of a guru, also called a swami or mahariji, is vitally important in the life of a Hindu, especially those seeking *moksha* by way of the path of knowledge.³⁴⁵ Hindus regard the personal guidance of a guru

³⁴²From Mark Albrecht, *New Religious Movements Update*, V. 5, No. 2, Aug 1981, Aarhus Univ., Aarhus, Denmark. Taken from *Matrisciana*, p. 25.

³⁴³Nigosian, p. 115.

³⁴⁴Esposito, p. 321.

³⁴⁵Braswell, p. 24.

more vital than the teachings of the Vedas, since the guru supposedly already knows the way to enlightenment by experience.

As a rule, a new guru will study under a more experienced one. The teaching passed on is known as *parampara*. Yet, training is not obligatory. Anyone can declare himself a guru. More progressive gurus will utilize mass-media and travel extensively to propagate their teaching.³⁴⁶

Pupils devote themselves totally to their gurus with complete submission. A pupil must “meditate ceaselessly on the form of the guru... always repeat his name. Carry out his orders. Think not of anything except the guru... through service at the feet of the guru the embodied (i.e. the pupil) should become purified.”³⁴⁷ The pupil considers the guru to possess supernatural power. Matrisciana writes,

Anything which has touched the body of the guru is holy, from the dust of his feet to his dirty dishes. Drinking the guru’s bathwater is said to be enlightening. Should the guru desire sex, the disciple (whether male or female) is to look upon this act as step up his spiritual ladder.³⁴⁸

A guru will sometimes draw his pupils away to form communities called *ashrams*, where they practice meditation with the goal of unification with Brahman. The practitioners will sometimes employ narcotics to obtain higher levels of “divine awareness.”³⁴⁹

During meditation, the practitioners will repeat a mantra, which is a “single or multisyllable phrase (usually in Sanskrit) on which one meditates. Each mantra is identified with a particular deity to the extent that the correctly pronounced mantra embodies that deity. The point of repeating the mantra is to provoke the powers of that deity and to invite it to enter you.”³⁵⁰ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi stated that the purpose of the mantra was “to produce an effect in some other world, to draw the attention of those higher beings or gods living there. The entire knowledge of the mantra... is devoted to man’s connection, to man’s communication with the higher beings in a different strata of creation.”³⁵¹ The “sacred syllable” *om* is considered to have special power.³⁵²

Along with repetition of the mantra, the practice of meditation also involves *yoga*. Practitioners of *yoga* observe a strict bodily regime for attaining greater spiritual heights. In the words of Davis, *yoga* involves “restraining one’s unruly inclinations in order to attain a higher state of consciousness.”³⁵³ It involves “withdrawal of the senses from the outer world, and culminating in fixed meditative awareness.”³⁵⁴ Devotees to *yoga* limit their intake of food and practice celibacy. During meditation, they occupy a special bodily posture and control their breathing.³⁵⁵

2. Worship (*puja*)

In relation to one’s “patron” god, worshippers, especially in the “Little Tradition” (Way of Devotion), practice *puja*. They perform various acts to please the idol, namely singing to the idol, bathing the idol,

³⁴⁶Esposito, p. 322-323, 335.

³⁴⁷From *Gita-guru*. See Matrisciana, p. 143.

³⁴⁸Ibid, p. 143.

³⁴⁹Ibid, p. 133, 154.

³⁵⁰Rice E. Eastern definitions // Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1980. – P. 279; taken from Halverson, p. 101.

³⁵¹Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The meditations of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, (New York, 1973), P. 17-18; quoted in Allen J. Yoga: A Christian analysis – Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1983. – P. 29; taken from Groothuis D. Confronting the New Age. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988. – P. 80.

³⁵²Narayanan, v. 1, p. 766.

³⁵³Davis, p. 19

³⁵⁴Ibid, p. 18.

³⁵⁵Davis, p. 19; Matrisciana, p. 153-154.

dressing it, offering food, “dining” with it, bringing flowers, etc. One can observe *puja* in a temple, where priests perform the rituals, or at home, where devotees perform them themselves for the household idols.³⁵⁶

Along with the temple practice of *puja*, Hindu priests offer sacrifices in the temple according to a religious calendar. There are five “great sacrifices”: for Brahman, departed relatives, gods, other beings and people. Every family has its own priest, who presents sacrifices on behalf of the family and provides instruction.³⁵⁷

3. Sacred Objects and Places

One of the most well known practices among Hindus is honoring cows. They do this for several reasons. First, a deity may dwell in them. Second, the cow is a symbol of Mother-Earth, and, as Hammer states, “of the bounty she bestows upon humanity.”³⁵⁸ Hildebeitel relates the conviction that the cow is an “animal that symbolizes everything good in nature.”³⁵⁹ It provides humanity with more than any other animal.³⁶⁰

Hindus show respect not only for the cow, but also for nature in general, because the universe is thought to be part of a single reality, that is, Brahman. Therefore, one’s attitude toward nature is the same as one’s attitude toward Brahman. Correspondingly, most Hindus are vegetarians or partial vegetarians. They are also pacifists.³⁶¹

Although it is not imperative, many Hindus make a pilgrimage to places where, reportedly, special spiritual manifestations have occurred. The most famous destination is the river Ganges, whose waters are thought to possess supernatural qualities valuable for cleansing from bad *karma*, bodily healing, protection from evil spirits and infertility, and preparation for the afterlife. After a pilgrimage to the Ganges, Hindus may take home some of its waters, or bring back flowers for their idols. Hindus desire to die along the Ganges in the sacred city of Varanasi, so that their ashes can be sprinkled in the river.³⁶²

In conclusion, we may mention several other sacred practices.³⁶³ By tradition, when a person enters a house or temple he/she removes his/her shoes. As a rule, Hindus refrain from alcohol. Touching a corpse or human excretions makes a person ceremonially unclean. Burial is by cremation. Certainly, the most shocking practice observed in traditional Hindu culture is *sati*, where the widow is cremated with her departed husband. Although this practice is now illegal, rare instances of its practice are still reported.³⁶⁴

Hindus observe various social events connected with the life cycle: the birth of a boy, his connection with a guru, weddings, and deaths.³⁶⁵ The religious calendar marks off a feast day complete with processions for every major god. On that day, it is thought that the god is more kindly disposed. The feast of *Diwali* coincides with Christmas.³⁶⁶ The most popular feast day is *Holi*, done in honor of Krishna. During this feast, Hindus permit themselves more “loose” behavior in search of pleasure. In Hinduism, we also observe, at least on the popular level, superstition, magic, astrology, and the worship of snakes and genies.³⁶⁷

4. The Caste System (*Varna*) and Stages of Life (*Asrama*)

³⁵⁶Hammer, p. 195. Hexham, p. 140; Esposito, p. 326.

³⁵⁷Hildebeitel, v. 6, p. 3991; Esposito, p. 334.

³⁵⁸Hammer, p. 182.

³⁵⁹Narayanan, v. 1, p. 768.

³⁶⁰Ibid.

³⁶¹Hexham, p. 140; Hildebeitel, v. 6, p. 3996.

³⁶²Nigosian, p. 103; Esposito, p. 333-334; Matrisciana, p. 159; Hexham, p. 140; Hammer, p. 171.

³⁶³Hexham, p. 140-143; Hammer, p. 195; Esposito, p. 320.

³⁶⁴<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sati>; Esposito, p. 338.

³⁶⁵Hildebeitel, v. 6, p. 3991.

³⁶⁶Esposito, p. 328-329.

³⁶⁷Renou, p. 34; Nigosian, p. 100.

Another interesting aspect of Hindu life is the caste system.³⁶⁸ It dates back to the Arians, who justified the system by appealing to the “sacrifice of Purusa” mentioned earlier. As we also learned, four caste distinctions divide Hindu society. The lowest caste, the *shudras*, consist of slaves and various common workers. The next higher class, the *vaishyas*, consists of merchants, herdsman and farmers. The *kshatriyas* are warriors and administrators. The highest class are the *brahmins* – priests and the intelligentsia. Usually people marry within their castes, but convention allows women to marry men of superior castes.³⁶⁹

The members of the three higher castes are considered “reborn,” and men belonging to these castes wear a distinguishing mark – a “sacred thread,” which they receive during their ceremony of initiation into adult life. Three times a day members of the higher castes are expected to perform ritual singing, meditation and bathing. Only the highest caste has opportunity to attain *moksha* in the next life. Elevation in the castes takes place through reincarnation. A person’s *karma* determines the outcome of the reincarnation.

The observance of *dharma* (teaching, or rules of life) differs among castes depending on the requirements defined for each one.³⁷⁰ From the Laws of Manu, Braswell summarizes the *dharma* for each caste:

To *Brahmanas* he assigned teaching and studying (the *Veda*), sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting (of alms). The *Kshatriya* he commanded to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the *Veda*), and to abstain from attaching himself to sensual pleasure; the *Vaisya* – to tend cattle, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the *Veda*), to trade, to lend money, and to cultivate land. One occupation only the lord prescribed to the *Sudra*, to serve meekly even these (other) three castes.³⁷¹

We should make mention of a fifth group, which arose in the history of Hindu society – the “untouchables.” They are subject to many restrictions. For example, they may not participate in ritual worship, fellowship or even drink from a common well. The class of “untouchables” includes foreigners. Yet, in recent times, the caste system in general is not so strictly observed.³⁷²

Finally, Hindu society recognizes four stages of life, the so-called *ashrama*, through which every Hindu male passes: student, family man, retiree and recluse. In the first stage, a person learns a trade and prepares for adult life. In the second, he works and contributes to society. In the third, he focuses more on spiritual disciplines under the guidance of a guru. In the fourth, he leads an ascetic life, restraining from the necessities of life, even from normal breathing, in order to draw near to Brahman. Yet, in practice, most Hindu men never attain to the demands even of the third stage.³⁷³

F. Evaluation of Hinduism

Besides a concern for life and respect for nature, it is difficult to find many other positive aspects of the Hindu faith and worldview. Instead, we observe in this religious system numerous serious defects. First, Hindu faith contradicts human consciousness and awareness. With rare exception, when people view the outside world, they perceive a clear distinction between themselves and other entities. Human consciousness has no tendency to view oneself as a manifestation of an all-encompassing, impersonal force. We affirm with Copan,

³⁶⁸There exists another system for defining status in Hindu society – distinction by *Jati*. These systems overlap each other. See Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3996.

³⁶⁹Nigosian, p. 76; Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3996.

³⁷⁰Hammer, p. 175, 195; Baumann, v. 3, p. 1324, 1328.

³⁷¹Braswell, p. 28-29.

³⁷²Nigosian, p. 89; Braswell, p. 35, 43.

³⁷³Nigosian, p. 91; Braswell, p. 33; Hiltebeitel, v. 6, p. 3995.

“The best procedure is to believe what is apparently true unless there is some known reason to believe that it is not.”³⁷⁴

Second, people have no recollection of having experienced a previous life, which seems strange, if they have already passed through multiple reincarnations. Third, this system goes against human judgment. Unlike Hinduism, which does not recognize the difference between good and evil as fundamental to reality, all people, by nature, recognize this distinction.

Furthermore, Hinduism claims that variety in the world is an illusion and that we should seek out the inherent unity of all things. Yet, we know from experience that people prefer variety to unvarying monotony, which quickly becomes dull and uninteresting. According to the teaching of theism, God created the world with variety for people to enjoy. Yet, Hindu thought reduces everything to a lifeless monotone.

In addition, classical Hinduism claims that ultimate reality is impersonal. This means that the impersonal exceeds the personal, which contradicts universal human judgment. All people consider the personal more highly developed than the impersonal. In this vein, Groothuis writes, “The impersonal, then, would be viewed as somehow higher than the personal... We do not normally think or live this way.”³⁷⁵ Preference for the impersonal (*nirvana*) “robs humans of any individual significance, value and purpose as real persons.”³⁷⁶ This is likely the reason that Hinduism at times has birthed different movements that view ultimate reality as personal. It is also difficult to image that an impersonal force (Brahman) can somehow reveal itself in sacred writings (Vedas).

So then, if the Highest Being is impersonal, as classical Hindu cosmology proposes, then people occupy a position of higher development and capability than Brahman does. Here Groothuis reminds us of the axiom, “A cause must be equal to or greater than its effects.”³⁷⁷ Similarly, Lewis writes, “If God is the ultimate source of all concrete, individual things and events, then God Himself must be concrete, and individual in the highest degree.”³⁷⁸ This means that in every respect God must be higher and greater than what He has created.

Lewis also regards that pantheists exchange “the image of a fatherly and royal looking man for the image of some widely extended gas or fluid.”³⁷⁹ He feels it more appropriate to compare God with a person: “Man, after all, is the highest of the things we meet in sensuous experience.... If God exists at all it is not unreasonable to suppose that we are less unlike Him than anything else we know.”³⁸⁰

Moreover, with another personal being one can have fellowship, spend time, and share affection, all of which is impossible with an impersonal force.³⁸¹ Groothuis correctly notes that Hinduism “is ultimately unsatisfying for real human needs because it provides no ultimate grounds for worship, adoration, fellowship or obedience in relation to a personal God.”³⁸² Tennent adds the thought that in this system true worship is impossible, since the worshipper, being himself/herself in essence one with Brahman, in reality is worshipping himself/herself.³⁸³

Another approach in evaluating Hinduism is considering its basis or foundation. Where did the Hindu faith come from, and how did it originate? Who, in fact, authored the Vedas? We usually rate the quality of a religion claiming Divine revelation by the qualifications of those who supposedly received that revelation. Yet with Hinduism, this is impossible to trace. In addition, there is no historical evidence of the real existence of

³⁷⁴Copan P. Why the world is not religiously ambiguous: A critique of religious pluralism // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 146.

³⁷⁵Groothuis, p. 110.

³⁷⁶Ibid, p. 111.

³⁷⁷Ibid.

³⁷⁸Lewis C. S. Miracles. – London: Centenary Press, 1947. – P. 105.

³⁷⁹Ibid, p. 90.

³⁸⁰Ibid.

³⁸¹Halverson, p. 94.

³⁸²Groothuis, p. 109.

³⁸³Tennent, p. 57.

the mythological *avatars*, i.e. incarnations of Vishnu, or that Buddha, who did exist, was one of them. This means that the entire Hindu faith likely arose from human imagination.

We also note in Hinduism a curious inconsistency in the use of terminology. For example, as we discussed previously, at first the term “brahman” referred to hymns recorded in the Vedas. Then it denoted the priest who read them. Next, the term referred to priests who offered sacrifices. Only later, during the writing of the *Upanishads*, did Brahman become an all-encompassing, ultimate reality. A similar phenomenon occurs in relation to the Hindu “pantheon.” As noted before, in the Vedas, Vishnu and Shiva are secondary gods, yet in classical Hinduism, they are now the primary manifestations of Brahman. Such inconsistencies render the plausibility of Hindu faith suspect.

Hinduism suffers from other serious defects. For example, Hindus sense a separation between themselves and God, that is, Brahman, yet have a hard time explaining this separation. If people are all manifestations of a single reality, then why do they sense this separation from Brahman and the need to reunite with it? Furthermore, how can a Hindu experience fellowship with Brahman or enjoy intimacy with it, if Brahman and the devotee are a single entity? Therefore, in Hinduism, true religious experience is unattainable.³⁸⁴

Moreover, in Hindu thought the concepts of good and evil have no relation to ultimate reality, since Brahman is supposedly above such concepts. Such an assumption, though, creates a contradiction. If good and evil are not foundational to the real order of things, then the related concepts of “better” and “worse” also have no meaning. If the concept of “better” has no meaning, then what motivates a person to seek unity with Brahman? On what basis can Hindus claim that unity with Brahman is “better” than separation from it?

Concerning the idea of *maya*, we may ask where this illusory world came from? In addition, if in reality all things are one, then the subject-object distinction breaks down. If, then, the subject-object distinction is removed, then how can someone (as a subject) claim that they *discovered* that reality (as an object) is one? Who is this “subject” that looks on reality as an “object” distinct from himself/herself?³⁸⁵ Moreover, if ultimate reality is unknowable and indescribable, then how can Hindu teachers claim to know that the Brahman is unknowable, or describe Brahman as indescribable?³⁸⁶

Here we recall that proponents of Hinduism allow logical inconsistencies in their system, since the Ultimate Reality is assumedly above logical categories. Yet, those who deny that the rules of logic apply to reality, in reality, are contradicting themselves. Let us explain.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that reality is illogical, that is, that the laws of logic do not apply to reality. Yet, claiming that reality is *illogical* is the same as claiming that reality is *not logical*. It is unlikely that one would claim that reality is both *logical* and *illogical* at the same time and in the same sense. A person will hold to either one position or the other. Making one of those claims automatically excludes the other.

So then, when a Hindu seeks to explain logical inconsistencies in his/her faith by claiming that ultimate reality is illogical, they are, paradoxically, actually confirming the logical nature of reality. In rejecting the logical nature of reality by claiming that it is illogical (and thereby claiming that it *cannot* be logical), they employ a rule of logic in their defense, namely, the law of non-contradiction: something cannot be A and not-A at the same time and in the same sense. In fact, whenever Hindus use any argumentation in defense of their faith, they rely on logical consistency.³⁸⁷

Groothuis affirms the absurdity of rejecting logic in theological discussion: “God is either personal or impersonal, not both; God is either moral or amoral, not both; people are either nondivine or divine, not both; there is either resurrection or reincarnation, not both.”³⁸⁸

In regard to ethics, Hinduism encounters more problems. First, if the concepts of good and evil are part of the illusory world of *maya*, then on what can we base our standards and moral principles? Second, if good

³⁸⁴Geisler N. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976. – P. 187-188.

³⁸⁵Clark, p. 153, 156, 207.

³⁸⁶Tennent, p. 54-55.

³⁸⁷Geisler N. L. Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999. – P. 606; Clark, p. 174-175.

³⁸⁸Groothuis, p. 50.

is not essentially “better” than evil, then why does Hinduism urge the practice of good works?³⁸⁹ The result is, as Lewis states, “The Pantheist’s God does nothing, demands nothing.”³⁹⁰

Clark and Geisler object that pantheism operates on the epistemological system “mysticism,” that is, verification of truth by inner intuition.³⁹¹ Obviously, a Hindu cannot rely on empirical data or logical deduction to verify truth claims, since those systems confirm the reality of the material world and the individuality of creatures and objects in it. As we demonstrated earlier, mysticism is an inadequate epistemological system, since the claims of mysticism defy objective confirmation. Actually, if pantheists seek to defend the legitimacy of mysticism, they must do so by appealing to empirical or logical proofs. Yet, by seeking confirmation from these other epistemological systems, they thereby undermine their claim of mysticism’s superiority.

Finally, every event or experience requires an accurate interpretation. Events do not interpret themselves. Correspondingly, every mystic interprets his/her mystical experience in accordance with his/her present worldview. The Muslim mystic claims to contact Allah, the Christian mystic – the Holy Spirit, and the Hindu mystic – Brahman. In other words, mystical experience defies objective analysis and interpretation, but instead is simply employed to confirm the already accepted religious position of the mystic.

G. Conclusions

So then, in spite of the popularity and pervasiveness of the pantheistic worldview, especially represented in Hinduism, it encounters many serious logical, epistemological, ethical and practical difficulties. In addition, Hinduism has no historical basis. Even the authors of its sacred books are unknown. In summary, it seems that there is little that might compel a person to embrace Hinduism.

Resources Used:

Allen J. Yoga: a Christian analysis – Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1983. – 64 p.

Baumann M. Hinduism // Melton J. G., Baumann M. Religions of the world. – Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010. – V. 3. – P. 1322-1331.

Braswell G. W. Understanding world religions. – Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. – 189 p.

Clark D. K., Geisler N. L. Apologetics in the new age: A Christian critique of pantheism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990. – 235 p.

Copan P. Why the world is not religiously ambiguous: A critique of religious pluralism // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 139-159.

Corduan W. A Tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – 239 p.

Davis R. Religions of India in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 1999. – P. 8-55.

³⁸⁹Clark, p. 211, 216.

³⁹⁰Lewis, p. 113.

³⁹¹Clark, p. 160-183.

Esposito J.L., Fasching D. J., Lewis T. World religions today. – New York, NY: Oxford, 2002. – 550 p.

Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976.

_____. Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999.

Groothuis D. Confronting the New Age. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988. – 222 p.

Halverson D. C. Hinduism / Halverson D. C. The compact guide to world religions. – Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1996. – P. 87-102.

Hammer R. Hinduism // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 170-195.

Hexham I. Understanding world religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Hiltebeitel A. C. Hinduism // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale, 2005. – V. 6. – P. 3989-4009.

Lewis C. S. Miracles. – London: Centenary Press, 1947. – 220 p.

Matrisciana C. Gods of the New Age. – Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985. – 221 p.

Narayanan T. Hinduism // Taylor B. R. Encyclopedia of religion and nature. – London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005. – V. 1 – P. 762-777.

Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – 480 p.

Renou L. ed. Hinduism. – New York, NY: George Braziller, 1962. – 241 p.

Stutley M., Stutley J. Harper's dictionary of Hinduism. – New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1977. – 352 p.

Tennent T. C. Christianity at the religious roundtable. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – 243 p.

~~~~~

wikipedia.org

## Chapter 6: Is the Force with Us? Episode 2

In the course of time, Hinduism birthed other religions, which, except for the Hare Krishna Movement, also promote a pantheistic worldview. Here we are speaking of the ancient faiths of Jainism and Buddhism, and also of faiths that appeal more to modern audiences, namely Hare Krishna and New Age.

### A. Jainism

#### 1. Description

The branch of Hinduism called Jainism arose in India in the sixth century BC. It was founded by Vardhamāna (599-527 BC), also called Mahavira, or the “great hero.” He was Indian, the son of a king, who lived in luxury until age 30, when reflections on life led him into a lifestyle of strict asceticism.

His history is unique in that he claimed to have attained *nirvana* in this life, at age 42. Subsequently, he became a religious teacher, instructing others seeking *nirvana*. His followers thought him to be divine. Mahavira considered himself the twenty-fourth in a series of *tirthankaras* (literally, “ford-makers”), whom followers of Jainism worship along with other lesser deities.<sup>392</sup> The original writings of Mahavira are now lost, but in the first century AD, the monk Dharasena, working off his knowledge of early Jain literature, recreated his teaching in his work *Śaṭkhaṇḍāgama*, now the most authoritative writing in Jainism.<sup>393</sup>

According to Jain teaching, devotees can attain *nirvana* in this life. The designation “Jainism,” in fact, means “victory.” The way to *nirvana*, according to Mahavira’s teaching, is through asceticism. *Karma* joins the spirit to the material world. Asceticism is necessary to break that bond.<sup>394</sup>

Two classes of people make up Jainism: the laity and the monks. The laity must lead a moral life, refrain from certain foods, and contribute to the monks and the poor. They worship the *tirthankaras* and other lesser gods in order to receive personal blessing and inspiration from their example of spirituality.<sup>395</sup>

Any individual (male or female) can devote himself/herself to monastic life, but he/she must surrender all personal property and vow to refrain from violence (even to animals), lying, possessions, stealing and sexual relations. Some monks refrain from wearing clothes (“sky-clad monks”), while others wear white (“white-clad monks”). An extreme practice among some is *sallekhana*, or self-starvation. Any activity can result in bad *karma*, so the preferred option is total inactivity.<sup>396</sup>

According to Jainism, the Ultimate exists in two manifestations: a spiritual aspect called *jiva*, and a material aspect, or *ajiva*. These manifestations of the Divine exist eternally, without beginning. Therefore, there was no creation of the material world.<sup>397</sup> As in Hinduism, Jainism also recognizes many lesser gods.

A unique feature of this teaching is the preservation of the individual. When a person attains *nirvana*, he/she is not “dissolved” into the Absolute, but remains a separate personality. Jainism also differs from Hinduism in its rejection of the caste system.<sup>398</sup>

---

<sup>392</sup>Порублёв, Н. В. Культы и мировые религии. — М.: Благовестник, 1994. — P. 63; Hexham I. Understanding world religions. — Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. — P. 234; Davis R. H. Religions of India in practice // Asian religions in practice. — Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. — P. 20.

<sup>393</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shatkhandagama>

<sup>394</sup>Hexham, p. 234.

<sup>395</sup>Davis, p. 20-21.

<sup>396</sup>Davis, p. 21; Braswell G. W. Understanding world religions. — Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. — P. 139; Corduan W. A tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. — Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. — P. 98.

<sup>397</sup>Hexham, p. 234.

<sup>398</sup>Порублёв, p. 64-65.



At the same time, Jainism shares with Hinduism a cyclic understanding of time. There exist six long periods of time, during which society reaches utopia, and then descends into degradation before a new cycle begins. Jains feel that we are now living in the next to last period of descent.<sup>399</sup>

There are between four and six million adherents of Jainism, most of whom live in India.<sup>400</sup>

## 2. Evaluation

Since Jainism shares many tenets with Hinduism, we may subject it to the same criticisms. Namely, the idea that Ultimate Reality is an impersonal force contradicts human sensibilities – people normally prefer the personal to the impersonal. In addition, people have no recollection of previous lives, which contradicts the teaching of reincarnation. On the other hand, Jainism has made some advances over classical Hinduism. Jains reject the assimilation of the individual into the Absolute and the caste system.

We can note other defects in this system. How can we know that Mahavira is qualified to define true religion, besides his self-claims to attainment of *nirvana*? In addition, we condemn the suicidal nature of this teaching – some monks take their devotion to the extreme of denying themselves the necessities of life. Finally, abandoning sound judgment, Jainism promotes attainment of *nirvana* through inactivity. Yet, a psychologically healthy individual strives to develop his/her potential and abilities. The Jain approach to “spirituality” results in arresting any progress for the improvement of the individual, or of human society.

## B. Buddhism

Buddhism is one of the oldest religions in the world. Five percent of the world’s population consider themselves Buddhists – about 400 million people. They call their faith Buddha-sasana, which means “the teaching of Buddha,” or *dharma*, translated “teaching,” “truth,” or “law.”<sup>401</sup>

The Buddhist faith enjoys great popularity in Japan, China, Tibet, Sri-Lanka, Bhutan, and Southeast Asia. The number of adherents, though, has sharply declined in the 20th century, especially in China, Mongolia and North Korea, due to the influence of communism, and in South Korea, due to the spread of Christianity. Although Buddhism began in India, at present less than one percent of India are Buddhists. This is partially due to the suppression of Buddhism by Moslems in the 11th century.<sup>402</sup>

Buddhism is a multifaceted faith. Keown warns, “Buddhism is a large and complex subject, and we should be wary of generalizations made on the basis of familiarity with any single part.”<sup>403</sup> One reason for this variety of views is that Buddhism adapts to each culture that embraces it.<sup>404</sup>

For example, for many years the dominating worldviews in China were Confucianism and Taoism. When Buddhism entered the picture, however, it intermingled with these other faiths to the point that they united into one philosophical-religious system named the “Three Teachings.” Similarly, in Japan Buddhism merged

---

<sup>399</sup>Corduan, p. 176-177, 188.

<sup>400</sup>Порублёв, p. 63; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jainism>.

<sup>401</sup>Baumann M. Buddhism // Melton J. G., Baumann M. Religions of the world. – Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010. – V. 1. – P. 419; Keown D. Buddhism: A very short introduction. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. – P. 8.

<sup>402</sup>Halverson D. C. Buddhism / Halverson D. C. The compact guide to world religions. – Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1996. – P. 54; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhutan>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India>; Hexham, p. 189. Baumann claims that in recent times Buddhism is gaining ground in China and India (Baumann, p. 423, 426).

<sup>403</sup>Keown, p. 2.

<sup>404</sup>Reynolds F. E., Hallisey P. Buddhism: An overview. // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale, 2005. – V. 2. – P. 1089.

with Confucianism and Shintoism. In addition, Buddhism may adapt its views to accommodate to local, tribal cults.<sup>405</sup>

## 1. History

The founder of Buddhism is Siddhārtha Gautama, who lived in the sixth or fifth centuries BC, but the exact dates of his life are unknown. He passed through three distinct life-epochs. First, he lived a life devoted to pleasure. Next, he experienced doubts as to the meaning of life and began to seek enlightenment. At age 35, he supposedly found enlightenment while sitting under a Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, and from that time became a religious teacher and leader.<sup>406</sup>

Many have commented on the life of Gautama.<sup>407</sup> Yet, we must note that his history has been elaborated with claims and legends that are difficult to confirm. Likely, he was born into a wealthy royal family, but renounced his wealth and position in search of enlightenment. According to legend, he was born of a virgin, and prior to that his mother received a vision of a white elephant (a sacred animal) entering her womb.<sup>408</sup>

It is also claimed that, at age 29, he encountered a number of figures that compelled him to consider the meaning of life: an elderly man, a sick person, a corpse, and an ascetic-wise man.<sup>409</sup> Because of this experience, he abandoned his home and became an ascetic monk for 6 years, seeking enlightenment. Yet, as Baumann claims, this search for meaning was not unique to Gautama, but “in those days monks and ascetic orders commonly sought to find and teach final solutions to the human sufferings of old age, sickness, and death.”<sup>410</sup>

Nonetheless, Gautama became disillusioned with the ascetic life, since it did not provide him with the enlightenment he sought. Yet, his experience in asceticism proved valuable in forming his view of the “Middle Path.” He discovered that neither wealth, nor poverty can satisfy the human need for authentic living.

The final epoch of Gautama’s story began when he sat under a Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, where, allegedly, he received enlightenment. Some believe that before receiving enlightenment, Gautama battled the demon Mara and overcame his temptations. Keown comments on the importance of this experience of enlightenment for Buddhists: “The Buddha’s personal experience of enlightenment is the bedrock of the entire Buddhist tradition. Time and again he invoked his own experience as authority for his doctrines.”<sup>411</sup>

From the time of his enlightenment, Gautama became a travelling preacher and teacher for 40 years, promoting his doctrines. Through his teaching, Gautama, reportedly, made the first turn of the “wheel of *dharma*.” His first disciples, called *arhats*, were fellow monks from his ascetic days. They made up the first monastic order of Buddhism, the *sangha*, which in time included women as well.

Because of his experience of enlightenment, Gautama became known as “Buddha,” which means “the Awakened One.” He also bears the title *Bhagavat*, or “lord.” He supposedly performed miracles and displayed

---

<sup>405</sup>Wright A. W. Buddhism in Chinese history. – Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1959. – P. – 101; Tanabe J. T. Jr. Religions of Japan in practice // Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 152; Lopez D. S. Jr. Buddhism in practice // Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 63.

<sup>406</sup>Halverson, p. 55-56.

<sup>407</sup>See Halverson, p. 55-56; Tennent T. C. Christianity at the religious roundtable. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 45, 93; Braswell, p. 46-47; Esposito J.L., Fasching D. J., Lewis T. World religions today. – New York, NY: Oxford, 2002. – P. 359-361; Hexham, p. 183-188; Baumann, v. 1, p. 419-420; Melton J. G. Buddha, Gautama // Melton J. G., Baumann M. Religions of the world. – Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010. – V. 1. – P. 415-418; Keown, p. 12, 22-23; Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994. – P. 120-124, 132; Davis, p. 22, 56; Metz W. Buddhism // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 224-225, 234-235; Bareau A. Buddhism, schools of early doctrinal schools of Buddhism // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale, 2005. – V. 2. – P. 1193; Reynolds, Hallisey, v. 2, p. 1090.

<sup>408</sup>Hexham, p. 181.

<sup>409</sup>According to another version of the story, he saw a youth, an elderly man, a sick person and then a corpse (see Hexham, p. 183-184).

<sup>410</sup>Baumann, v. 1, p. 419-420.

<sup>411</sup>Keown, p. 6.

supernatural powers, yet this is difficult to confirm. It is believed that Buddha could have attained *nirvana*, yet refrained from entering it in order to teach others the way.

When Buddha died, he appointed no successor, but claimed that his teaching, the *dharma*, would provide his movement the needed direction. His monastic order, the *sangha*, passed down his teaching by oral tradition about 400 years until his followers finally recorded it in the *Pāli* Canon, or the *Tipitaka* (see below).

After Buddha's death, his disciples began holding periodic councils. Eventually, they divided into two factions: *Theravada*, that is the "Teaching of the Elders," and *Mahayana*, the "Great Vehicle." The main difference between the two centered on a disagreement about who could attain *nirvana* – only monks, or laity also. A third movement arose from *Mahayana* named *Vajrayana*. We will discuss these movements more in detail later.

Several key events led to the spread of Buddhism. In the third century BC, the Indian king Ashoka converted to Buddhism and actively promoted the religion of Buddha. In the sixth century AD, the emperor of China converted, and two centuries later the king of Tibet. Tibet also boasts the most famous teacher of Buddhism – the Dalai Lama.

## 2. Scripture

In investigating the scriptures of Buddhism, we encounter the problem of its transmission. Buddha's teachings were passed down orally for about 400 years (some say 500). In the version that was finally written, we observe indications of adaptations by one Buddhist faction or the other. Bareau offers the following commentary:

The actual, original teaching of the Buddha is accessible to us only through the canonic texts of these (*Hinayana*) schools, texts that were set down in writing only about the beginning of the common era and reflect the divergences that already existed among these sects. Moreover, only a very small part of this vast canonic literature has survived, either in its original Indian language or in Chinese or Tibetan translation, and for this reason our knowledge of the doctrine taught by the Buddha himself still remains rather vague and conjectural.<sup>412</sup>

For at least five centuries, the Buddha's teaching was actually preserved by oral transmission alone... This and the absence of an authoritative ecclesiastical hierarchy in the *sangha* constitute two obvious sources of progressive distortion and alteration of the message left by the Blessed One to his immediate disciples.<sup>413</sup>

Lopez confirms, "The original teachings of the historical Buddha are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to recover or reconstruct."<sup>414</sup>

Nonetheless, Buddhists acknowledge as sacred scripture the *Pāli* Canon, created in the first century BC during the Fourth Buddhist Council. The *Pāli* Canon is also called the *Tipitaka*, or the "Three Baskets." The first part, the *Vinaya Pitaka*, contains rules for monks. The second, *Sutta Pitaka*, preserves the life, preaching and sayings (*sutra*) of Buddha. The third, *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, is ascribed to Buddha's disciples, and contains various philosophical teachings that elaborate Buddhist doctrines.<sup>415</sup>

Followers of the *Mahayana* teaching also recognize the *Lotus Sutra*, which relates a different version of the life of Buddha and a version of his teaching, which they consider more authoritative.<sup>416</sup> The *Mahayana*

---

<sup>412</sup>Bareau, v. 2, p. 1192.

<sup>413</sup>Ibid, v. 2, p. 1193.

<sup>414</sup>Lopez, Buddhism, p. 57.

<sup>415</sup>[https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pāli\\_Canon](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pāli_Canon); Corduan, p. 68; Metz, p. 234.

<sup>416</sup>Baumann, v. 1, p. 421.

claim that Buddha could not pass on these teachings to his disciples during his lifetime, because they would not have understood them. After his death, however, he revealed them, and the *Lotus Sutra* records them.

Buddhists also revere other works. *Abhidharma* is Buddhist *dharma* in a systematic format. The *Acts of Buddha*, written in the first century AD, relate incidents in Buddha's life. The *Prajnaparamita-Sutra*, accepted by *Mahayana*, is the "Guide to Perfect Wisdom." *Jataka*-tales allegedly tell of previous lives of Buddha. *Vajrayana* accepts *Kangyur* and *Tengyur* as sacred scripture. Finally, monks have written commentaries, called *Shastra*.<sup>417</sup>

### 3. Teaching

The teachings of Buddhism are called *dharma*. Buddhists hold that Buddha did not invent *dharma*, which includes not only teaching, but also laws that govern the cosmos, but simply discovered it.<sup>418</sup> The starting point for Buddhists is the "Three Refuges," which must be repeated three times by a new convert or someone entering a monastic order.<sup>419</sup> The devoted Buddhist will also repeat them several times a day.<sup>420</sup>

I go for refuge in Buddha.

I go for refuge in *dharma* (the teachings).

I go for refuge in *sangha* (the Buddhist community).

The cornerstone of Buddha's teachings is his "Four Noble Truths." First, suffering exists. Second, suffering is the result of unfulfilled human desire. Third, one must find liberation from desire. Fourth, liberation from desire comes by observing the "Eightfold Path."<sup>421</sup>

Let us attempt to describe these items in more detail. When people strive for satisfaction and self-realization (so-called *trishna* or *tanha*), they experience disappointment (*duhkha*) when they fail to attain them. However, according to Buddhist thought, the problem consists namely in this: that people consider themselves individual, existing beings.<sup>422</sup>

Buddha taught that the existence of the self was an illusion. People's experience consist of several components: body (*rupa*), sensations (*vedana*), perceptions (*samjna*), dispositions (*samskaras*) and consciousness (*vinjana*). Yet, humans lack a centralizing factor that unifies these components into a whole personality. In other words, people have no soul or individuality. These components interact with one another and create the illusion that they relate to a concrete person.<sup>423</sup>

When a person dies, though, these components disperse and rejoin in a different combination, making up, as it were, a new personality. The only element that is "preserved" from the original combination is "awareness" (*vinjana*).<sup>424</sup> A person still retains awareness of himself/herself as "me," in whatever form he/she takes. Metz describes this idea: "The person is actually a flowing stream of *dharms*, which continually changes and which after death rearranges itself to form a new individual."<sup>425</sup>

So then, a person needs to accept that he/she is not an individual, but simply a combination of elements without a unifying center. When someone understands this, he/she will realize that striving for satisfaction or

---

<sup>417</sup>Hexham, p. 201; Reynolds, v. 2, p. 1092-1093; Keown, p. 9, 16-17; Metz, p. 234; Halverson, p. 60; Lopez D. S. Jr. Religions of Tibet in Practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 130.

<sup>418</sup>Keown, p. 97.

<sup>419</sup>[https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Refuges\\_\(Buddhism\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Refuges_(Buddhism)); Esposito, p. 353.

<sup>420</sup>Nigosian, p. 152.

<sup>421</sup>Baumann, v. 1, p. 420-422.

<sup>422</sup>Ibid.

<sup>423</sup>Esposito, p. 372; Nigosian, p. 127.

<sup>424</sup>Keown calls this stable factor "moral identity" (see Keown, p. 48).

<sup>425</sup>Metz, p. 231.

self-realization is senseless. How can a non-existing entity attain self-realization? The devotee is now in position to attain liberation from suffering.

Consequently, a person's primary enemies are desire and hatred. On the one hand, a person desires to live a satisfying life. On the other hand, when his/her happiness is threatened, he/she defends it by manifesting hatred. According to Buddhist teaching, desire and hatred derive from ignorance of the fact that the individual, in fact, does not really exist. Deliverance (*prajna*) from ignorance (*avidya*) results in liberation from desire, hatred and the suffering that arises from them, that is, it results in *nirvana*.

Lopez describes it in this way: "There is, in fact, no permanent and autonomous self in the mind or the body, and to believe otherwise is the root cause of all suffering. It is this imagined self that is inflamed by desire and defended by hatred."<sup>426</sup> Keown writes, "The recognition that there is ultimately no subject that 'has' desires weakens and finally destroys craving once and for all,"<sup>427</sup> and further, "When craving is removed suffering ceases and *nirvana* is attained."<sup>428</sup>

Unlike Hinduism, where *nirvana* is a merging with Brahman, in Buddhism *nirvana* is "the end of all transitory states; the final, peaceful bliss; the ultimate goal of each individual... an inscrutable state of absolute transcendence."<sup>429</sup> Clearly, the Buddhist conception of *nirvana* is hard to grasp. In fact, as Keown claims, the Buddhist is not so concerned to understand *nirvana*, as to attain it.<sup>430</sup> Buddhists approaching this state are called *arhats*.<sup>431</sup>

Buddhist teaching also differs from Hindu teaching in that the former rejects the existence of *Atman*, i.e. an inner "point of contact" with Brahman. Instead, Buddhism advances the idea *anatman*, which means that at the center of human existence there is no "point of contact" with Brahman, but *synyata*, that is, nothingness.<sup>432</sup>

It is also important to note that in Buddhist thought, not only is the human a combination of factors, but the universe is as well. This doctrine, called "dependent arising," claims that everything in the universe is interdependent, which means that there is no "independent" object or being, which does not depend on something else.<sup>433</sup>

As mentioned above, the way to attain awareness of one's non-existence (*prajna*) is to observe the "Eightfold Path," which is a "Middle Way" between sensuality and asceticism. It consists of the following elements:<sup>434</sup>

1. Right view (acceptance of the Four Noble Truths)
2. Right resolves ("commitment to develop right attitudes," no hatred)
3. Right speech (no lying or gossip)
4. Right behavior (no killing, stealing)
5. Right livelihood ("having employment not to detriment of others")
6. Right effort ("generating wholesome states")
7. Right mindfulness (clarity of thought)
8. Right concentration (meditation)

---

<sup>426</sup>Lopez, Buddhism, p. 70.

<sup>427</sup>Keown, p. 95.

<sup>428</sup>Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>429</sup>Nigosian, p. 132.

<sup>430</sup>Keown, p. 53.

<sup>431</sup>Davis, p. 71; Braswell, p. 55.

<sup>432</sup>Esposito, p. 372; Corduan, p. 96; Cobb J. B., Griffen D. R. Process theology: An introductory exposition. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1976. – P. 138.

<sup>433</sup>Tennent, p. 91-92.

<sup>434</sup>Nigosian, p. 128; Keown, p. 55; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noble\\_Eightfold\\_Path](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noble_Eightfold_Path); Esposito, p. 364.

The first two of these elements concern wisdom (*prajna*), the next three – morals (*shila*), the last three – meditation (*dhyana* or *samadhi*). Each of these categories of religious activity serves a specific goal: *prajna* leads to liberation from the illusion of individuality, *shila* – to moral living, and *samadhi* – to enlightenment through meditation.<sup>435</sup>

Buddhism shares with Hinduism faith in *karma* and *samsara*, i.e. the cycle in reincarnations. Although at death the components of the person disperse, the principle of *karma* guarantees that his/her awareness (*viññana*) continues on in the next life. A person's *karma* is determined not only by a person's deeds, but also by the motivation behind those deeds.<sup>436</sup>

The ten acts that result in bad *karma* are murder, stealing, improper sexual behavior, lying, causing divisions among people, harsh speech, foolish speech, pride, evil intent and improper viewpoint. Contrasting behaviors result in good *karma*.<sup>437</sup>

The cosmology of Buddhism is complicated.<sup>438</sup> According to the Buddhist view, there are three spheres of reality: the sphere of desire, the sphere of form and the sphere of formlessness. People live in the sphere of desire; gods live in the higher spheres, nearer to enlightenment or *nirvana*. Still, *samsara* affects the gods as well, and their fate in the next life depends on *karma*.

It is said that in the sphere of desire exist four islands, one of which, known as *Jambudvīpa*, is inhabited by the people of our world. These four islands surround Mount Meru, where the gods live and seek enlightenment through meditation. Under Mount Meru, there are several layers of hell. Reincarnated in the lowest hell are those who kill father or mother, and *arhats*, who have wounded a Buddha or caused division in the *sangha*.<sup>439</sup>

Four levels that the gods inhabit are situated on Mount Meru (and above it). The lower gods inhabit the sphere of form, and the higher gods – the sphere without form. Gods in the sphere of form have sensory perception except for taste and smell. "Formless" gods have no body or sense perception at all. They exist only in a condition of consciousness.

In order to be reincarnated to a higher condition in the sphere of desire, all that is required is good *karma*. The majority of Buddhists strive for this goal. In order to enter the sphere of form, one must devote oneself to meditation as well. The monks strive for this goal. In addition, the adherents of *Mahayana* believe that more than one Buddha exists, and that they live in the "Worlds of Buddha." A layperson may attain reincarnation there, where his/her attainment of enlightenment is accelerated.<sup>440</sup>

Buddhism teaches that the universe is eternal and passes through cycles of evolution and degradation. After every 20 cycles, the universe disintegrates and the process begins anew. So then, time proceeds cyclically with no goal in mind. It is said that we now live in a period of degradation, during which our life expectancy decreases and conditions in the world worsen.

#### 4. Divisions

There exist three main divisions or branches in Buddhism: *Theravada*, *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana*. The first two are more widespread movements, while the third is more prevalent in Tibet and is also known as Tantra Buddhism. Among the *Mahayana*, two subdivisions exist: Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism.

Here we may also mention a reform taking place among some contemporary Buddhists to remove superstition and magical tendencies from Buddhism and focus more on morality and meditation. This reform

---

<sup>435</sup>Halverson, p. 54-59; Esposito, p. 364.

<sup>436</sup>Metz, p. 230; Lopez, Buddhism, p. 84.

<sup>437</sup>Davis, p. 67.

<sup>438</sup>See Davis, p. 65-66; Lopez, Buddhism, p. 65-68; Keown, p. 30-36.

<sup>439</sup>Davis, p. 71

<sup>440</sup>Ibid, p. 68.

includes a return to the original teaching of Buddha. In addition, reformers support the idea that *nirvana* is accessible to the laity.<sup>441</sup>

### **a. *Theravada* (*Hinayana*)**

*Theravada* makes up 38% of worldwide Buddhism and is prominent in Sri-Lanka and Southeast Asia. The name itself means “the original teaching” or “the teaching of the elders.” It was one of the original twelve Buddhist schools of thought, and the only one to survive from the early period. The *Theravada* branch of Buddhism is also known as *Hinayana*, or “the Lesser Vehicle,” which contrasts with *Mahayana*, the “Great Vehicle.” The *Mahayana*, in fact, ascribed this title to *Theravada* in order to demean it.<sup>442</sup>

The main distinction of *Theravada* is the conviction that only monks may attain to enlightenment. Consequently, the goal of *Theravada* is to become an *arhat*, i.e. a monk approaching *nirvana*.<sup>443</sup> In addition, *Theravada* teaches that there is only one Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, who was a mere human. Correspondingly, only the words of Buddha are sacred, that is, the *Pāli* Canon. Unlike *Mahayana*, Buddhists in the *Theravada* branch reject the idea that the “spirit” of Buddha can be incarnated in subsequent Buddhas.<sup>444</sup>

### **b. *Mahayana* and Related Movements**

In this section, we will discuss not only the *Mahayana* branch of Buddhism, but also two movements arising from it: Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism.

#### **1) *Mahayana***

*Mahayana* Buddhism makes up 62% of all Buddhism and is especially prevalent in Central and East Asia, namely in Tibet, Korea, Japan and China. As was already mentioned, the term *Mahayana* means the “Great Vehicle.” Its teaching originated in the first century AD.<sup>445</sup>

Several features distinguish *Mahayana*. First, it teaches that not only monks may attain enlightenment, but laypersons also. Second, there are many Buddhas. More specifically, Buddha is an eternal being with three “bodies” (so-called *Trikaya*). The highest form is *dharmakaya* (or “the body of *dharmakaya*”), which is “an all-pervading principle,” or the “essence of the entire universe.”<sup>446</sup> Next, Buddha may take upon himself a more concrete spiritual body, or *sambhoga-kaya*. The most famous manifestation of this form is Amida. Finally, Buddha may take on physical form, *nirmanakaya*. One such manifestation was Siddhartha Gautama. So then, Gautama did not receive enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, but only pretended to – he was actually already enlightened. There will also reportedly be a future manifestation of Buddha, Maitreya, who will introduce an era of universal enlightenment.<sup>447</sup>

Another key aspect of *Mahayana* is faith in the so-called *bodhisattvas*. This is a class of beings, which are already able to enter *nirvana*, but refrain from entering it order to help others find the way. They are able to communicate to others the good *karma* they received during their earthly lives, which can accelerate the process of others obtaining enlightenment. The number of *bodhisattvas* is apparently endless. The most

---

<sup>441</sup>Esposito, p. 405-410.

<sup>442</sup>Baumann, v. 1, p. 421; Reynolds, v. 2, p. 1088; Nigosian, p. 143; Keown, p. 57-58.

<sup>443</sup>Bareau, p. 1192; Nigosian, p. 143.

<sup>444</sup>Hexham, p. 201; Lopez, Buddhism, p. 60; Halverson, p. 56-57.

<sup>445</sup>Hexham, p. 196; Lopez, Buddhism, p. 57.

<sup>446</sup>Tennent, p. 94. Also see <https://wikipedia.org/wiki/dharmakāya>.

<sup>447</sup>Corduan, p. 188; Tennent, p. 94; Lopez, Buddhism, p. 81-82.

famous of them is Avalokitesvara, who, supposedly, is incarnate in the leaders of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai-Lamas.<sup>448</sup>

Since Buddha (Gautama) refrained from entering *nirvana* as well, he is still able to give new revelation to his followers. Therefore, *Mahayana* Buddhists accept as sacred scripture not only the *Pāli* Canon, but also the *sutra* of Buddha, such as *Lotus Sutra* and the *Prajnaparamita-Sutra*, which were, allegedly, later revealed to *Mahayana* Buddhists. *Theravada* Buddhists reject these additional writings.<sup>449</sup>

*Mahayana* Buddhists, both monks and laity, must strive to become *bodhisattvas*. That goal, however, is not easily accomplished. Reportedly, it takes  $384 \times 10^{58}$  years to attain it. The first step in that process is taking a vow to devote oneself to helping others reach enlightenment. Next comes the task of developing certain character qualities, such as generosity, morality, patience, courage and wisdom, along with meditative skills. So then, unlike *Theravada*, where the goal is to become an *arhat* on the way to personal attainment of *nirvana*, in *Mahayana* the aim is to become a *bodhisattva*, who helps others reach that stage.<sup>450</sup>

In conclusion, we will briefly mention two other philosophical movements that arose in *Mahayana*: *Yogacara* and *Madhyamika*. These movements challenge the generally accepted postulate of *Mahayana* that the ultimate element making up the essence of reality is *dharma-kaya* (see above). Followers of *Yogacara* feel the ultimate reality is the mind. In *Madhyamika* – it is nothingness.<sup>451</sup>

## 2) Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism arose in China in the third-fourth centuries AD, and is, in fact, a combination of native philosophy and *Mahayana* Buddhism. It is especially popular in Japan.<sup>452</sup>

Although Zen is classified within *Mahayana* Buddhism, in many ways it differs from it. For example, Zen rejects the deity of Buddha and the existence of *bodhisattvas* – each person must work out his/her own way to *nirvana* without the assistance of these beings. At the same time, gurus (“masters”) do assist the devotee in his/her meditation.<sup>453</sup>

According to Zen teaching, an all-encompassing “Buddha nature” penetrates all things, including human nature, and is the basis for all reality. The goal of the Zen-devotee is to discover and liberate this Buddha nature within oneself through meditation. Wright describes it thus: “The Buddha-nature is immanent in all beings, and ... its discovery through meditation and introspection brings release from illusion.”<sup>454</sup>

One form of Zen, named *Soto*, teaches that enlightenment comes by a slow process. Another school of thought, *Rinzai*, proposes that it comes by a crisis experience, named *satori*, which occurs during meditation. The devotee meditates on the idea that the “Buddha nature” lies at the core of reality, and that it consists of nothing (*sunyata*). Therefore, the goal of meditation is to realize that the basis of human existence is emptiness, i.e. *sunyata*.<sup>455</sup>

In the *Rinzai* school, we observe two approaches to attaining *satori*. First, devotees may practice typical meditation, or *zazen*. Second, they may utilize special techniques, specifically *mondo* and *koan*. *Mondo* consists of giving quick answers to rapid questions, and *koan* is the posing of illogical, unsolvable riddles. The goal of these exercises is to break down the devotee’s logical thought processes, so that he/she may

---

<sup>448</sup>Lopez, Buddhism, p. 77; Davis, p. 78; Corduan, p. 188; Braswell, p. 47.

<sup>449</sup>Lopez, Buddhism, p. 58; Keown, p. 62; Davis, p. 78; Hexham, p. 210.

<sup>450</sup>Nigosian, p. 144; Lopez, Buddhism, p. 76-77; Davis, p. 76, 86; Braswell, p. 57; Bareau, v. 2, p. 1192; Keown, p. 64, 90.

<sup>451</sup>Tennent, p. 96-98; Keown, p. 66-68.

<sup>452</sup>Wright, p. 77-78; Clark D. K., Geisler N. L. Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian critique of pantheism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990. – P. 18; Baumann, v. 1, p. 429; Keown, p. 78-79; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zen>.

<sup>453</sup>Clark, p. 31; Braswell, p. 46, 64; Nigosian, p. 147.

<sup>454</sup>Wright, p. 77-78.

<sup>455</sup>Keown, p. 78; Clark, p. 19; Nigosian, p. 147.



experience *satori* directly through a mystical experience.<sup>456</sup> As Nigosian expresses it, the devotee must “accept the limitations of human reasoning, and ... probe beyond the barriers of rational thinking to insight.”<sup>457</sup>

### 3) Pure Land Buddhism

This form of Buddhism appeared in India in the second century AD and today is one of the more widespread forms of Buddhism in East Asia, especially in China and Japan. According to this teaching, there is a certain Buddha named Amitabha, who has enough good *karma* to save all people.<sup>458</sup> Amitabha lives in the so-called “Pure Land,” and invites all who desire to come there. All that is required is to call on his name in faith. If a person arrives in the “Pure Land,” he/she will find it easier to meditate, and in such conditions, he/she will attain *nirvana* sooner. This teaching is found in the *Prajna Sutra*.<sup>459</sup>

#### c. Vajrayana (Mantrayana)

The so-called “Third Vehicle” of Buddhism is *Vajrayana* or *Mantrayana*. Some consider it simply another branch of *Mahayana*. The term *Vajrayana* means “Diamond Vehicle,” and *Mantrayana* – “Mantra Vehicle.”<sup>460</sup>

*Vajrayana* dates back to the sixth century AD. It enjoys great popularity in Tibetan Buddhism, or “Lamaism,” headed by the Dalai-Lama, who is considered to be the incarnation of Avalokitesvara, the *bodhisattva* of compassion.<sup>461</sup> In fact, in Tibet the confession of Buddhist faith includes a fourth element:

I go for refuge in Buddha.  
I go for refuge in *dharma* (the teachings).  
I go for refuge in *sangha* (the Buddhist community).  
I go for refuge in Dalai-Lama.<sup>462</sup>

The distinctive feature of this movement is the employment of special meditative methods and visualization to accelerate attainment of *nirvana*, even in this life. This “fast track” to *nirvana* is described in the scriptures of *Vajrayana*, namely the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur*.<sup>463</sup>

*Vajrayana* is also known as esoteric Buddhism, or *Tantrayana*. Many aspects of this teaching are shrouded in mystery and are revealed only in private by one’s personal guru.<sup>464</sup>

### 5. Religious Practices

In Buddhism, the obligations of the monks differ from that of the laity. Although some branches of Buddhism teach that both monks and laity can attain *nirvana*, from a practical point of view, monks still have an advantage in that they can devote more time to meditation.<sup>465</sup>

---

<sup>456</sup>Braswell, p. 51; Metz, p. 238; Clark, p. 30.

<sup>457</sup>Nigosian, p. 148.

<sup>458</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pure\\_Land\\_Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pure_Land_Buddhism); Braswell, p. 67.

<sup>459</sup>Wright, p. 41; Nigosian, p. 145-147; Corduan, p. 123-124.

<sup>460</sup>Lopez, Buddhism, p. 133.

<sup>461</sup>Davis, p. 57-58; Baumann, v. 1, p. 421; Reynolds, v. 2, p. 1093; Lopez, Tibet, p. 131.

<sup>462</sup>Baumann, v. 1, p. 421; Lopez D. S. Jr. Religions of Tibet in practice // Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 131.

<sup>463</sup>Halverson, p. 56-57; Lopez, Tibet, p. 134.

<sup>464</sup>Reynolds, v. 2, p. 1088; Lopez, Buddhism, p. 59, 135; Braswell, p. 46; Metz, p. 237.

<sup>465</sup>Hexham, p. 197.

Monks live on the offerings of the laity. Yet, the laity do this willingly, since they receive good *karma* for it. Nonetheless, at times monks must beg for support. Even though monks differ in class from laypeople, there is no caste system in Buddhism.<sup>466</sup>

The layperson is obliged to observe five basic rules: no killing (any living thing), no stealing, no lying, no adultery, no drunkenness. Other stipulations include earning an honest living, having a good reputation, and the proper use of money: for the happiness of others, the happiness of family, personal protection and the support of monks. The conscientious Buddhist observes these obligations with pure motivation as well. Therefore, the sincere Buddhist must not only observe rules, but also develop good character.<sup>467</sup>

In addition to the five basic rules of conduct, listed above, Buddhist monks observe five others: no eating after noon, no sleeping on high beds, no handling of money, no adorning of self, and no attendance at musical performances. Monks observe many other rules as well that direct nearly every aspect of their lives. The entire code of behavior is known as *vinaya*.<sup>468</sup>

Let us comment more on the monastic life.<sup>469</sup> Monks do not worship so much as meditate, seeking *nirvana*. Yet, the *Mantrayana* monks do pray to the *bodhisattvas*. Monks do not fulfill any sacerdotal or mediatorial function in Buddhist society. Some monks, though, become philosophers or teachers of *dharma*. Sometimes monks are permitted to work or marry. Although the monastic life is open to women as well, the number of woman monks is small.<sup>470</sup>

All monks and dedicated Buddhists focus on meditation. Keown comments, "Virtually all schools of Buddhism see meditation as the high road to enlightenment."<sup>471</sup> The devotee occupies a certain bodily position, repeats a mantra and reflects on some concept "until the awareness of subject and object dissolves in a unified field of consciousness."<sup>472</sup>

At the same time, Buddha taught that this type of meditation does not lead to enlightenment, but only soothes the soul. In order to reach enlightenment, one must distance oneself from all sensibilities, physical and emotional. Only in this way can one become aware of the transient nature of reality and the absence of the personal soul.<sup>473</sup>

Another important aspect of Buddhist religious life is visitation of *stupas* and *pagodas*, some of which are thought to contain relics of Buddha. Pilgrims also visit monuments to unknown *bodhisattvas*. The most sacred site for a pilgrimage is Bodh Gaya, where Buddha, supposedly, received his enlightenment. There exist numerous statues of Buddha, and he is thought to reside in them.<sup>474</sup> In the words of Lopez, "Icons thus empowered were treated as spiritual beings possessed of magical powers, to be worshipped with regular offerings."<sup>475</sup>

## 6. Evaluation

As noted above, Buddhism shares a number of common features with Hinduism and therefore is subject to the same critique. Buddhism embraces the concepts of *karma* and reincarnation, which find no confirmation in human consciousness. It seems strange that a person, having passed through innumerable reincarnations, would have no recollection of previous lives. In addition, under normal conditions people have an awareness

---

<sup>466</sup>Nigosian, p. 127; Braswell, p. 62; Keown, p. 40; Hexham, p. 196; Esposito, p. 367, 375-376.

<sup>467</sup>Keown, p. 99; Esposito, p. 375-376.

<sup>468</sup>Hexham, p. 201; Keown, p. 98; Davis, p. 84, 100-101; Corduan, p. 82-83.

<sup>469</sup>The term *sangha* usually refers to monks, but can also denote those supporting them (see Baumann, v. 1, p. 422), or even to all Buddhists (see Teiser, p. 101).

<sup>470</sup>Lopez, Buddhism, p. 63, 86, 140; Reynolds, v. 2, p. 1097; Nigosian, p. 133; Keown, p. 6; Hexham, p. 210; Braswell, p. 61.

<sup>471</sup>Keown, p. 84.

<sup>472</sup>Ibid, p. 88-89.

<sup>473</sup>Ibid, p. 94-95.

<sup>474</sup>Teiser, p. 101; Keown, p. 73; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhisattva>; Davis, p. 23, 72; Nigosian, p. 149.

<sup>475</sup>Lopez, Buddhism, p. 73.

of their personhood and individuality. To the sound mind, the idea that the individual does not exist appears absurd.

Moreover, like Hinduism, Buddhism also postulates that the essence of reality is either nothingness or an impersonal principle. This places the impersonal above the personal, which, again, contradicts universal human judgment. If the Absolute is impersonal, then people occupy a position of higher development and capability than it does. Additionally, with rare exceptions, people value the personal above the impersonal. With another personal being, one can have fellowship, spend time, and share affection, all of which is impossible with an impersonal force.<sup>476</sup>

We may also challenge the basis of Buddhist faith. Buddha claimed to have received enlightenment, but how can we verify that? Anyone can claim, and many have claimed, to have found the way of truth. There is no external or verified supernatural confirmation of Buddha's claims. As far as we know, his teachings may be of his own creation.

We note another curious feature. The root of Buddhist aspiration is deliverance from suffering, which, in Buddhist thought, requires liberation from desire. Yet, here we encounter a contradiction. Deliverance from all desire requires *having a desire for deliverance from desire*. Consequently, it is impossible, as well as "undesirable," to be delivered from all desire.

Furthermore, is deliverance from suffering really the ultimate value in life? In fact, the system of *bodhisattvas* directly contradicts this fundamental principle. A *bodhisattva*, allegedly, refrains from entering *nirvana* (and thus subjects himself to hardship) for the sake of others. So then, what is the higher value: deliverance from suffering, or subjecting oneself to suffering for the sake of others?

In connection with *bodhisattvas*, we must note their fairytale-like character. Buddhists assume the reality of innumerable *bodhisattvas*, yet we have no objective evidence of their existence. They believe that the *bodhisattvas*, or Buddha himself, are present in statues, relics and stupas. Yet, these objects are inanimate and give no evidence of a divine indwelling. If the essence of reality is emptiness or an impersonal principle, then whom are they worshipping? The fact is that every person has an irrepressible desire to worship due to his/her inherent awareness of God's existence (see chapter 3). Buddhism, however, cannot provide the worshipper a genuine relationship with a personal Absolute, and, consequently, cannot meet that universal human need.<sup>477</sup>

All that Buddhism can offer is the annihilation of the individual personality, absorbed into nothingness. However, embracing this as a life goal runs contrary to normal and healthy human ambition. Humans of sound mind have as their life goal some type of progress or achievement, not self-annihilation.

We may comment further on the original reason for Buddhism's rise – the desire for deliverance from suffering. Buddhism seeks to solve this dilemma by denying the reality of the human individual and his/her normal desires. A preferred solution is trust in God, who will eventually eliminate all suffering and lead believers in Him into His glorious kingdom.

Finally, Buddhism is faulty in regard to ethics. If the basis of reality is nothingness, then what can serve as a standard for the moral living that Buddhism itself promotes?

## C. The Hare Krishna Movement

### 1. Description

The Hare Krishna movement takes its roots from Hinduism, but arose as a separate movement in the 15th century AD. According to traditional Hinduism, Krishna is one of the incarnations (*avatars*) of Vishnu. In the 15th century, however, a Hindu teacher claimed that Vishnu was an incarnation of Krishna and that Krishna

---

<sup>476</sup>Halverson, p. 58-60.

<sup>477</sup>Tennent, p. 108.

was, in fact, Brahman. So then, the whole of deity (that is, the *Trimurti* –Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma), are manifestations of Krishna. In addition, Krishna can manifest himself independently of these.<sup>478</sup>

Consequently, the Hare Krishna movement differs from traditional Hinduism in that the Ultimate Reality is Krishna, who is not an impersonal force, but a personality. Followers of Krishna describe their relation to Hinduism in the following way: “Krishna consciousness, or *Vaishnavism*, is a spiritual philosophy... which is in no way connected to pantheism, polytheism or the caste consciousness associated with Hinduism.”<sup>479</sup>

For devotees, Krishna is the eternal, all-mighty father of all the living, the energy that supports all life and the entire universe. Everything comes from him and cyclically returns to him, in order to again originate from him. The word “Hare” means “God’s energy,” and therefore the chant “Hare Krishna” attributes to Krishna divine energy.<sup>480</sup>

Krishna is also known by the name Rama, who, according to traditional Hinduism is also, along with Krishna, an incarnation (*avatar*) of Vishnu.<sup>481</sup> The Krishna mantra ascribes divinity to him under both names:<sup>482</sup>

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna  
Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare  
Hare Rama, Hare Rama  
Rama Rama, Hare Hare

It is felt that the name of Krishna is part of his being. Therefore, articulating his name supposedly actualizes his presence.<sup>483</sup> Allen describes the supposed influence of the mantra as creating cosmic vibrations in the atmosphere around a person’s body, which invites divine, life-giving power.<sup>484</sup>

From a historical point of view, the legend of Krishna derives from the history of a certain warrior-king from the region of Mathura in India, whose story was embellished and exaggerated to the point that he became a legendary hero with divine qualities. Subsequently, in a work called *Harivamsa* (first-second century BC) Krishna was considered an incarnation of Vishnu.<sup>485</sup>

The legend of Krishna is told in several Hindu writings, but the main source is the *Bhagavad Gita* (written in the period between the fifth and second centuries BC), which is part of the greater work *Mahabharata*. The spiritual aim of this publication is to teach devotees the way to attain perfect god-consciousness by means of certain purifying acts. Along with the *Bhagavad Gita*, followers of Krishna rely on commentaries written by their gurus.<sup>486</sup>

The Hare Krishna Movement shares several common features with its parent faith, Hinduism. For example, followers of Krishna believe in *karma* and reincarnation. In addition, they believe that the material world is *maya*, or illusion, which dissipates when they repeat the Krishna mantra. Through this repeated exercise, the devotee hopes to find liberation from *maya* and achieve perfect Krishna-consciousness.<sup>487</sup>

The goal, for which the worshipper of Krishna strives, is complete devotion to Krishna. In the terms of traditional Hinduism, the Hare Krishna Movement falls into the “path of devotion” or *bhakti-marga*. The lifestyle adopted by devotees is called *sankirtan*, the primary element of which is singing and dancing before Krishna. They also attend to the idol of Krishna by bathing it, dressing it, presenting food to it, taking it on

---

<sup>478</sup>Tucker R. A. Another Gospel. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. – P. 273.

<sup>479</sup><http://www.krishna.ru/about/hare-krishna-and-hinduism/>

<sup>480</sup>Tucker, p. 273-274.

<sup>481</sup>Sometimes Krishna is identified with Christ. Tucker, p. 273.

<sup>482</sup>Ibid, p. 274.

<sup>483</sup>Davis, p. 43.

<sup>484</sup>Allen J. Yoga: a Christian analysis – Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1983. – P. 26.

<sup>485</sup>Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>486</sup>Tucker, p. 275-277.

<sup>487</sup>Ibid, p. 275.

processions, etc. The devotee repeats the Krishna mantra with the aid of prayer beads, 108 in number. A consecrated worshipper will complete 16 cycles of prayer beads a day.<sup>488</sup>

Four main virtues guide the followers of Krishna: mercy, self-control, honesty, and purity of body and mind. Additionally, they abstain from gambling, meat, alcohol, narcotics, coffee, tobacco and sex outside of marriage. Even within marriage, a couple will limit their sex life, employing it only to bear children. Children are raised by the Krishna community. In the community, women occupy a subordinate position. Financial support for the movement comes from soliciting funds on the street and selling religious literature.<sup>489</sup>

Each devotee is under the tutelage of a guru, and subjects himself/herself to his guidance. A new initiate receives a new “spiritual” name and a sacred necklace. He/she may graduate to a “second consecration,” where he/she obtains a personal mantra, and male devotees receive a sacred thread. Traditionally, the devotees reside in the temple and devote themselves to worship of Krishna, housekeeping, and attending lectures.<sup>490</sup> At present, though, more and more followers of Krishna live independently and regularly visit the temple.<sup>491</sup>

In 1966, the Hare Krishna Movement experienced marked progress under the leadership of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Beginning in New York City, the movement quickly spread worldwide, especially in India and Eastern Europe. After Prabhupada’s death, however, the movement split into various factions. Several scandals also weakened the movement.<sup>492</sup>

In founding his movement, Prabhupada pursued seven goals:<sup>493</sup>

1. the spiritual education of society with the goal of achieving world peace and unity,
2. the advance of Krishna consciousness,
3. relational development of the members of ISKCON with Krishna and each other, and awareness of spiritual unity with Krishna,
4. encouragement of the practice of *sankirtan* and chanting the name Krishna,
5. increase of sacred knowledge for conducting spiritual exercises,
6. encouragement of a more simple and natural lifestyle,
7. publication of thematic journals, newspapers, books and other materials.

The members of ISKCON actively participate in the propagation of their message through public performances of ritual singing and dancing, passing out literature, and managing vegetarian restaurants.<sup>494</sup>

## 2. Evaluation

Since the Hare Krishna Movement embraces the basic Hindu worldview, our refutation of Hinduism applies to this movement as well. Yet, we note an important distinction from Hinduism, which is, in fact, a step forward from its parent faith. Devotees to Hare Krishna worship a personal being, not the impersonal Brahman.

Concerning common features with Hinduism, both faiths hold to the system of *karma* and reincarnation, which runs contrary to universal human consciousness. It is curious that no one remembers any of their

---

<sup>488</sup>Ibid, p. 271-275; Taken from Mark Albrecht, New religious movements update, Vol. 5, No. 2, Aug 1981, Arhus Univ., Arhus, Denmark, p. 82.

<sup>489</sup>Ibid, p. 272-277; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Society\\_for\\_Krishna\\_Consciousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Society_for_Krishna_Consciousness).

<sup>490</sup>Ibid, p. 272.

<sup>491</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Society\\_for\\_Krishna\\_Consciousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Society_for_Krishna_Consciousness).

<sup>492</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Society\\_for\\_Krishna\\_Consciousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Society_for_Krishna_Consciousness); Tucker, p. 269, 280-281.

<sup>493</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Society\\_for\\_Krishna\\_Consciousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Society_for_Krishna_Consciousness).

<sup>494</sup>Tucker, p. 282-283.

previous, supposedly innumerable lives. In addition, the Hare Krishna movement accepts the concept of *maya*. Yet, universal human experience confirms the reality of the material world.

Possibly, the weakest element of the Krishna faith is its basis. We have no information on the creator of the *Harivamsa*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, or other sources of the Krishna myth. We usually rate the quality of a religion claiming Divine revelation by the qualifications of those who supposedly received that revelation. Yet, with the Hare Krishna Movement, this is impossible to trace. In addition, there is no historical evidence of the real existence of Krishna as he is depicted in these works. This means that the entire Krishna faith likely arose from human imagination.

If, in defense of their faith, devotees to Krishna appeal to their personal mystical experience, they encounter the same problem that plagues Hinduism – one cannot verify the validity of a mystical experience. It is purely subjective. In addition, every event or experience requires an accurate interpretation. Events do not interpret themselves. Correspondingly, every mystic interprets his/her mystical experience in accordance with his/her present worldview. The Muslim mystic claims to contact Allah, the Christian mystic – the Holy Spirit, the Hindu mystic – Brahman, and the follower of Krishna – Krishna. In other words, mystical experience defies objective analysis and interpretation, but instead is simply employed to confirm the already accepted religious position of the mystic.

Finally, if we view the question simply from the standpoint of classical Hindu faith, how can one prove that Krishna is not an incarnation of Vishnu, as traditional Hinduism holds? Such a radical change in Hindu faith should be based on more than just the personal opinion of some medieval teacher or guru.

## D. New Age

### 1. Description

The New Age Movement, also known as the “New Era,” is associated with astrology, where periods of time are correlated with the signs of the zodiac. It is claimed that in recent times humanity has shifted from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius, that is, humanity has entered a “New Age.”<sup>495</sup>

The movement itself embraces a great variety of views and practices. Clark writes, “The New Age movement is not a view or a school, it is a movement, a loosely related network of people and ideas that share a web of common characteristics.”<sup>496</sup> Groothuis similarly states, “*The New Age movement* is an umbrella term referring to a variety of people, organizations, events, practices and ideas. Sociologically speaking, it is not a centrally organized movement with one human leader.”<sup>497</sup>

New Age is a pantheistic worldview, that is “monistic.” Like Hinduism, New Age teaches the essential oneness of all things, and that Ultimate Reality is impersonal. In addition, it accepts the existence of the universal “I,” reincarnation, and potential unification with Ultimate Reality.<sup>498</sup>

New Age also holds to the evolutionary model – humans are in a process of development from lower to higher levels of consciousness in route to utopia. At the end of this process a great world leader will arise, who will unify all under himself. All religions will unite. Proponents of New Age sometimes identify this leader as Maitreya, the supposed future manifestation of Buddha.<sup>499</sup>

By means of meditation, each person must participate in ushering the world into this New Age, characterized by perfect unity. Clark describes this claim: “A New Age of international peace, ecological sensitivity, and social enlightenment can be inaugurated.”<sup>500</sup> Groothuis relates the New Age view that through

---

<sup>495</sup>Matrisciana P. *Gods of the New Age*. – Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985. – P. 17.

<sup>496</sup>Clark, p. 135.

<sup>497</sup>Groothuis D. *Confronting the New Age*. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988. – P. 18.

<sup>498</sup>Groothuis, p. 18; Tucker, p. 331.

<sup>499</sup>Groothuis, p. 20-21, 31; Tucker, p. 336-337.

<sup>500</sup>Clark, p. 9.

meditation, people may “harmonize their positive energy” to attain a “critical mass,” which would “catapult us into a New Age.”<sup>501</sup>

Since the guiding principle of the New Age movement is complete world transformation into a condition of utopia in the Age of Aquarius, practitioners of New Age engage in efforts to improve conditions on the planet, in particular, in ecology and the preservation of wildlife.<sup>502</sup>

Beyond meditation, several other practices supposedly lead to higher levels of consciousness: martial arts, visualization, yoga, hypnosis, New Age music and biofeedback. Due to the influence of this movement, the worlds of business, psychotherapy and medicine have adopted some of these practices. Other practices “beneficial” for attaining higher levels of consciousness include use of crystals, narcotics, astrology, Tibetan bells, and herbal teas.<sup>503</sup>

It is claimed that meditation (particularly with crystals) “will increase your intuition, increase your abilities of concentration and focus, stimulate creativity and originality, and increase psychic abilities.”<sup>504</sup> In addition, harmonization of vibrations is thought vital. The vibration that holds the cosmos together, supposedly, is the sound “om,” which one should pronounce during meditation.<sup>505</sup>

Moreover, New Age embraces the phenomenon of “channeling,” that is, communication with spiritual “masters” through mediums. Some claim in this way to contact Christ. Other, supposedly, contact aliens from outer space. New Age practices may also include worship of pagan gods, such as Isis.<sup>506</sup>

Practitioners of New Age claim to have contact with spiritual world and supernatural experiences, such as healings, recollections of previous lives, and mind control over events and natural phenomena. The magic power behind all this is called “wicca.”<sup>507</sup>

As a rule, followers of New Age teaching live in countries where the Judeo-Christian worldview is dominant. Consequently, they hold to a unique interpretation of the Bible. According to their view, during the early years of Christianity, the Church removed from Scripture references to reincarnation. Nonetheless, some indications of that teaching remain – John the Baptist is thought to be the reincarnation of Elijah. Jesus is believed to be simply an exemplary teacher or guru.<sup>508</sup>

In New Age teaching, evil is simple ignorance of our divine potential. There is no clear distinction between right and wrong. Truth is relative.<sup>509</sup>

## 2. Evaluation

Like every pantheistic worldview, New Age suffers from the same defects that Hinduism, Buddhism and similar faiths suffer from: inconsistency with human experience. People do not think of themselves as part of an all-encompassing entity. Also, the idea that the essence of reality is impersonal contradicts human sensibilities – people prefer the personal to the impersonal. Furthermore, people in a normal psychological condition have no recollection of previous lives. Finally, like Hinduism and Buddhism, New Age has no reliable source for its teachings. Who exactly founded this system?

In their treatment of the Bible, proponents of New Age commit serious errors. Ancient copies of the New Testament exist that show that, in the founding years of Christianity, there was no alteration in its basic teachings, including on reincarnation (see chapter 15). The early Church Fathers without exception taught

---

<sup>501</sup>Groothuis, p. 15-16.

<sup>502</sup>Ibid, p. 207.

<sup>503</sup>Clark, p. 9; Groothuis, p. 156-180; Tucker, p. 333.

<sup>504</sup>Silbey U. Meditation and quartz crystals // Meditation. 87 Winter 88. P. 42. Quoted in Tucker, p. 333.

<sup>505</sup>Tucker, p. 350-351.

<sup>506</sup>Groothuis, p. 23-30; Tucker, p. 326-327, 340-341.

<sup>507</sup>Tucker, p. 330-332.

<sup>508</sup>Groothuis, p. 102.

<sup>509</sup>Ibid, p. 113, 136-139.

against reincarnation, and in this regard we may cite Origen, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Jerome, Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa. We also note that John the Baptist never claimed to be a reincarnation of Elijah, but flatly denied it (John 1:21).<sup>510</sup> Finally, the Bible categorically condemns astrology and spiritism (see. Deut 18:9-12; Isa. 47:13-16).<sup>511</sup>

Groothuis subjects New Age to the following criticisms.<sup>512</sup> Since the Absolute is impersonal, this system cannot offer its followers personal fellowship with God. Instead, it offers contact with “masters,” who lead them down the path of spiritism and the occult. In addition, this system embraces relativity, that is, the rejection of absolute truth. Yet, as we discussed previously, the rejection of truth is, in itself, an affirmation of truth. Those who affirm that there is no truth are actually claiming to know the truth about truth – that it does not exist. Finally, modern history does not confirm the claim that humanity will reach utopia in the Age of Aquarius. In many respects, conditions in the world are not improving, but getting worse.

## **E. Conclusion**

In spite of the enormous popularity of the *Star War* series and its promotion of the idea of the Ultimate as an Impersonal Force that is beyond the categories of good or evil, on closer investigation, as we have seen, this theory is fraught with logical, historical, theological, and ethical shortcomings. The preferred option is clearly understanding the nature of the Ultimate as a personal Being. Therefore, we will continue our search for the Ultimate by viewing options promoting the latter perspective.

## **Resources Used:**

Allen J. Yoga: a Christian analysis – Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1983. – 64 p.

Bureau A. Buddhism, schools of early doctrinal schools of Buddhism // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale, 2005. – V. 2. – P. 1192-1203.

Baumann M. Buddhism // Melton J. G., Baumann M. religions of the world. – Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010. – V. 1. – P. 419-436.

Braswell G. W. Understanding world religions. – Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. – 189 p.

Clark D. K., Geisler N. L. Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian critique of pantheism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990. – 235 p.

Cobb J. B., Griffen D. R. Process theology: An introductory exposition. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1976. – 185 p.

Corduan W. A tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – 239 p.

Davis R. Religions of India in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton: Princeton Press, 1999. – 174 p.

---

<sup>510</sup>Groothuis, p. 100-103.

<sup>511</sup>Tucker, p. 333.

<sup>512</sup>Groothuis, p. 105-116, 200-201.



Esposito J.L., Fasching D. J., Lewis T. – World religions today. NY: Oxford, 2002. – 550 p.

Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it's true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. – 487 p.

Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1976.

Groothuis D. Confronting the New Age. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

Halverson D. C. Buddhism / Halverson D. C. The compact guide to world religions. – Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1996. – P. 54-69.

Hexham I. Understanding world religions. – Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2011.

Keown D. Buddhism: A very short introduction. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. – 125 p.

Lopez D. S. Jr. Buddhism in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 56-87.

\_\_\_\_\_. Religions of Tibet in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 123-154.

Matrisciana C. Gods of the New Age. – Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985. – 221 p.

Melton J. G. Buddha, Gautama // Melton J. G., Baumann M. Religions of the world. – Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010. – V. 1. – P. 415-418.

Metz W. Buddhism // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 222-244.

Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – 480 p.

Reynolds F. E., Hallisey C. Buddhism: An overview. // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale, 2005. – V. 2. – P. 1087-1001.

Tanabe J. T. Jr. Religions of Japan in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 154-175.

Tennent T. C. Christianity at the religious roundtable. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – 243 p.

Teiser S. F. Religions of China in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 88-122.

Tucker R. A. Another Gospel. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. – 406 p.

Wright A. W. Buddhism in Chinese history. – Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1959. – 127 p.

~~~~~

Порублёв, Н. В. Культы и мировые религии. – М.: Благовестник, 1994. – 336 с.

Porublyev N. V. Cults and world religions. – Moscow, Herald of Good News, 1994. – 336 p.

~~~~~

[www.krishna.ru](http://www.krishna.ru)

[wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)

## Chapter 7: The Ultimate as a Being

Having discussed the theories ascribing to the Ultimate an impersonal nature, what options exist for viewing the Ultimate as a personal Being? Logic suggests three possibilities: deism – that God is distinct from His creation and makes no contact with it (transcendence without immanence), panentheism – that God interpenetrates the material world (immanence with a pseudo-transcendence), or theism – that God is distinct from His creation, yet is in close contact with it (both transcendence and immanence).

### A. Deism

#### 1. Beliefs

According to deism, there is only one God, yet He does not exist as a Trinity. He is “eternal, unchangeable, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good, true, just, invisible, infinite – in short, completely perfect, lacking in nothing.”<sup>513</sup> In this teaching, God is totally transcendent. He is so removed from His creation that people have no access to Him or contact with Him. In other words, God is transcendent, but lacks the dimension of immanence.

Deism teaches that when God created the world, he left it in perfect condition under the operation of natural laws. Joyce describes this idea as follows: “It seems more in accordance with the principles of Deism that Nature should be left to work itself out in obedience to the laws originally given.”<sup>514</sup> Just like their Creator, these laws are eternal, perfect and unchanging.<sup>515</sup> Therefore, we should not expect miracles, direct revelation from God, or His intervention in our lives.<sup>516</sup> He expects people to care for His creation and develop their own potential. Humans are to accomplish this goal with the aid of reason, which is to be the guiding principle in all respects.

People are to know God by means of reason as well. God has revealed Himself exclusively through so-called “general revelation,” that is, through His work of creation. Consequently, it makes little sense to seek special revelation from God, for example, through religious literature, which is simply a human creation. The Bible of deists is Nature.<sup>517</sup> Nature also provides for the deist a handbook for moral conduct in accordance with the principles of “natural moral law.” Wood describes deism in the following words: “Deism signifies the belief in a single God and in a religious practice founded solely on natural reason rather than on supernatural revelation.”<sup>518</sup>

Geisler identifies four different types of deism that hold to the following tenants:<sup>519</sup>

- God created the world and left it to operate by natural laws. He is indifferent to what subsequently happens on earth.
- God is concerned about natural events in the world, but cares little about what people do.

---

<sup>513</sup>Noted in Geisler, N. L., Watkins, W. D. *Worlds apart: a handbook on world views*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989. – P. 177.

<sup>514</sup>Noted in Joyce G. P. *Deism* // Hastings J. *Encyclopedia of religion and ethics*. – New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928. – T. 4. – P. 541.

<sup>515</sup>Geisler, *Worlds apart*, p. 177–178.

<sup>516</sup>Some deists feel that God may intervene in the affairs of men, but rarely does so (see Joyce, v. 4, p. 541). Geisler notes that English and American deists are more open to the possibility that, in some sense, God is ready to “exercise a certain degree of providential care over the affairs of human history, yet without miraculous intervention” (See Geisler, *Worlds apart*, p. 180).

<sup>517</sup>Geisler, *Worlds apart*, p. 178.

<sup>518</sup>Wood A. W. *Deism* // Jones L. *Encyclopedia of religion*. – Farmington Hills, MI: MacMillan/Gale, 2005. – V. 4. – P. 2251.

<sup>519</sup>Geisler, *Worlds apart*, p. 148–149, 179.

- God is concerned with how people conduct themselves. He requires them to observe the moral law instilled in creation. However, there is no life after death.
- God requires observation of the moral law of creation. There is life after death in an incorporeal form and retribution for deeds done during this life.

## 2. Origins

The following factors led to the rise of deism in the seventeenth century. At that time, science was making exciting discoveries about the existence and operation of natural laws. This resulted in less dependence on God to explain the mysteries of creation and, in time, some began to doubt Divine intervention completely. Deism, then, arose from the desire to accommodate religious faith to new scientific discoveries.<sup>520</sup> In addition, the epistemological theory “empiricism” was gaining ascendancy at that time. According to empiricism, one accepts as true that, which one can perceive with the five senses or prove experimentally. The spread of this worldview further weakened people’s expectation for God’s supernatural intervention.

It is interesting that a leading empiricist of that age, John Locke, unintentionally advanced the cause of deism. Locke wrote *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, in which he sought to defend the reasonable nature of Christian faith. His rationalistic approach, however, inspired other thinkers to employ reason as a rival to faith.<sup>521</sup>

A concern about low morals also contributed to deism’s spread. Deists felt people were relying too much on God’s help in their moral life and, consequently, not applying enough personal discipline toward self-improvement. In addition, people of that time began to rely more and more on reason to resolve moral and ethical problems, that is, to rely on the so-called “natural moral law.”<sup>522</sup>

In addition, Stephen feels that Protestantism contributed to deism’s popularity.<sup>523</sup> In his opinion, Protestantism’s liberation from Catholicism allowed more freethinking, of which rationalists, in turn, took advantage to advance their ideology. Stephen writes, “If Protestantism was unintentionally acting as a screen for rationalism, rationalism naturally expressed itself in terms of Protestantism.”<sup>524</sup> Rationalists sought a “common denominator” between all people as a basis for religious faith. They found such an element in human reason, which all possess. Thus, deism arose as a result of all these factors.<sup>525</sup>

## 3. Leading Proponents

In this section, we will describe how several leading proponents of deism understood this view. The father of English deism is regarded to be Edward Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1633), author of *de Veritate (Concerning Truth)*. He believed in one Most High God, who instilled in human consciousness certain axioms to direct people’s lives. These axioms can be found in all religions of the world: (1) there is a God, (2) people must worship Him, (3) good works please Him, (4) people must repent of sin, (5) God will reward or punish our behavior, either in this life through the action of natural laws, or in the afterlife.<sup>526</sup> Joyce gives this summary of Herbert’s teaching: he affirmed “competence of human reason to attain certainty with regard to fundamental

---

<sup>520</sup>Joyce, v. 4, p. 533.

<sup>521</sup>Ibid, p. 534-535.

<sup>522</sup>Grenz S. J. A Primer on postmodernism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996. – P. 72.

<sup>523</sup>Stephen L. History of English thought in the eighteenth century. – 3rd ed. – London: John Murray, 1902. – V. 1. – P. 74-84.

<sup>524</sup>Ibid, v. 1, p. 79.

<sup>525</sup>Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976. – P. 152.

<sup>526</sup>Geisler, Christian apologetics, p. 152-153; Joyce, v. 4, p. 533.

religious truths, and insistence upon the indissoluble connection between religion and the practical duties of life.”<sup>527</sup> Consequently, Hebert devalued the significance and importance of Divine revelation.<sup>528</sup>

Another famous deist, Matthew Tindale (1657-1733), emphasized God’s general revelation through creation, which he considered the most reliable avenue to knowing God: “Obedience to nature is the one sufficient principle.”<sup>529</sup> Tindale also rejected the notion that God revealed Himself in a special way to just one people group – Israel.<sup>530</sup> He concluded that, since God gave all people reason, then that must be the best test of truth: “The unassisted reason of man is abundantly able to discover the few and simple truths of which genuine religion consists.”<sup>531</sup> According to his observation, followers of the natural moral law behave no worse than believers in written revelation. For Tindale, the four components of genuine religious life are: (1) faith in God, (2) the worship of God, (3) personal happiness, (4) the happiness of others.<sup>532</sup>

Leaving England, deism came ashore on the European continent, especially exerting its influence on France. One of deism’s most ardent defenders was Voltaire. Voltaire gleaned much from Locke and Tindale, yet even before that, he had leanings towards this worldview. It is said of Voltaire, that he was a “deist, one might say, from birth.”<sup>533</sup>

Among early American deists, we may mention Thomas Paine (1737-1809), who, like others, rejected special revelation from God.<sup>534</sup> The only way to know God was by employing reason. The universe “reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God,”<sup>535</sup> in particular, his existence, character and demands.

Finally, we will review the convictions of a more contemporary deist, Martin Gardner (1914-2010).<sup>536</sup> He believed in a God who is wise, strong, good, loving, merciful, just, and infinite. Yet, he rejects the idea that God “periodically thrusts a hand into the universe to break the sequence of natural causes and produce a genuine miracle.”<sup>537</sup>

At the same time, Gardner is not opposed to prayer. Yet, the goal of prayer should not be to receive something from God or bring about some change in the natural order. Instead, a deist gives thanks in prayer and asks for forgiveness from God. Gardner joins those deists who hold to an afterlife, but he cannot specify what that entails. Still, he rejects the idea of eternal punishment. As far as the reason for suffering, Gardner remains agnostic. The deist “must believe, again by faith, that in some unfathomable manner which we cannot now understand, perhaps will never understand, the existence of evil is necessary for ultimately bringing about the greatest good.”<sup>538</sup>

Finally, along with other deists Gardner shares their optimism for a glorious future for humanity, which the use of reason will introduce. Humanity “has the power to control its own destiny, to minimize (if not eliminate) war, poverty, and other needless suffering – the power to shape a better world.”<sup>539</sup>

The deistic worldview, of course, predates the rise of its popularity in the seventeenth century. Joyce makes note of the deistic mindset of Confucius, who, although he believed in a Higher Being, felt that He does not interact with people, and that people should simply live in accordance with rules and regulations. Joyce also sees hints of deism in Islam. As a rule, Allah distances himself from humanity and requires from it the

---

<sup>527</sup>Joyce, v. 4, p. 533.

<sup>528</sup>Robertson J. M. A short history of freethought. – New York, NY: Russell and Russell, 1957. – P. 296.

<sup>529</sup>Stephen, v. 1, p. 139.

<sup>530</sup>Geisler, Christian apologetics, p. 159-160.

<sup>531</sup>Stephen, v. 1, p. 138.

<sup>532</sup>Geisler, Christian apologetics, p. 160; Stephen, v. 1, p. 138-146.

<sup>533</sup>Torry N. L. Voltaire and the English deists. – New Haven, CT: Yale, 1930. – P. 1, 199-201.

<sup>534</sup>Geisler, Worlds apart, p. 150-155.

<sup>535</sup>Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>536</sup>Ibid, p. 165-176.

<sup>537</sup>Gardner M. The whys of a philosophical scrivener. – New York: Quill, 1983. – P. 350, noted in Geisler, Worlds Apart, p. 168.

<sup>538</sup>Ibid, p. 252 (Geisler, Worlds apart, p. 168).

<sup>539</sup>Ibid, p. 122 (Geisler, Worlds apart, p. 168).

observance of a high moral standard. In distinction from deism, though, Islam accepts Divine revelation, particularly the Quran.<sup>540</sup>

Although by the nineteenth century deism was already phasing out, its influence is still felt today in the rejection of the miraculous, a critical approach to the Bible, and in the conviction that God, as a rule, does not intervene in our lives.<sup>541</sup>

#### 4. Support

Deists support their theory in the following way. First, it is clear that God does not routinely descend from heaven to visit this planet. It seems to them that God is distant and not active in our affairs. Second, scientific discoveries have confirmed the presence and activity of natural laws, which seem to exclude the need for God's continual and personal intervention. Third, proponents of deism object to the lackadaisical attitude of some believers to their moral and spiritual development. Fourth, this theory offers a new approach to resolving the problem of evil: God is not to blame for evil in the world, but people. It is up to humankind to get to work and solve its problems.<sup>542</sup>

Next, deists feel that what God creates must be perfect, just as He is. Therefore, there is no room for improvement in creation, or the need for God to intervene and "fix" something.<sup>543</sup> Deists draw this analogy:

A perfect machine, it is supposed, would not require from time to time to be adjusted by its maker; nor would the Unchangeable introduce any later corrections into a creation, which from the first reflected His omniscience and omnipotence.<sup>544</sup>

As we mentioned before, in the deistic worldview there are no miracles. Deists claim that there can be no miraculous violation of natural laws, otherwise they would not be "laws."<sup>545</sup> Human experience confirms that natural processes occur with the required regularity and consistency. Some feel that God could work miracles, but chooses not to. Deists find claims to miracles unlikely and support for their occurrence unconvincing. They explain them away as superstition or deception.<sup>546</sup> Paine argues that our limited understanding of nature leaves us with "no criterion to determine what a miracle is."<sup>547</sup>

#### 5. Evaluation

Although in this system we note such positive features as acknowledging the existence of a Creator and the important role of reason in religious matters, at the same time we encounter some serious difficulties. First, deists believe in God, a personal God, who thinks, feels and acts. If God is indeed personal, then one might expect that He would seek personal fellowship with the creatures He has made, instead of avoiding them. Second, can we consider the world perfect or even potentially perfect, when it is cut off from the Creator, who is the source of all good?

Third, in creation, God demonstrated His concern for His creatures by the masterful way He designed it. If God cares so deeply for His creatures so as to create such a marvelous world for them to inhabit, then why

---

<sup>540</sup>Joyce, v. 4, p. 542.

<sup>541</sup>Geisler, *Worlds apart*, p. 147.

<sup>542</sup>Geisler, *Christian apologetics*, p. 168-169.

<sup>543</sup>Noted in Casserley J. T. L. *Apologetics and evangelism*. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962. – P. 119-120. Also see Craig W. L. *Apologetics: An introduction*. – Chicago, IL: Moody, 1984. – P. 102.

<sup>544</sup>Noted in Joyce, v. 4, p. 541.

<sup>545</sup>Noted in Geisler, *Worlds apart*, p. 178.

<sup>546</sup>*Ibid*, p. 178.

<sup>547</sup>*Ibid*, p. 155.

would He fail to express His love in personal ways as well? Joyce adds that if God is indifferent toward His creation, then what motivated Him to create it in the first place?<sup>548</sup> In addition, why would a loving God abandon the world at a time, when it encounters so many seemingly insurmountable problems that require His assistance?

Deists may answer that if God indeed does intervene in our world, then why does He not do so more often?<sup>549</sup> This is the same question we tackled in a previous chapter – the “problem of evil.” The reader can refer to that discussion for a response. Furthermore, millions of people claim to have had personal experience with God, and that He intervenes in their lives in answer to prayer. It is problematic to ascribe all these testimonies to chance or imagination. Jacob Vernet adds that the great variety of reported miracles weights against them being explained by natural laws. There would need to be a great number of still unknown natural laws to explain all these miracle claims.<sup>550</sup>

Geisler argues that if God is sufficiently powerful to create the world, then it presents no difficulty for Him to do “lesser” miracles. In addition, it seems that deists reject miracles *a priori*, that is, as an assumption or axiom in their worldview without sufficient substantiation.<sup>551</sup>

In answer to the claim that a perfect God created a perfect creation that does not need His intervention, we simply have to look at present conditions in the world. We observe problems not only with people’s behavior, but also with the sometimes destructive forces of nature, which are not under human control. It appears that something occurred in God’s “perfect world” that gave rise to these irregularities – the introduction of sin and death. Deists do not factor these features into their worldview.

As far as reliance on natural moral law, we still stand in need of Divine revelation to motivate our observance and guard certain behaviors from neglect. We also note that, although there is supposedly only one natural moral law, which should guarantee uniformity, different societies sometimes have different standards. Even deists do not always agree among themselves about the content of that law.<sup>552</sup> It seems that reason alone is insufficient to establish universal principles of proper behavior.

We also find interesting the results of David Hume’s research in the history of religions. He showed that in periods when people lived only by their own preferences, society regressed into superstition and other errors.<sup>553</sup> It appears again that reason alone is an inadequate guide for life.

Furthermore, deism underestimates sinful tendencies of humans, that is, their incapability to fulfill a moral law.<sup>554</sup> In addition, the promise of rewards and threat of Divine punishment add needed motivation for leading a moral life.<sup>555</sup>

It is also curious that this system quickly fell from favor in Europe, where it first took root. It remained popular only from the late 17th to the late 18th centuries. Stephens attributes its fall to the following:

The true cause of the decay of Deism is to be sought in its internal weakness. The creed was never really alive; it was not rooted in the deepest convictions, nor associated with the most powerful emotions of its adherents. The metaphysical deity was too cold and abstract a conception to excite much zeal in his worshippers.<sup>556</sup>

---

<sup>548</sup>Joyce, v. 4, p. 541.

<sup>549</sup>Noted in Helm P. The Providence of God. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993. – P. 77.

<sup>550</sup>Ibid, p. 107-108.

<sup>551</sup>Geisler, Worlds apart, p. 181-183.

<sup>552</sup>Stephen, v. 1, p. 173.

<sup>553</sup>Joyce, v. 4, p. 537.

<sup>554</sup>Ibid, v. 4, p. 536.

<sup>555</sup>Stephen, v. 1, p. 148-150.

<sup>556</sup>Ibid, v. 1, p. 169.

Stephen further comments, “A religion founded on such precarious evidence can never have the power to command our passions and to push men to martyrdom.”<sup>557</sup> Joyce agrees that such a system lacks ability to motivate devotion to God. There is no personal element. In addition, people develop a spirit of prideful independence and self-reliance, which the religious mind considers not a virtue, but a vice.<sup>558</sup>

## B. Panentheism (Process Theology)

### 1. Origins

Panentheism is a relatively new philosophical movement, arising in the twentieth century. It holds that God is not perfect, but still being perfected. This teaching is also known by the designation “process theology.” The idea of a “being perfected God” dates back to antiquity, namely to the philosophy of Diogenes. We could also mention the panentheism of Plotinus (204-270 AD), who held a belief in a certain “One,” who is the essence of reality, and from whom emits “emanations,” the last of which is the material world.

Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000), a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago, popularized this teaching in the 20th century. Hartshorne, in turn, borrowed extensively from the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) with some modifications. Hartshorne considered his theology a synthesis of atheism and theism, and hoped by it to ease the tensions between those two competing worldviews.<sup>559</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, the son of an Anglican pastor, worked as a mathematician in Cambridge and London before teaching philosophy at Harvard. His most famous philosophical work is *Process and Reality*.<sup>560</sup>

Process theology arose as a reaction against the scholastic dogma of God’s “impassibility” from the Middle Ages, which taught that God has no emotion – He is “impassive.”<sup>561</sup> The starting point, then, for Whitehead’s thinking was that God is, in some sense, subject to change.<sup>562</sup>

### 2. Description

#### a. The Nature of Reality

Panenthiesm operates on a totally different perception of reality. Reality consists not of material elements, but of constantly changing events and processes. The fundamental components of reality are not bits of material, but moments of experience. Consequently, every moment is a new reality. Furthermore, if reality consists of constantly changing events and processes, then reality itself is changing. Along with that, God Himself, being the ultimate Reality, also undergoes change.<sup>563</sup>

Let us look at this system more closely.<sup>564</sup> It claims that reality consists of units of time called “actual entities” or “actual occasions.” The chain of these individual and momentary occasions makes up our life experience. Lowe explains Whitehead’s thinking in these words: “The transient experiences *are* the ultimate

---

<sup>557</sup>Ibid, v. 1, p. 174.

<sup>558</sup>Joyce, v. 4, p. 541-542.

<sup>559</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_Hartshorne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Hartshorne); Hartshorne P. The formally possible doctrines of God // Brown D., James R. E., Reeves G. Process philosophy and Christian thought. – Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971. – P. 189, 195.

<sup>560</sup>Reeves G., Brown D. The development of process theology // Brown D., James R. E., Reeves G. Process philosophy and Christian thought. – Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971. – P. 22, 31; Cobb J. B., Griffen D. R. Process theology: An introductory exposition. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1976. – P. 162-163, 179; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred\\_North\\_Whitehead#Life](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_North_Whitehead#Life).

<sup>561</sup>Cobb, p. 44-45.

<sup>562</sup>Geisler, Christian apologetics, p. 194ff.

<sup>563</sup>Erickson M. J. Christian theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998. – P. 305.

<sup>564</sup>Cobb, p. 13-28; Lowe T. Whitehead’s metaphysical system // Brown D., James R. E., Reeves G. Process philosophy and Christian thought. – Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971. – P. 3-20.



realities... Every actual entity is a pulse of experience.”<sup>565</sup> They are the “cells of the universe.”<sup>566</sup> Hartshorne describes it thus: “Indeed, for Whitehead, each experience is a numerically different actuality from its predecessors.”<sup>567</sup>

Cobb aptly compares this phenomenon with reel-to-reel filmmaking. Just as a reel-to-reel film consists of multiple individual snapshots, which pass in rapid succession, yet are perceived as smooth motion, reality consist of many individual “actual entities,” which are perceived as life experience.<sup>568</sup> One of the features of higher life forms is the ability to synthesize these individual units into a unity. The result is the experience of “consciousness.”<sup>569</sup>

Another important aspect of this system is that every actual entity, that is, moment of time, experiences some degree of “enjoyment.” Every actual entity “enjoys” the experience it receives. In the words of Cobb, “Every individual unit of process enjoys its own existence.”<sup>570</sup> The amount of enjoyment received depends on two factors: harmony and intensity. Disharmony and conflict reduce the amount of enjoyment. In addition, a simple experience provides less enjoyment than more complex and intensive ones. Therefore, by means of an evolutionary process, the world strives toward higher levels of development and complexity and, as a result, experiences more enjoyment.

The question arises, however, about stability of experience. If these “actual entities” constantly pass away, then how can we explain the phenomenon of “constancy,” which is obvious to all? Although proponents of process theology struggle to satisfactorily answer this question, nonetheless, they claim that certain actual entities possess a quality that permits them to repeat themselves. They form “complexes,” that give their manifestation an appearance of permanence. We perceive these “repetitious, complex occasions” as objects or persons. We ourselves are such occasions. As Cobb states, “Personal human experience is a ‘serially ordered society’ of occasions of experience.”<sup>571</sup>

So then, objects and persons have no “ontological basis,” or basis for their existence.<sup>572</sup> They come and go with each passing “occurrence.” Their dissolution provides “material” for the formation of the next actual occurrence. Yet, this “dissolving” occasion in no way causes the appearance of the subsequent one, although it may exert an influence on its formation. Each actual entity defines its own character and direction. Lowe describes this phenomenon: “The subject which enjoys an experience does not exist beforehand, neither is it created from the outside; it creates itself in that very process of experiencing.”<sup>573</sup>

The next question that arises concerns the idea of “progress.” Why do objects and persons move toward fulfilling some goal? Process theology claims that each actual entity consists of fragments of the previous “dissolving” entity as well as factors it introduces itself. Thus, each actual entity possesses the quality of “self-determination” and can define for itself what it will become and how it will differ from the previous one. Lowe comments: “The brief course of each pulse of experience is guided by an internal teleology.”<sup>574</sup> And further:

The basic fact of existence is everywhere some process of self-realization, growing out of previous processes and itself adding a new pulse of individuality and a new value to the world... The ultimate

---

<sup>565</sup>Lowe, p. 6.

<sup>566</sup>Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>567</sup>Hartshorne C. Reality as social process. – Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1953. – P. 21.

<sup>568</sup>Cobb, p. 14.

<sup>569</sup>Lowe, p. 13-14.

<sup>570</sup>Cobb, p. 17.

<sup>571</sup>Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>572</sup>Cobb compares this with Buddhism, which also claims that there is no “ontological basis” for reality. Buddhists feel that at the core of reality lies “emptiness.” Ibid.

<sup>573</sup>Lowe, p. 7.

<sup>574</sup>Ibid, p. 7.

character pervading the universe is a drive toward the endless production of new syntheses or “creativity.”<sup>575</sup>

A vitally important aspect of this system is that not only the actual entity itself and previous actual entities contribute to the formation new entities, but God instills in each new actual entity a certain “impulse,” which also contributes towards its development and trend. This impulse is termed an “initial aim.” Yet, we recall that every actual entity defines itself, which means that God does not control this process. Cobb writes, “In sum, God is that factor in the universe which establishes what-is-not as relevant to what-is, and lures the world toward new forms of realization.”<sup>576</sup> In addition, God preserves positive aspects of previous actual entities and introduces them into the formation of new actual entities. We may call this Divine influence the “Kingdom of God.”<sup>577</sup>

## **b. God’s Nature**

Next, we must investigate the question whether or not God goes through this same process that the universe experiences, that is, “dissolution” and “reformation.” Process theology proposes that God has two “poles”: His so-called abstract or non-relative pole, and his concrete or relative pole. God’s abstract pole is eternal, independent of the world and not subject to change. His concrete pole is dependent on the world, can change, and indeed does change.<sup>578</sup>

Such a combination of factors in God determines His relation to the world. Recalling our discussion of God’s transcendence and immanence, we may relate God’s abstract pole to His transcendence and his concrete pole to His immanence. His concrete pole interpenetrates the world and exerts its influence on the formation of new actual entities. This is where the term “pan-en-theism” comes from: “God in all.” On the other hand, His abstract pole remains separate from the world. We may compare God’s abstract pole with His “soul,” and His concrete pole with His “body.” As Reeves describes it, “God includes the world while transcending it.”<sup>579</sup>

How can one, however, reconcile the claim that God’s abstract pole is not subject to change with the claim that all reality is in process? Whitehead suggested the following: God’s concrete or relative pole make up God’s essence. This means that God, in essence, undergoes a process of becoming perfect. In Whitehead’s words, “Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion.”<sup>580</sup> His abstract pole, on the other hand, is “derived” from His concrete pole and consists only of potential possibilities. Cobb explains, “This envisagement of possibilities is an abstraction from the actual process that is God.”<sup>581</sup>

What qualities, exactly, does God’s abstract pole contain? It contains His ability to simultaneously perceive all reality as well as His good will, that is, His active promotion of good. In other words, God is able to constantly observe all that occurs in the universe and constantly seeks the good of all. His abstract pole produces the above-mentioned “initial aim.”<sup>582</sup>

However, God cannot precisely predict what will result from each actual entity. God takes a certain “risk” in that He is uncertain whether His “initial aim” will produce the desired results. He evaluates the results of each actual entity, and then adjusts His plan accordingly to produce a better result next time. Cobb calls this

---

<sup>575</sup>Ibid, p. 3-4.

<sup>576</sup>Cobb, p. 43.

<sup>577</sup>Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>578</sup>Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>579</sup>Reeves, p. 32.

<sup>580</sup>Whitehead A. N. *Process and reality*. – New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929. – P. 529.

<sup>581</sup>Cobb, p. 141.

<sup>582</sup>Ibid, p. 98.

contribution to the process God's "creative love," since God manifests His love to the world in that He seeks a creative solution to its problems.<sup>583</sup>

The results of each actual entity not only affects God's plans, but also contributes to the formation of God's nature. Whitehead writes, "Each actuality in the temporal world has its reception into God's nature," and also, "Each temporal occasion embodies God, and is embodied in God."<sup>584</sup> So then, Whitehead describes the relationship between God and the world in the following way: "It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God."<sup>585</sup>

Remember, that each actual entity possesses the quality of self-determination, which means that God cannot precisely predict or control the formation of these occasions. Yet, He strives to influence this process. God's goal is to maximize the "enjoyment" (see above) of each occasion.<sup>586</sup> Lowe comments, "His consequent nature perfects and saves the world."<sup>587</sup>

We ask, "Can God be considered perfect, if He Himself is still in the process of becoming so?" Hartshorne replies that he does not deny the dogma of God's perfection. In his opinion, God is as perfect as He can be in every moment of time. Since every moment presents a new reality, in subsequent moments God may attain higher levels of perfection. Hartshorne writes, "To attribute change to God, so far from conflicting with permanence of stability in his being, means rather that nothing positive that ever belongs to God can change, but only the negative aspects of *not yet* being this or that."<sup>588</sup>

Hartshorne further claims that God is still being perfected not only in His knowledge of the future, but also in His emotions. In other words, a loving God cannot be content with what is taking place in the world. Consequently, He still lacks perfect happiness.<sup>589</sup> Commenting on God's perfection in general, Hartshorne writes, "A purely final or static perfection possessing all possible values is impossible. We must then conceive perfection as partly dynamic."<sup>590</sup> God's perfection, then, consists in the ability to maximally realize all possible values.<sup>591</sup>

Hartshorne voices the objection that if God already maximally possesses all possible positive values, as is claimed in theism, then the world cannot present Him with anything new, or with that which would enrich Him in some way. Consequently, the world has no meaning. However, if the world can bring Him some good, then the world, and people as well, have significance.<sup>592</sup>

### c. The World

According to the theistic worldview, God created the world from nothing. Process theology, though, claims that the world co-existed and co-exists with God, but existed in a state of chaos until God began exerting His influence on it by introducing His "initial aim."<sup>593</sup> Hasker describes the panentheistic view: "Creation, for

---

<sup>583</sup>Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>584</sup>Whitehead, *Process and reality*, p. 531, 529.

<sup>585</sup>Ibid, p. 528.

<sup>586</sup>Cobb, p. 53-55.

<sup>587</sup>Lowe, p. 20.

<sup>588</sup>Hartshorne P. *Man's vision of God* – Hamden, CO: Archon Books, 1964. – P. 130. Also see Henry P. F. H. *God, revelation, and authority*. – Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976-1983. – V. 5. – P. 290.

<sup>589</sup>Hartshorne, *Doctrines of God*, p. 197.

<sup>590</sup>Ibid, p. 200.

<sup>591</sup>Ibid.

<sup>592</sup>Ibid, p. 209.

<sup>593</sup>Griffin, D. R. *Response to William Hasker* // Cobb J. B., Pinnock P. H. *Searching for an adequate God: A dialogue between process and free will theists*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – P. 250.

process thought, it not ex nihilo; it is rather a sort of divine 'shaping' of realities already in existence, a shaping that depends for its effect on the response of those already existent realities."<sup>594</sup>

In the panentheistic view, the world developed according to the evolutionary model, in which God actively participated. Loomer feels that the theory of evolution serves as a proof of this worldview.<sup>595</sup> In the process of time, more advanced actual entities appeared, which possessed the quality of "permanence" due to repetition of their appearance.<sup>596</sup> This development occurs not without resistance, but takes place, as Cobb describes it, "to the degree to which (actual entities) respond to the divine impulses."<sup>597</sup>

Actual entities, which result in the appearance of animals, experience more "enjoyment" than more primitive occasions, since they possess "consciousness." Those entities that result in human life experience even more "enjoyment." This development witnesses a "shift from a psyche primarily serving the body, to a psyche primarily using the body for its own purposes."<sup>598</sup> In the words of Cobb, evolution involves "evocation of actualities with greater and greater enjoyment."<sup>599</sup>

#### **d. The Nature of Religion**

Since God's activity in the world is totally immanent, panentheism and process theology do not recognize special revelation from God. God does not speak, but just exerts His influence on the formation of actual entities by means of introducing His "initial aim." For the same reason, this worldview does not recognize miracles. God always acts in accordance with natural laws. At the same time, God's "initial aim" may at times result in an outcome that is out of the ordinary.<sup>600</sup>

Process theology does not operate on a historical basis. Whitehead explains that all that we have access to is the present moment. The past has already "dissolved," and has ceased to exist. The information available in the present moment is our only source for guidance in life. Whitefield writes, "When it comes to the primary metaphysical data, the world of which you are immediately conscious is the whole datum."<sup>601</sup>

Although process theology does not recognize special revelation, there exists in this system, nonetheless, a concept of "doctrine."<sup>602</sup> In the past, religion consisted only of ritual, but in time, religion developed a more personal character. Eventually, it embraced doctrinal positions. Initially people held only to "unconscious convictions," without concrete substantiation, but eventually developed "formulated doctrines," accentuating those unconscious convictions that were found more beneficial. Cobb describes it thusly: "Much of Christian doctrine is selective description of features of universal prereflective experience."<sup>603</sup>

Cobb further comments on the value that doctrine brings to human society: "Christian doctrine, by selecting certain features of experience for conscious emphasis, shapes attitudes, purposes, and commitments, and even the structure of human existence itself."<sup>604</sup> Yet, different religions may differ in doctrine, because

---

<sup>594</sup>Hasker W. *An adequate God* // Cobb J. B. Pinnock P. H. *Searching for an adequate God: A dialogue between process and free will theists*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – P. 220.

<sup>595</sup>Loomer B. M. *Christian faith and process philosophy* // Brown D., James R. E., Reeves G. *Process philosophy and Christian thought*. – Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971. – P. 94.

<sup>596</sup>Cobb, p. 65-66.

<sup>597</sup>Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>598</sup>Ibid, p. 88.

<sup>599</sup>Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>600</sup>Hasker, p. 229, 239-244.

<sup>601</sup>Whitehead A. N. *Religion and metaphysics* // Brown D., James R. E., Reeves G. *Process philosophy and Christian thought*. – Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971. – P. 68.

<sup>602</sup>Cobb, p. 30-40, 86.

<sup>603</sup>Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>604</sup>Ibid, p. 36.

different cultures perceive these universal principles differently. Therefore, Cobb recommends openness to other religions, as well as to God's movements in secular society as well.<sup>605</sup>

The goal of religion is the attainment of peace. Peace is harmonious interrelationships between actual entities and God's initial aim. When subjects in an actual entity act in accordance with God's initial aim, peace and harmony result.<sup>606</sup>

We recall here that in panentheism and process theology life is a cooperative effort between the subjects of actual entities (esp. people) and God. So then, to obtain peace both parties must be involved in this movement. If God could accomplish this alone, then the world would have no real importance or significance. People serve God by providing Him with positive experience, which, in turn, leads to perfecting both humanity and God.<sup>607</sup>

Since the above-mentioned cooperation between the subjects of actual entities and God involves not just a single, but all elements of the actual entity, process theology champions harmony in human society. If society as a whole provides God with positive experience in accordance with His initial aim, then the world progresses to higher levels of enjoyment.<sup>608</sup> In addition, process theology support ecology, since nature is also an element of each actual entity, and nature's condition affects the quality of those occasions.

Finally, process theology offers hope. Each new actual entity may provide creative solutions for previous problems. Through this process, God "learns" from previous experience what is needed, and what is not needed in the world.<sup>609</sup>

### **e. The Problem of Evil**

One seeming advantage to this system is its suggestion of a novel solution to the problem of evil. Hartshorne feels that if God is already perfect in power and virtue, then how can we explain the presence of evil in the world? Why has God not dealt with it by now?<sup>610</sup> He apparently has not yet arrived at a solution for all the world's problems. Cobb writes, "God acts persuasively upon the wreckage to bring from it whatever good is possible."<sup>611</sup> God does not control events in the world, but cooperates with the world to attain the highest good.

If God does not control life events, then each formation of a new actual entity involves a certain "risk," since each occasion possesses the quality of self-determination and can move in a direction contrary to God's intent. In addition, actual entities that include higher life forms present a greater risk, since they possess even more freedom for self-determination.<sup>612</sup>

Nonetheless, God is willing to risk the favorable outcome of future events in order to attain greater good. We recall that the elements that increase enjoyment are harmony and intensity. On the other hand, more "simple" experiences, although they present less risk (since their subjects possess less self-determination), do not provide the same level of enjoyment, since they lack intensity. Therefore, God is willing to risk formation of actual entities with higher complexity to increase enjoyment.<sup>613</sup>

## **3. Evaluation**

---

<sup>605</sup>Ibid, p. 128-129, 137.

<sup>606</sup>Ibid, p. 125.

<sup>607</sup>Hartshorne, *Doctrines of God*, p. 212-213; Cobb, p. 14.

<sup>608</sup>Cobb, p. 22, 82.

<sup>609</sup>Ibid, p. 112.

<sup>610</sup>Hartshorne, *Doctrines of God*, p. 204.

<sup>611</sup>Cobb, p. 118.

<sup>612</sup>Ibid, p. 70-73.

<sup>613</sup>Ibid, p. 72-73.

How do we respond to panentheism and process theology? First, we note that process theology faces the logical dilemma of the preservation of the individual. If each moment is a new reality, then how can we confirm that from moment to moment a person remains the same person? In addition, if there is no permanence of personhood, then there can be accountability for one's deeds, since those deeds were done, supposedly, in another "reality." In defense of process theology, Cobb claims that personhood is preserved, but he is unable to explain how that can be so.<sup>614</sup>

Second, this system assumes that each actual entity possesses the quality of "self-determination" and can affect the formation of new occasions. In addition, not only animate subjects in these occasions have this quality, but also inanimate subjects. Yet, this claim contradicts both human observations and common sense. How can an inanimate object, which cannot think or speak, substantially participate in determining the future direction of reality?

Third, process theologians do not tell us where the energy comes from for forming new actual entities. What or who gathers the "fragments" of the last actual entity to form a new one? They say that God introduces His "initial aim" into every new occurrence, but they do not ascribe the energy needed for their formation to God. It seems that the universe functions independently of God.

Another logical difficulty is this: if God's concrete pole changes, then it must have had a beginning, since every process has a starting point from which it progresses forward. It follows then, that if God's concrete pole had a beginning, there was a time when this imperfection entered into God's nature. How, then, did this imperfection originate?

Next, proponents of this theory have difficulty explaining how God evaluates the quality of actual entities. They claim that God evaluates His experience – what in it was good, and what was bad – and adjusts His future plans accordingly. Yet, if God is still imperfect in knowledge, then what does He base His judgment on? By what standard does He decide how to "improve" conditions in the world? The idea "improvement" implies conformity to some standard.

Furthermore, if God is in constant conflict with the lack of perfections in Himself and in the world, then what guarantee do we have that good will triumph in the end? Cobb himself admits that process theology cannot guarantee the final victory of good.<sup>615</sup> Might God fail in His mission to bring the world to utopia? Might He even become, in the end, an evil God? The claim that God is always working toward the world's good is an unsubstantiated assumption.

In fact, the entire system is based on unsubstantiated assumptions. There are no historical, empirical or logical proofs that can confirm this theory. Who has ever observed or shown the logical necessity of "actual entities," "initial aim," "field of force," God's bipolar nature, etc.? Whitehead and Hartshorne simply imagined a fanciful description of reality and made up the "rules of the game" as they went along.

Speaking from a historical perspective, this system is simply an overreaction to the errant doctrine of God's impassibility, that is, His inability to feel pleasure or pain. However, instead of making a more reasonable correction to this extreme, one that preserves the concepts of God's perfection and unchanging nature, Whitehead and Hartshorne went to the other extreme, denying these truths.

In addition, there exists a philosophical dilemma in supposing that someone can reach their potential on their own. "Potential," in the philosophical use of the term, is that which lies outside the limitations of one to achieve by his/her own effort. Outside help is required to realize it. However, who is able to assist God in reaching His potential perfection? Whitehead answers that God has a power called "creativity," which enables Him to reach his potential and possibilities. Yet, this means that the force "creativity" is greater than God and

---

<sup>614</sup>Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>615</sup>Ibid, p. 118.

must itself be God.<sup>616</sup> Hasker writes that this teaching “suggest strongly that Creativity itself is the ontological ultimate.”<sup>617</sup> Nash aptly comments that panentheism needs a theistic God to make the system plausible.<sup>618</sup>

In defense of process theology, Lowe states that “creativity” does not exist outside of God, but is one of His attributes.<sup>619</sup> Yet, the difficulty mentioned previously remains. “Creativity” implies the ability to find creative solutions for problems. Yet, the idea of “solutions” implies approximation to a desired result, that is, to some standard. If God is still imperfect in knowledge of good, then how can His “creativity” determine in which direction the “solution” to a problem lies?

Speaking from a practical point of view, the system of Whitehead and Hartshorne is too difficult for the average person to grasp. Reeves concurs, “Whitehead’s conception of God is unsuitable for religion.”<sup>620</sup>

Finally, Pinnock voices the following objections.<sup>621</sup> First, this theory limits God by not allowing Him to operate in His transcendence, in particular, to do miracles. Second, God’s “dependence” on the world limits Him in love. God may intend good, but is not always able to effectively accomplish it, for “God cannot override the freedom of creatures.”<sup>622</sup> Third, God’s “dependence” on the world limits His freedom. He is able only to try to “convince” the world to cooperate with Him, yet He has no authority to enforce His will unilaterally.

A more balanced approach to God’s immutability (i.e. unchangeableness), might posit that that God may change His plan as a result of a person’s response to Him, but that He does not change in His essential nature or the general contours of His plan – to bless the righteous and punish the unrighteous. If God announced judgment on someone, but they repent, then God will have mercy and not punish. On the other hand, if God promises blessing, but a person does evil, then God may withdraw his promise.<sup>623</sup> One may also posit that God may change in His emotions, and that He possesses the entire spectrum of emotions present in humans, whom He created. Yet, this does not require that God also changes in relation to His nature, His standards, or His promises.

In conclusion, we concur that God indeed interacts with the world and those who inhabit it. Yet, that interaction does not involve His dependence on the created order. God has need of nothing. On the contrary, He establishes relations with people because of His desire to fellowship with them. He does this not by necessity, but voluntarily.

### C. Theism

Having examined in this and previous chapters different theories as to the Ultimate’s relationship to the universe, we have discovered that the theories of pantheism, deism, and panentheism encounter numerous contradictions in logic, experience and history. None of them offers a satisfactory explanation of this relationship.

Unlike pantheism, theism proposes that God, in essence, is distinct from His creation, that is, God and the universe are separate entities. The universe is not God’s manifestation, but God’s creation. At the same time, unlike the claims of deism, God is near to the world and intervenes in its affairs. People may enjoy fellowship with Him.

---

<sup>616</sup>Gaisler, Christian apologetics, p. 209.

<sup>617</sup>Hasker, p. 224.

<sup>618</sup>Nash, p. 34-35.

<sup>619</sup>Lowe, p. 4.

<sup>620</sup>Reeves, p. 25.

<sup>621</sup>Pinnock P. H. Introduction // Cobb J. B. Pinnock P. H. Searching for an adequate God: A dialogue between process and free will theists. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – P. x–xii.

<sup>622</sup>Pinnock, p. x–xi.

<sup>623</sup>Henry P. F. H. God, revelation, and authority. – Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976-1983. – V. 5. – P. 303; Calvin J. Institutes of the Christian religion. – Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997. – 1.17.14. Grudem W. Systematic Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020. – P. 194-195.

According to theism, God is not an all-penetrating, all-encompassing force. He is a personality. He thinks, speaks, feels, acts and has every positive personality trait. Theism also teaches that, although God is great, people can know Him. It is true, of course, that humans cannot know the Infinite God fully, but nonetheless they can truly know Him in part, and in part accurately speak of Him in human words.

Finally, unlike the God of panentheism, the true God is a perfect being, who is able to guarantee the success of His plan and serve as a standard of perfection for us.

Our study of what options exist for viewing the Ultimate as a personal Being gives strong support to theism, which best of all corresponds to normal human consciousness, thought and sensibilities, and avoids the logical inconsistencies present in other worldviews. Therefore, we will adopt the premise that theism is the most logical and reasonable system for understanding the Ultimate's nature in relation to the world.

### **Resources Used:**

Calvin J. Institutes of the Christian religion. – Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997.

Casserley J. V. L. Apologetics and evangelism. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962.

Cobb J. B., Griffen D. R. Process theology: An introductory exposition. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1976. – 185 p.

Craig W. L. Apologetics: An introduction. – Chicago, IL: Moody, 1984.

Erickson M. J. Christian theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998.

Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1976.

Geisler N. L., Watkins W. D. Worlds apart: A handbook on world views. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989.

Grenz S. J. A Primer on postmodernism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

Griffin D. R. Response to William Hasker // Cobb J. B., Pinnock C. H. Searching for an adequate God: A dialogue between process and free will theists. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – P. 246-262.

Grudem W. Systematic theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020.

Hartshorne C. Man's vision of God – Hamden, CO: Archon Books, 1964. – 356 p.

\_\_\_\_\_. Reality as social process. – Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1953. – 223 p.

\_\_\_\_\_. The formally possible doctrines of God // Brown D., James R. E., Reeves G. Process philosophy and Christian thought. – Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971. – P. 188-214.

Hasker W. An adequate God // Cobb J. B., Pinnock C. H. Searching for an adequate God: A dialogue between process and free will theists. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – P. 215-245.

Helm C. The providence of God. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993.



Henry C. F. H. God, revelation, and authority. – Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976-1983.

Joyce G. C. Deism // Hastings J. Encyclopedia of religion and ethics. – New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928. – V. 4. – P. 533-543.

Loomer B. M. Christian faith and process philosophy // Brown D., James R. E., Reeves G. Process philosophy and Christian thought. – Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971. – P. 70-98.

Lowe V. Whitehead's metaphysical System // Brown D., James R. E., Reeves G. Process philosophy and Christian thought. – Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971. – P. 3-20.

Nash R. H. The concept of God. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983.

Pinnock C. H. Introduction // Cobb J. B., Pinnock C. H. Searching for an adequate God: A dialogue between process and free will theists. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – P. ix-xii.

Reeves G., Brown D. The development of process theology // Brown D., James R. E., Reeves G. Process philosophy and Christian thought. – Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971. – P. 21-64.

Robertson J. M. A short history of freethought. – New York, NY: Russell and Russell, 1957. – 434 p.

Stephen L. History of English thought in the eighteenth century. – 3rd ed. – London: John Murray, 1902.

Torry N. L. Voltaire and the English deists. – New Haven: Yale, 1930.

Whitehead A. N. Process and reality. – New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929. – 543 p.

\_\_\_\_\_. Religion and metaphysics // Brown D., James R. E., Reeves G. Process philosophy and Christian thought. – Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971. – P. 67-69.

Wood A. W. Deism // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – Farmington Hills, MI: MacMillian/Gale, 2005. – V. 4. – P. 2251-2252.

~~~~~

wikipedia.org



Image by intographics from Pixabay

IV. How Many Gods?

After examining the question of God's transcendence, that is, His relation to the universe, and determining that theism is the preferred worldview, we are ready to advance to our next inquiry – how many gods are there? In ancient times, polytheism was widely accepted, i.e. faith in many gods. Also from ancient times comes a religious view still popular today – animism, which is faith in spiritual powers that determine our quality of life. We must also address a relatively new religious movement that also teaches the existence of many gods – Mormonism.

Chapter 8: Pantheons of the Past

A. Definition of Animism

Although animism has been practiced for thousands of years, a concrete definition of this phenomenon appeared only in the 19th century. In his 1873 publication, *Religion in Primitive Culture*, E. B. Taylor wrote, "Animism, in its full development, includes belief in souls and in a future state, in controlling deities and subordinate spirits,... resulting in some kind of active worship."⁶²⁴ Van Rheezen offers a more expanded definition:

Animism is "the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future actions and, frequently, to manipulate their power."⁶²⁵

Animists believe that hidden spiritual powers control the course of life and nature. It is felt that spiritual powers stand behind nearly all natural phenomena and determine their activity. Animists associate these powers with the earth, moon, sun, grains, trees, rivers, animals, etc.⁶²⁶ Consequently, the natural and supernatural are basically indistinguishable. Some spirits are good, while others cause harm.

Animists often acknowledge the existence of a supreme god, who is above all other gods.⁶²⁷ They often consider him the creator and one who observes human behavior. They also feel this supreme god decides the fate of the dead. Some animists believe both in a supreme god, and in a pantheon of lower gods, who carry out his will.⁶²⁸

However, animists pay little attention to this supreme god, since he is detached from earthly affairs. They speak of him as "a distant, unapproachable Creator," "the Supreme Being who reflects his nature in lower spiritual beings," or "the impersonal power that permeates all of nature."⁶²⁹ Nevertheless, at times they bring him propitiatory sacrifices for sins. Animists prefer to deal with the lower, mediatorial spirits, i.e. with those who direct the forces of nature, as well as with the spirits of departed ancestors.⁶³⁰

Clodd notes that paying reverence to departed ancestors is a universal practice among animists. It is felt that after death, people obtain greater powers. Yet, as a rule, their powers are less than the spirits in nature. Departed ancestors take an interest in the living and are able to assist them. For this reason, animists decorate their tombs and offer presents.⁶³¹

In summary, animists believe that one's happiness and well-being depends on the disposition of departed ancestors and spirits in nature. To ward off evil effects from the above, animists perform various rituals and sacrifices, along with observing taboos and other forms of superstition.⁶³² Risley masterfully describes the animist's mentality:

⁶²⁴Taylor E. B. *Religion in primitive culture*, p. 11. Quoted in Van Rheezen G. *Communicating Christ in animistic contexts*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – P. 19.

⁶²⁵Ibid, p. 20.

⁶²⁶Clodd E. *Animism: The seed of religion*. – Montana: Kessinger Publishers. – P. 52-83; Van Rheezen, p. 55; Turner H. *World of the spirits // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 130; Hexham I. *Understanding world religions*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. – P. 62.

⁶²⁷Turner, p. 131; Hexham, p. 59; Corduan W. *A Tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions*. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – P. 15-16; Clodd, p. 53-58.

⁶²⁸Van Rheezen, p. 253, 291-295.

⁶²⁹Ibid, p. 243.

⁶³⁰Halverson D. C. *Animism / Halverson D. C. The compact guide to world religions*. – Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1996. – P. 40.

⁶³¹Clodd, p. 87-94; Van Rheezen, p. 252.

⁶³²Hexham, p. 60.

The idea that lies at the root of their religion is that of power, or rather many powers. What the Animist worships and seeks by all means to influence and conciliate is the shifting and shadowy company of unknown powers or influences making for evil rather than good, which resides in the primeval forest, in the stumbling hills, in the rushing river, in the spreading tree; which gives its spring to the tiger, its venom to the snake, which generates jungle fever, and walks abroad in the terrible guise of cholera, smallpox, or murrain.⁶³³

By means of rituals, animists seek not so much to appease these spirits, as to manipulate them. On the one hand, they do indeed worship them, but, on the other hand, they attempt to manipulate them by means of magic. They feel that natural forces, and the spirits associated with them, operate in a mechanical way, much like electricity. If, by means of rituals and incantations, someone is able to manipulate the spirits and secure access to the energy of nature, then he/she can use it for his/her own benefit, or the benefit of a "client."⁶³⁴

Van Rheenen concurs, "Magic is the use of rituals and paraphernalia to manipulate spiritual powers."⁶³⁵ In addition, animists feel the words of the incantation itself contain power to accomplish its intent. To protect themselves from the "evil eye," animists utilize amulets and charms.⁶³⁶

A key figure in the system of animism is the witchdoctor or shaman. Van Rheenen describes him as follows: "A shaman is a diviner who seeks to discern what spiritual being or impersonal force is causing sickness, discord, or catastrophe in order to prescribe some remedy."⁶³⁷ A shaman works in divination, performs rituals and serves as a medium for communication with spirits.⁶³⁸ A shaman often undergoes throughout training before assuming his religious role. Some feel this "art" is passed on by heredity. In order to fulfill their role, shamans must be possessed by a spirit. Van Rheenen comments,

These illustrations from throughout the world demonstrate that joining with the spiritual beings in some type of ecstatic experience, especially through possessions and dreams, is a prerequisite to becoming a shaman.⁶³⁹

Divination, supposedly, serves several goals: to aid in future planning, to discover the source of a problem, to avoid dangers, to choose leaders, to expose guilt. Shamans work divination in various ways: observation of certain natural phenomena, astrology, rituals, Taro cards, interpretation of dreams and visions, communication with departed ancestors or other spirits.⁶⁴⁰

At times, spiritual power is associated with concrete objects, especially idols, which become objects of worship. Idols sometime adopt the form of "totems," which is a figure of an animal connected in some way with the given tribe. Clodd reports that animists worship idols not in a symbolic sense, but believe that spirits really do inhabit them and manifest their power through them.⁶⁴¹ On the relationship of spiritual power and the idol Shart comments that in ancient Mesopotamia people could easily distinguish a statue from a god, yet they felt that the god could fully incarnate itself in the idol. This resulted from the performance of the required ritual and depended on the will of the gods.⁶⁴²

⁶³³Risley, Census of India, vol 1, part 1, p. 352ff, 1901, Calcutta. Taken from Clodd, p. 24-25.

⁶³⁴Van Rheenen, p. 218, 253.

⁶³⁵Ibid, p. 218; Also see Hexham, p. 60.

⁶³⁶Ibid, p. 225, 229.

⁶³⁷Ibid, p. 154.

⁶³⁸Turner, p. 131-132; Hexham, p. 55; Van Rheenen, p. 215.

⁶³⁹Van Rheenen, p. 157.

⁶⁴⁰Ibid, p. 172-189.

⁶⁴¹Clodd, p. 78; Turner, p. 130; Van Rheenen, p. 249-250.

⁶⁴²Schart A. Die "Gestalt" YHWYs. // Theologische Zeitschrift. 1999. 55. P. 26-43.

Ethical standards among animistic peoples show similarities, yet they vary in their application. Concerning the concept of sin, Van Rheezen states, “Sin in animistic contexts is understood to destroy the balance and harmony of life. When harmony is disrupted, people experience suffering and misfortune.”⁶⁴³

As a rule, animistic religions revere no sacred texts. The animistic faith is either passed down by oral tradition, or revealed in personal mystical experience with spirits. These mystical experiences may include visions, dreams, voices, apparitions, or spiritual impressions.⁶⁴⁴

Often scholars of religion errantly assume that the first humans were animists, and that, later on, humanity developed more advanced notions about God, leading to the monotheistic view embraced by most people today. This view of religion is known as the “History of Religion” approach, and works off the evolutionary model. Let us look more closely at this theory.

It is assumed that cave people encountered powers in nature that they could not control, yet these powers affected their quality of life. Clodd writes that from this fear of nature’s powers “spring the feelings of inferiority, helplessness and dependence which man’s surroundings quicken, and which are the raw material of theologies and rituals.”⁶⁴⁵ Yet in time, Clodd feels, with the advancement of religion, such fear “has declined as knowledge has advanced.”⁶⁴⁶

Consequently, people began to worship these powers and their corresponding manifestations in nature in an effort to appease them and, thereby, gain security and success. In time, people started to assign names to these powers, like Mars, Jupiter, etc.

Next, as the theory goes, people began to acknowledge some chief god, who served as patron for their clan. Proponents of the History of Religion approach suppose that Israel acknowledged the existence of many gods, yet considered Yahweh their patron. Finally, in the course of time, Israel “invented” monotheism, i.e. faith in only one God. In the second volume of this series, in chapter 1 and section C, we discuss and refute the History of Religion approach.

In conclusion, we note that although at present the number of animists is relatively small (135 million), their number is increasing. Van Rheezen states, “Generally animism is not dying but rather reshaping itself into new, contemporary forms.”⁶⁴⁷ Animism exerts a powerful influence on adherents of other religions, as we note in section B.5 below. Stephen Neill reports that 40% of the world’s population “base their lives on animistic thinking.”⁶⁴⁸ Van Rheezen insightfully observes,

The average person in an animistic society may wear Western clothes, desire education, listen to the radio, and travel long distances... However, when he is sick or his wife is barren, he consults the medium or diviner.⁶⁴⁹

B. Animism in Various Contexts

It appears that in antiquity animism prevailed in most countries of the world, yet traces of animistic superstition persist among many people groups even today. Even though certain characteristics of animism are common in animistic religions in general, each culture may express these features in unique ways.⁶⁵⁰ In this section, we will investigate the persistence of animistic thinking in various cultures of the world.

⁶⁴³Van Rheezen, p. 297. Also see p. 277.

⁶⁴⁴Hexham, p. 51; Corduan, p. 15; Van Rheezen, p. 58.

⁶⁴⁵Clodd, p. 21.

⁶⁴⁶*Ibid*, p. 48.

⁶⁴⁷Van Rheezen, p. 25.

⁶⁴⁸*Ibid*, p. 25.

⁶⁴⁹*Ibid*, p. 32.

⁶⁵⁰Corduan, p. 15.

1. Animism in China

From a historical point of view (except for the influence of atheistic communism), the dominant philosophical-religious worldview of China has been shaped by Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. At the same time, we observe certain features of indigenous Chinese religious practice that do not coincide with these ideologies. These features we can define as “Chinese animism.” Specifically, in indigenous Chinese religion, we observe reverence for departed ancestors, exorcisms, and special rituals for the dead. In additions, certain pagan festivals are celebrated, and shamans practice their magic arts.⁶⁵¹

A survey taken in Chinese villages in 2008 revealed that one-third of the surveyed population believed in supernatural powers that dominate or strongly influence the fate of people, and that people’s fate can be altered by offering sacrifices to the gods and to departed ancestors. These convictions and practices are deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture and customs.⁶⁵²

In the ancient cosmology of China, there existed a pantheon of gods headed by the “Jade Emperor,” who is also one of the gods of Taoism. He directs the activity of the lesser gods. One example of a lesser god is the “household spirit,” who supervises the behavior of the family at home. Another god lives within humans and marks their personal behavior. Other lesser gods oversee the underworld. The Chinese emperor, although only a mortal, was nonetheless a “son of heaven,” and served as a mediator between gods and people.⁶⁵³

Furthermore, Chinese animists believe that the universe evolved from nothing and is a living organism. Additionally, the universe has an inherent energy, called *qi*, which sustains all things.⁶⁵⁴

The most remarkable element of native Chinese religion, which is also present in Taoism, is the concepts of *ying* and *yang*. These are contrasting forces present in the universe that create between themselves a certain balance or harmony. *Yang* represents the male gender, bright light, creativity, the sun, and the East. *Ying* represents the female gender, warmth, passivity, the moon, and the West.⁶⁵⁵ Disharmony between *ying* and *yang* leads to disease. Acupuncture, supposedly, restores this balance in the human body. When a person dies, *ying* remains in the corpse and may become a ghost. *Yang*, however, arises to heaven and is then reincarnated.⁶⁵⁶

Since *qi* permeates the entire universe and expresses itself in *ying* and *yang*, everything, in essence, is part of the spiritual world. Thus the demarcation between the natural and supernatural is wiped away, which, in fact, is the basic tenet of animism.⁶⁵⁷

2. Animism in Japan (Shintoism)

Animism has existed a long time in Japan and is known under the title of Shintoism or Shinto. In 2010, it boasted 2-3 million followers. In the history of Japan, Shinto frequently intermingled with Buddhism and Confucianism, creating a syncretic faith unique only to Japan. Consequently, some of the Buddhists gods were adopted by Shinto and vice versa. Buddhist monks could even be found serving in Shinto temples.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵¹Teiser S. F. Religions of China in practice // Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 105-108.

⁶⁵²<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China#Religion>

⁶⁵³Teiser, p. 115; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jade_Emperor.

⁶⁵⁴Teiser, p. 115-117; Wright A. W. Buddhism in Chinese history. – Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1959. – P. 13; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qi>

⁶⁵⁵Van Rheeën, p. 206; Wright, p. 12-13; Teiser, p. 117-120;

⁶⁵⁶Teiser, p. 117-118; Van Rheeën, p. 206.

⁶⁵⁷Ibid, p. 119.

⁶⁵⁸Melton J. G. Shinto // Melton J. G., Baumann M. Religions of the world. – 2nd ed. – Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010. – V. 6. – P. 2619; Nigosian, p. 223-225; Bocking B. Shinto // Jones L. Encyclopedia of Religion. – 2nd ed. – Detroit, MI: Thomson-Gale, 2005. – P. 8357.

Tracing the origins of Shinto presents some difficulties. Nigosian relates, “Shinto is a collective term, referring to a multitude of varying Japanese religious and national practices, including folklore, magic, ancestral spirits, ritualism and nationalism.”⁶⁵⁹

The earliest manifestation of indigenous Japanese religion was a rudimentary form of animism, where shamans worked to ward off evil spirits. In addition, each Japanese clan had their own “patron-god.” In the fourth century AD, worship of the goddess of the Yamato clan, Amaterasu, goddess of the sun, became dominant. The term “Shinto,” which means “the way of the gods/spirits,” appeared later, in the sixth century AD.⁶⁶⁰

In its mature form, Shinto shares many qualities with animism in general. Melton writes, “Shinto views the world as alive with divinity.”⁶⁶¹ Nigosian adds, “Shinto has recognized no firm dividing line between the mortal and immortal, the human and divine, the spiritual and material worlds.”⁶⁶² Gods that direct the cosmos are called *kami*. They fill, it is claimed, the entire universe. Melton writes about them, “Anything above the ordinary or that might awaken a sense of awe or mystery in the human mind may be listed as a *kami*.”⁶⁶³

Nonetheless, Shinto cosmology highlights three original and self-created *kami*: (1) *Ame-no-Minakanushi*, the “Kami Master of the Center of Heaven,” (2) *Takamimusubi*, the “High Sacred Creating King,” and (3) *Kamimusubi*, the “Sacred Creating Kami.” They created the world from chaos and also created the “primal parents,” namely, Izanagi (male) and Izanami (female). These two, in turn, founded the Japanese islands, the Japanese people, and other *kami*, including the famed Amaterasu (see below). Another god highly respected is Hachiman, the *kami* of war and the defender of Japan.⁶⁶⁴

The figure Amaterasu deserves more elaboration. As noted above, she was the chief *kami* of the Yamato clan and thought to be an ancestor of both the clan’s leader, and the emperor of Japan. So then, in the cosmology of Shinto, the Japanese emperor comes from divine lineage. By 1868, Shinto became the state religion of Japan, and the head of state, the emperor, was thought divine. In 1889 he was proclaimed “sacred, inviolable, and a manifestation of the Absolute.”⁶⁶⁵ All Japanese were required to participate in State Shinto, as Nigosian states, “The test of loyalty to the government was acceptance of State Shinto.”⁶⁶⁶

After World War II, State Shinto was banned by the American occupying forces. From then on, State Shinto was reformulated as “Temple Shinto,” which operated separately from the government apparatus. At present, Temple Shinto is the most prominent branch of Shintoism.⁶⁶⁷

Although in early Shinto devotees performed their religious rituals in various places, now the cult is more centralized in temples. Yet, household devotions are still held at personal shrines, or *kami-dana*. Mt. Fujiyama also hosts some special ceremonies. On New Years, the great feast day of Japan, about 80% of the population visit a temple.⁶⁶⁸

Other devotees to Shinto belong to “Sect Shinto”, which arose in the 19th century. This term designates a group of sects, whose founders claim special spiritual status. These sects became popular after World War II, when participation in State Shinto was forbidden. Some sects are termed “Pure Shinto,” since they resist syncretic mixing with other religions and emphasize the basic tenets of the native faith. “Confucian Shinto” combines Shintoism with Confucianism. In “mountain sects,” worshippers worship mountains. “Purification sects” focus on ritual purification.⁶⁶⁹ “Redemptive sects” are unique in that they are theistic and emphasize

⁶⁵⁹Nigosian, c. 217.

⁶⁶⁰Nigosian, p. 218, 221; Melton, v. 6, p. 2616.

⁶⁶¹Melton, v. 6, p. 2618.

⁶⁶²Nigosian, p. 223.

⁶⁶³Melton, v. 6, p. 2618.

⁶⁶⁴Melton, v. 6, p. 2618-2619; Nigosian, p. 220; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hachiman>; Bocking, p. 8369.

⁶⁶⁵Nigosian, p. 228. Also see Melton, v. 6, p. 2618;

⁶⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁷Nigosian, p. 220, 228-229; Melton, v. 6, p. 2618-2619.

⁶⁶⁸Bocking, p. 8357-8358; Nigosian, p. 240.

⁶⁶⁹Melton, v. 6, p. 2618; Bocking, p. 8367-8369; Nigosian, p. 233-234.

faith in God. In them, divine healing is practiced. The most unique sect is Konko-kyo. Nigosian describes it as follows:

Adherents of Konko-kyo hold that all people should have faith in this Great Father of the Universe, love each other, fulfill their respective responsibilities, and pray for peace, happiness and prosperity in the world... They reject all occult activities, ascetic practices, and religious austerities.⁶⁷⁰

Shinto temples number about 100,000. They serve as centers for the worship of the *kami*, offerings of food, and ritual purifications. Both Shinto and Buddhists worship there, and some Shinto *kami* are identified with Buddhist *bodhisattvas*. In 1868, the emperor Meiji officially separated Shinto and Buddhism, but overlap persists.⁶⁷¹ In addition, during the reign of Meiji, the “Great Teaching” was advanced, which enjoins followers to, as Bocking relates, “(1) revere the deities and love your country, (2) make clear the principles of heaven and the way of man, (3) reverence the emperor and abide by the will of the court.”⁶⁷²

Although devotees of Shinto do not hold to any canon of sacred writings, nevertheless they greatly respect two works: *Kojiki* (712 AD) and *Nihon Shoki* (720 AD). These publications relate a mythological history of the appearance of the Japanese islands and the *kami*, yet the latter also contains a factual history of Japan. Finally, Shinto practices situational ethics.⁶⁷³

3. Animism in Oceania

The appearance of animism in Melanesia is especially interesting. There the concept of *mana* predominates, which is an impersonal force that directs all things, both good and bad. One must “accumulate” *mana* in order to achieve success in life. One can obtain it through a soldier fallen in battle, a departed ancestor, a special tooth or stone, or an amulet, which has touched a person filled with *mana*. For example, the king of Hawaii was allegedly full of *mana*. Van Rheezen states, “*Mana* provides the Melanesian with the power to be successful; the absence of such power explains failure.”⁶⁷⁴

Mana can bring benefit or harm. Therefore, it is expedient to control it by performing the proper rituals and observing prescribed taboos. Those having experience with *mana* can advise as to its proper use. Curiously, a concept similar to *mana* exists among other tribes. Among Sioux Indians, it is *wakan*, among pigmies – *oudah*, in Indonesia – *toh*, in Tanzania – *bugota*.⁶⁷⁵

Among some tribes in Oceania, we find faith in a Creator God. Yet few worship him, considering him too detached from affairs on earth. Animists in Oceania, as in other parts of the world, believe that spirits of departed ancestors are active in our lives.⁶⁷⁶ A curious group among the Melanesian aborigines, the “Cargo Cult,” awaits the arrival of some ancestor on a boat or in an airplane, bringing manufactured goods and inaugurating a time of great prosperity without death.⁶⁷⁷

4. Animism in Russia

⁶⁷⁰Nigosian, p. 235-237.

⁶⁷¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinto#Notable_shrines; Melton, v. 6, p. 2618; Nigosian, p. 225-227, 231; Bocking, p. 8357; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinbutsu-shugo>.

⁶⁷²Bocking, p. 8366.

⁶⁷³<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kojiki>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nihongi>; Melton, v. 6, p. 2618; Nigosian, p. 219

⁶⁷⁴Van Rheezen, p. 209.

⁶⁷⁵Van Rheezen, p. 208-212; Tippet A. Oceania // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 140.

⁶⁷⁶Tippet, p. 140-141; Loeliger P. Melanesia // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 142.

⁶⁷⁷Loeliger P. Cargo cults // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 143.

Prior to the Kievan Rus' accepting Christianity in the 10th century under Vladimir the Great, a polytheistic-animistic system of worship prevailed.⁶⁷⁸ Even after the conversion of the Rus, a remnant of paganism persisted in their Christian faith. Lupan describes the situation as follows:

It is amazing that in spite of the frequent sound of church bells under gold-plated cupolas, in the villages we encounter people, when entering a home, appeasing the household spirit, or when entering the woods, appealing to the spirit of the forest... A religious festival hardly passes, except that people visit the graves of departed ancestors, arranging a meal and inviting their presence.⁶⁷⁹

The paganism of the ancient Rus is more similar to polytheism than animism, since gods with specific names are thought to oversee certain aspects of life. Scholars debate about the identity of the chief god of the Slavic peoples. Some say it was Perun, others – Svarog, Rod or Svetovit. Certain gods, reportedly, fulfilled specific functions: Yarilo – the god of vegetation and spring, Morana (the sister and wife of Yarilo) – the goddess of death and winter, Dazhbog – the sun god, and others.⁶⁸⁰

Indigenous Slavic religion also recognized an evil god, Veles, who stands in contrast to the chief god. Other lesser gods, subject to Veles, are *barabashki* (mischevious household spirits), *domovoy* (the chief household spirit), *vodyanoy* (the spirit of watery disasters), *leshii* (the spirit of the forest), *kikimora* (the spirit of the swamp), and apparitions of the departed.⁶⁸¹

Lupan reports that in contemporary Slavic society a revival of animism is taking place.⁶⁸² Neo-pagan religious organizations exist, such as “Union of the Veneti,” “Veles Circle,” “Union of Slavic Native Belief Communities,” and “Ukrainian Neo-pagans.” The neo-pagan movement as a whole has a “nationalistic-patriotic flavor,” and attracts those who are “tired of the turmoil of the present” and desire to “return to their roots.” This movement employs ritual, ceremonial worship, pagan priests, idols, and the like.

Even outside of formal neo-pagan organizations, traces of animistic superstition are present in modern Slavic society. Lupan reveals;

They are engrossed in superstition: spitting over the left shoulder, rising up on the correct leg, avoiding black cats, not shaking hands across a threshold, not borrowing money on a Monday, leaving food for the *domovoy*. If one sleeps on his back, he may suffocate... If one does not appease *vodyanoy*, there may be a flood. If one does not appease *leshii*, one may get lost in the woods. Fear and superstition engulf all of life.⁶⁸³

Finally, shamans are active in Russia, especially in Siberia. They practice all kinds of sorcery and occult arts, and people appeal to them for help in resolving personal problems.⁶⁸⁴

5. Animism in Other Religions

Animism is not only a feature of primitive tribes located in faraway places, but exerts its influence on more advanced, contemporary faiths. Clodd claims that, although more advanced religions may satisfy their

⁶⁷⁸Лупан А. Апологетические доводы относительно анимистической религии в России // Евангельская теологическая семинария, студенческий реферат. – Киев, 2012.

⁶⁷⁹Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰Hultkrantz A. Nomads of the steppes // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 124; Лупан; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavic_mythology;

⁶⁸¹Лупан.

⁶⁸²Ibid. Also see <http://www.paganism.ru/neo-pag.htm>.

⁶⁸³Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴Boal B. Asia // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 133-136.

followers intellectually, animism has a greater appeal to the heart. He states, “Animism remains the distinctive feature of the highest religions... Animists, to the core, we remain.”⁶⁸⁵

1) Eastern Orthodoxy and Catholicism.

In his critique of Russian Orthodoxy, Lupan feels that some features of contemporary Russian Orthodoxy derive from pagan traditions.”⁶⁸⁶ Additionally, a devotee of modern animism in Russia writes concerning the Orthodox Church:

Orthodoxy and cultural customs recognize certain rituals and feast days, which trace back to paganism: the feasts of Koliada, Kupala, Maslenitsa, Kuzminki, Saturday of Souls, the consecration of special festival foods, and many others.”⁶⁸⁷

Furthermore, Lupan draws a parallel between appealing to Orthodox saints and pagan gods:

Each saint is designated for a certain earthly task. If one’s cow is sick, pray to Saint Blaise. If your horse is barren, pray to Saints Florus and Laurus. The patrons of chicken husbandry are Saints Cosmas and Damian, for sheep – Saint Mamont or Saint Anastasius, for pigs – Saint Vasily, for bees – Saint Zosimus. If you are ill, pray to Saint Pantaleon...”⁶⁸⁸

Finally, Lupan feels that the persistence of animism in Orthodoxy resulted from the forced conversion of the Kievan Rus to Christianity in the 10th century. Their conversion to Christianity was formal and superficial. Consequently, in heart they remained animists. In time, their indigenous faith found expression in Orthodoxy and remains there to the present day.⁶⁸⁹

Animism in Catholicism follows a similar line, especially in its practice among common people. Catholics revere statues, appeal to specific saints for specific needs, utilize relics in worship, etc. Furthermore, 70% of the South African tribe “Zulus” consider themselves Christians, yet still believe that the spirits of deceased ancestors influence life on earth.⁶⁹⁰

2) Islam

Animism exerts its influence on Islamic faith as well.⁶⁹¹ There we encounter the concept *baraka*, which is an impersonal spiritual force. Van Rheenen describes it as follows: *Baraka* is “divine blessing, grace and mercy... protection from danger and trouble, charisma for leadership, and power to protect and heal.”⁶⁹² Orthodox Muslims believe that *baraka* comes as a blessing from Allah, but that one cannot transfer it to others. In popular Islam, though, *baraka* is a magical power, which one can transfer to others.

Muslims also believe that one may “accumulate” *baraka* for oneself by observing the “Five Pillars” of Islam, including the pilgrimage to Mecca and touching the Kabba. Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, recognizes “*pirs*,” who are spiritual leaders possessing much *baraka*, received directly from Allah.

⁶⁸⁵Clodd, p. 96-97.

⁶⁸⁶«Язычество древней Руси» <http://voov.narod.ru/b-i-y/jaz-ref1.htm>. Taken from Лупан.

⁶⁸⁷Язычество имеет право на уважение и терпимость: Обращение русских язычников к Российским средствам массовой информации, 25 сентября 2003 года <http://slavya.ru/dialog/pres03/rights.htm>. Taken from Лупан.

⁶⁸⁸Лупан. Also see Van Rheenen, p. 247.

⁶⁸⁹Лупан.

⁶⁹⁰Ibid, p. 24-26, 98, 247, 256.

⁶⁹¹Ibid, p. 60, 199-265.

⁶⁹²Ibid, p. 199.

The Quran, supposedly, contains much *baraka* as well. Orthodox Muslims seek to obtain it by reading the Quran, but in popular Islam – by physically touching the book. Another animistic practice connected to the Quran is opening it to a random passage and accepting what is written there as a personal word from Allah. Still another – some dissolve the words of the Quran in a liquid and administer it to the ill as medicine.

As in manifestations of animism in other religions, in popular Islam devotees appeal to departed ancestors. They adorn their graves and bring them food in order to avoid receiving curses from them. It is claimed that departed ancestors may contact the living through dreams or direct revelations.

Finally, Islam accepts the existence of *jinn* (genies), who occupy a place in Islamic cosmology between people and angels. As a rule, they are evil, but some are good. They cause illness, especially to newborns and their mothers, newlyweds and fearful people. One may appease *jinn* by offering food, or ward them off with light, powder, or reading from the Quran.

3) New Age

Although we have already discussed the New Age Movement in the context of pantheism, we may note that it also demonstrates strong animistic tendencies.⁶⁹³ Followers of New Age believe in “universal life energy,” which lies at the basis of all existence. Van Rheeën writes, “It is *the* energy that flows from the universe into living creatures and circulates within them in an orderly manner.”⁶⁹⁴

Followers of New Age believe that hindering the flow of this “life” results in illness. Healing comes by administering a “dose” of this energy. One may activate this energy through meditation, especially as a group. A “miracle,” then, is a manifestation of this life force.

4) Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians

In conclusion, we need to touch on the question of animistic tendencies in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement of Christianity. First, we often encounter the claim that proclamation of words releases spiritual power, resident in the words themselves, to affect one’s life for good or for ill. The verse cited in support of this is Proverbs 18:21: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

This interpretation, however, is inconsistent with conventional biblical faith. It fails to take into account the Proverbs’ teaching on human speech in general. In the context of the entire book, it is clear that the words “death and life” refer not to releasing spiritual power, but the effect speech has on ourselves and others in a moral sense.

For example, “death” in a moral sense can result from a “perverted tongue,” (Prov 10:31), a “lying tongue,” (Prov 12:19), a “backbiting tongue,” (Prov 25:23), a “destructive tongue,” (Prov 15:4), or a “smooth tongue” (Prov 6:24). A tongue that gives “life” is the “tongue of the righteous” (Prov 10:20), the “soft tongue,” (Prov 25:15), the wise tongue (Prov 31:26), or the “soothing tongue” (Prov 15:4). In fact, the final verse specifically states, “A soothing tongue is a tree of life.”

At the same time, the Christian scriptures teach that the proclamation of God’s Word does play a role in releasing God’s power. Jesus said, “Whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.” Both Jesus and His apostles released God’s power by verbal declarations (see Mk 4:39; Matt 8:8; Acts 9:34, 40; 14:10).

However, closer examination reveals that God’s power is released not by the words believers speak, but as a result of their faith. Throughout the Bible, faith in God and His Word leads to a manifestation of His power. The words believers speak should be understood as simply one way to express that faith. The Bible does not

⁶⁹³Ibid, p. 205-207.

⁶⁹⁴Ibid, p. 205.

confirm that words themselves contain supernatural power. They simply serve as instruments to express faith in God, who releases His power in response to a person's faith and in accordance with His will.

If one claims that the words themselves contain power and can actualize themselves, then that individual is already flirting with animism (more specifically, with incantations), where one can control and manipulate the power of words independently of God. Whenever one separates the person of God from His power and understands that power as autonomous and self-actualizing, that individual is in danger of practicing animism.

Next, sometimes Pentecostal or Charismatic Christians speak of the "anointing," which God gives for ministry. In so speaking, they sometimes give the impression that this "anointing" is a spiritual power from the Holy Spirit that operates independently from Him and leads to success in ministry. Yet, here again an affinity with animism is apparent, since God's power is supposedly operating autonomously.

According to New Testament teaching, the word *χρῖσμα* (*hrisma*), i.e. "anointing," relates not to the power of the Holy Spirit, but to the Holy Spirit Himself. In the New Testament, the word occurs only in 1 John 2:20 and 27, where we read, "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know ... the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things..." The "teaching" anointing corresponds to the description of the Holy Spirit in John's gospel: "But the Helper, the *Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in My name, *He will teach you* all things." So then, the "teaching" anointing is the person of the Spirit.

Acts 10:38 confirms this view, where we see the verbal form of *χρῖσμα* (*hrisma*), that is *χρίω* (*hrio*): "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power." First, we note that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit, which shows that the anointing and the Spirit are the same. Second, the phrase "with power" points to the activity that the Spirit was to personally accomplish in the miracle ministry of Jesus (see Matt 12:28).

Paul writes on this theme as well. In 1 Corinthians 12:7 we read, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Again, the power of God is connected with the person of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts are a "manifestation" of the Spirit. The "anointing," just like spiritual gifts, does not operate independently from God's Spirit, like a magical power, but is a manifestation of the person of the Holy Spirit through the believer. Whenever one separates God's power from His person, he/she is in danger of sliding off into animism.

C. Polytheism in Antiquity and Today

Animism and polytheism in many respects overlap. The main difference is that in polytheism natural forces are personalized and receive names. The animist appeases impersonal natural forces and nameless spirits, but the polytheist recognizes personal gods, who require worship and receive it. Consequently, polytheists direct their energies to building temples and offer appeasing sacrifices to their gods.⁶⁹⁵ The practice of polytheism has not totally died out. Even today, several small movements exist to restore the worship of many gods.

Polytheistic religions nearly always recognized a chief god, often accompanied by a cohort. Other gods make up a hierarchy under his headship. Sumerians worshipped the chief god Anu, the god of heaven, whose cohort was Inanna. Under Anu we find Enlil, the god of the atmosphere, Enki, the god of fresh water, the sun god, Utu, the moon god, Nanna, and others.⁶⁹⁶

The Akkadians and the Canaanites worshipped as their chief god El. The Canaanites worshipped along with El his cohort Asherah, who bore not only other gods, but people as well. The god of the Assyrians was

⁶⁹⁵Smith P. P. The ancient religions of Greece and Rome // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 97; Millard A. Cradle of civilization: The Ancient Near East // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 60.

⁶⁹⁶Millard, p. 60; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anu>

Ashur, of Babylon – Marduk, of Moab – Chemosh, of Edom – Qaus, of Ammon – Milcom, of Damascus – Hadad.⁶⁹⁷

In Egypt, the primer god was Re, who Ruffle describes as the “Sun-god, the great state-god of ancient Egypt, king of the gods, father of mankind and protector of kings.”⁶⁹⁸ At the same time, Egyptians also recognized an unnamed high god of a different type, of whom Ruffle writes, “There are also references to ‘God’ or ‘The God,’ who seems to have been an unnamed universal divine power who controlled the universe and upheld good against evil.”⁶⁹⁹

The pantheons of Greek and Rome are well known. The gods they recognize in many respects overlap each other. Their head is Zeus (or Jupiter), who is described by Smith as “the father of the gods and people, though not the creator-god. Also god of the sky and weather.”⁷⁰⁰ Other members of these pantheons include:

- Ares = Mars – god of war
- Aphrodite = Venus – god of love
- Artemis = Diana – god of fertility
- Athena = Minerva – god of wisdom, war, art
- Hermes = Mercury – messenger god
- Poseidon = Neptune – god of the sea

At times, ancient peoples considered their emperor a god, or the emperor filled the role of high priest.⁷⁰¹

So then, various gods fulfilled various functions in the world order and corresponded to natural phenomena or human experience. Millard cites the following example: “The gods of the Sumerians were the powers of nature as revealed in the world.” He also writes, “The gods were restricted to their own sphere.”⁷⁰²

Since the gods of antiquity were all connected with natural phenomena or human experience, it is not surprising that not only the gods of Rome and Greece overlap, but also that the pantheons of all cultures share commonalities. Walls relates the following words of Caesar: “Caesar assumed the Gallic Celts worshipped the same gods as the Romans, though under different names. ‘Of these deities’ he says, ‘they have almost the same idea as all other nations.’”⁷⁰³

It is curious to note that the ancients often believed in an impersonal force, “fate,” that stood above all the gods and determined the future for all.⁷⁰⁴ As far as the gods’ behavior, Smith comments on the Greek gods of Olympus that they “were scarcely model examples of ethical behavior.”⁷⁰⁵ Millard adds that the behavior of the gods was capricious and unpredictable. He also comments,

They fight to hold their place against evil powers that want to break down their ordered way of life, they quarrel over their areas of influence, they engage in trickery and show every kind of human emotion and vice.⁷⁰⁶

⁶⁹⁷Millard, p. 61- 67.

⁶⁹⁸Ruffle J. *Ancient Egypt: Land of the priest-king* // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 79.

⁶⁹⁹Ibid, p. 71.

⁷⁰⁰Smith, p. 103.

⁷⁰¹Smith, p. 108; Ruffle, p. 72.

⁷⁰²Millard, p. 61.

⁷⁰³Walls A. *The old gods: Religions of Northern Europe* // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 117.

⁷⁰⁴Smith, p. 95.

⁷⁰⁵Ibid, p. 99.

⁷⁰⁶Millard, p. 61.

The pagan priesthood held the exclusive right to offer sacrifices to appease the gods – the laity did not participate in the rituals, yet they could perform certain animistic practices at home. In the temple, the priests catered to idols of the gods by offering them food, washing them, and dressing them. It was thought that the gods created people to raise food for them. Devotees worshipped the gods in order to receive material benefits. Every city boasted its own “patron god.”⁷⁰⁷

As noted above, polytheism has not totally died out, but actually is experiencing a certain revival. For example, in his book, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*, David Miller defends in detail polytheistic faith.⁷⁰⁸ He gives the following description of the gods:

The Gods and Goddesses are the names of powers, of forces, which have autonomy and are not conditioned or affected by social and historical events, by human will or reason, or by personal and individual factors.⁷⁰⁹

Miller’s defense rests on the idea that monotheism cannot adequately account for all the phenomena in the world or fully encompass all of human experience. The existence of variety in the world testifies to the existence of more than one divine essence. The monotheist, in Miller’s opinion, unjustifiably limits his/her perception of reality: “It is this monotheistic thinking that fails a people in a time when experience becomes self-consciously pluralistic, radically both/and.”⁷¹⁰

Miller supposes that people experience such a variety of life experience, encounter such a plentitude of ideas, and hold to such varying values that one cannot ascribe all these aspects of human experience to only one divine essence. They must indicate the existence of many gods.

Furthermore, Miller contrasts the concepts of “logic” and “experience.” He claims that in defense of their view, monotheists appeal to logical deduction, since logic rules out contradiction and points to a single, logically consistent, monotheistic worldview. Miller responds, though, that life is not so simple. In everyday life, people encounter logical inconsistencies and seemingly unsolvable dilemmas. He claims that monotheism makes sense from a theological (logical) point of view, but from a sociological (existential) point of view, it does not.

At the same time, Miller makes room for a modified approach. He allows a “functional monotheism,” where someone can devote oneself to one God, yet concede that the existence of only one God cannot explain all of life experience. This means that a person can practice monotheism, but in theory embrace polytheism. In addition, one can feel free to “try” different gods at different times.

Moreover, Miller draws support from the philosophies of relativism and pluralism, which dominate modern society. The fact that no philosophical system to date has been able to precisely define truth indicates that there is more than one truth, that is, more than one god. Additionally, polytheism can enhance tolerance among people.

Next, Miller cites the Copernican revolution in science. In the Ptolemaic system, the earth was the center of the universe. Copernicus showed that the universe has no center. In a similar way, we should not seek in the religious world an organizing center, i.e. a single God. At the same time, Miller is ready to concede the existence of unifying factors that relate to all the gods and goddesses. He feels that two forces permeate the entire universe, represented by the Greek gods Moira (Fate) and Dike (Righteousness), which are “pervading elements.”⁷¹¹

In formulating polytheistic theology, proponents of this theory focus on literature containing narrative. Narrative focuses exclusively on the story of one god or goddess and is a self-contained unit. Therefore, there

⁷⁰⁷Smith, p. 105-108; Millard, p. 60-61, 66; Ruffle, p. 71-72.

⁷⁰⁸Miller, D. L. *The new polytheism: Rebirth of the gods and goddesses*. – New York: Harper & Row, 1974. – 83 p.

⁷⁰⁹Miller, p. 6.

⁷¹⁰Ibid, p. 7.

⁷¹¹Ibid, p. 39.

is no need to coordinate the narrative of one god with the narrative of another. Contradictions are allowed between narratives.

Finally, contemporary polytheists see the influence of gods and goddesses in modern society in the following ways: growth in technology from Prometheus, Hephaestus and Asclepius, political control from Apollo, conservatism from Cronus, apathy from Hestia, social science from Hera, militarization from Hera-Heracles-Hephaestus, activism from Heracles, urbanization from Athena, irrational violence from Pan, erotic love from Eros, Aphrodite and Hermes.⁷¹²

Miller concludes,

We are the playground of a veritable theater full of Gods and Goddesses. What do the Gods and Goddesses want with us? Our task is to incarnate them, become aware of their presence, acknowledge and celebrate their forms.⁷¹³

D. Evaluation

How should one respond to the claims of animism? First, thanks to scientific discoveries, we now explain natural phenomena not by the activity of spiritual powers, but by the operation of natural laws.

In addition, several features caution us about adopting an animistic worldview. What, exactly, is the nature of the spiritual forces behind it? Indications point to the conclusion that animists contact dark powers. For example, animists practice various occult arts like sorcery, voodoo, divination, and, at times, even human sacrifice. Such features should make one wary of considering animism as a viable option for religious devotion.

Moreover, the primary motivation in this system is fear.⁷¹⁴ Animists live in constant fear of powers that may at any moment cause them harm, and that they must either control or appease. Lupan points out the following contradiction. If a person during his/her life was evil, how can they become divinized after death and thus counted worthy of reverence?⁷¹⁵

Also, animists in general are pragmatists. They are willing to solicit the help of some god or power on the condition that the approach will “work,” that is, immediately bring the desired results. Van Rheezen writes, “Animists tend to follow whatever power, whether personal or impersonal, that works. Instead of patiently waiting for creator God to work, animists impatiently seek whatever power might solve their immediate problem.”⁷¹⁶ In chapter 1 of this volume, we already discussed the defects of pragmatism as a guide for living. Moreover, when one devotes all his/her attention to receiving material benefit, one may neglect the weightier question of one’s eternal destiny.⁷¹⁷

Concerning polytheism, we may begin by citing David Miller, a supporter of this worldview, who admits the following defect in this system: “A pluralistic society, with subcultures, countercultures, generation gaps, and relativized moral codes, is ripe for the next overarching ideology that comes along.”⁷¹⁸ In other words, a polytheist lacks a solid foundation for his/her life and is easily enticed by every new movement or ideology. He/she may conclude that this new movement is the manifestation of still another god!

The Greek philosopher Xenophanes (6th-5th century BC), although he was raised in a polytheistic culture, nevertheless criticized his native faith. He wrote, “As long as men create Gods in the human image, there will

⁷¹²Ibid, p. 66-69.

⁷¹³Ibid, p. 55.

⁷¹⁴Лупан; Van Rheezen, p. 30.

⁷¹⁵Лупан.

⁷¹⁶Van Rheezen, p. 272-273.

⁷¹⁷Лупан.

⁷¹⁸Miller, p. 27.

be as many Gods as there are men.” We should “recognize the ‘One who is greatest,’ the One all men have in common.”⁷¹⁹

Another, more contemporary critic of polytheism, H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962), warns that the absence in polytheism of a center of focus, which is present in monotheism, “divides us within ourselves and from our fellow man.”⁷²⁰ Polytheism cannot provide humanity with this center of focus, because the benefits and values offered by each individual god of polytheism can never fully satisfy the human need for wholeness. As a result, each of the “gods” of polytheism will eventually disillusion his/her devotees. Miller describes Niebuhr’s position:

Niebuhr does his best to persuade us that one after another of the polytheistic gods will let us down; thus the only answer to the problem of enduring human meaning is to ground our being in the principle of value that is radically monotheistic.⁷²¹

Martin Gardner offers his critique as well.⁷²² First, he notes that polytheistic systems nearly always recognize a high god: “We see this impulse toward monotheism operating even in the great polytheisms of the past. There are many gods, but almost always One among them towers over all the others.”⁷²³

Second, Gardner borrows the following argument from Thomas Aquinas. If more than one God exists, then they must differ from one another in some way. If they are not identical, then they both cannot be perfect (a quality that is inherent to the concept of the Absolute), because one will possess qualities that the other does not have. So then, the true God will be the one that has the highest attributes or qualities.

Third, polytheism encounters the following practical difficulty: to whom should one pray? If the gods conflict with one another, then we have no guarantee that the god, to whom we pray, has sufficient power to answer our prayer. Possibly, another, stronger god will prevent him. Gardner states that people want “communion with a God who has no rivals.”⁷²⁴

In response to David Miller’s arguments, we might say that the variety of experience in the world is equally well explained by the religious teaching on evil spirits, who operate in contradiction to the will of God and create the appearance of a plurality of spiritual forces. In addition, Miller’s appeal to pluralism and relativism are refuted in chapter 2 of this volume. His appeal to the “Copernican revolution” in religion is groundless. An observation in science does not force a parallel application in matters of faith.

In conclusion, we will draw on a resource that devotes a great amount of attention to the refutation of polytheism – the Hebrew *Tanakh*, i.e. the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. In it, we discover numerous warnings to Israel against abandoning faith in one God.

In the beginning of the *Tanakh* we read of the creation of the world by one God (Gen 1:1), who subsequently destroyed it by a flood (Gen 6-8). Unlike the “History of Religion” view (see volume 2, chapter 1), where monotheism allegedly appeared in Israel only in the sixth century BC, the *Tanakh* testifies of a number of individuals who believed in the one God of heaven and earth. They include Abram (Gen 18:25; 24:3), Melchizedek (Gen 14:19), Rahab (Josh 2:11), Solomon (1 Kings 8:60), Hezekiah (Isa 37:16), Isaiah (Isa 45:5), Joel (Joel 2:27) and others.

The heart of Jewish faith is the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (Deut 6:4; also see Deut 4:35, 39). This statement defined the monotheistic faith of Israel in distinction from the polytheistic cultures of that time.

⁷¹⁹Miller, p. 21-22; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenophanes#Theology>.

⁷²⁰Ibid, p. 18.

⁷²¹Ibid, p. 20-21.

⁷²²Gardner M. The whys of a philosophical scrivener. – Oxford: Oxford Press, 1985. – P. 175-176.

⁷²³Ibid, p. 175.

⁷²⁴Ibid, p. 176.

The fact that the *Tanakh* speaks of other gods (see Ps 135:5; 136:2, etc.) does not imply that the Bible approves that view. Here the text simply compares the true God with the gods of the nations, not for the purpose of acknowledging their existence, but to show the surpassing excellence of Yahweh over all the so-called 'gods' of the nations (see 1 Chr 16:26; Ps 96:5).

In addition, in the *Tanakh* narrative, we often encounter "competition" between Yahweh and other gods. For example, David advanced against Goliath in the name of the God of Israel, and Goliath – in the name of his god (1 Sam 17:43-46), but David came off victorious. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to have their god send fire from heaven. Yet, it was Yahweh that did it in answer to Elijah's prayer (1 Kings 18:23-24). Finally, Pharaoh's magicians were able to perform some of the miracles of Moses, but not all them. They were eventually forced to concede, "This is the finger of God" (Ex 8:19).

From the earliest times in Israel, idolatry was forbidden (Deut 5:8-10). Violators suffered the death penalty (Deut 17:2-7). However, Israel frequently strayed from monotheistic faith, which brought upon them fearsome punishments (see 2 Kings 17:6-12). Only in time, Israel began to understand that idolatry resulted in tragic consequences.

We also note that Yahweh promises not only to purify Israel from idolatry, but also to destroy the idols of the nations, namely, Egypt (Ezek 30:13; Num 33:4), Moab (Jer 48:7-46), Babylon (Jer 51:47-52) and others (Jer 10:11-15), thereby showing His preeminence and uniqueness.

Finally, in the book of the prophet Isaiah, we discover specific arguments in defense of monotheism and in refutation of polytheism. First, idols cannot predict the future, but the true God, the God of Israel, can (Isa 41:21-24). Second, idols are lifeless, powerless, and not able to help people. In fact, people created them (Isa 44:12-20; 45:20; 57:13; Jer 10:1-5).

Resources Used:

Boal B. Asia // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 133-136.

Bocking B. Shinto // Jones L. Encyclopedia of religion. – 2nd ed. – Detroit: Thomson-Gale, 2005. – P. 8356-8370.

Clodd E. Animism: The seed of religion. – Montana: Kessinger Publishers. – 99 p.

Corduan W. A Tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – 239 p.

Gardner M. The whys of a philosophical scrivener. – Oxford: Oxford Press, 1985. – 454 p.

Geisler N. L., Watkins W. D. Worlds apart: a handbook on world views. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989.

Halverson D. C. Animism / Halverson D. C. The compact guide to world religions. – Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1996. – P. 37-53.

Hexham I. Understanding world religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011

Hultkrantz A. Nomads of the steppes // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 122-126.

Loeliger C. Cargo cults // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 143.

_____. Melanesia // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 142-144.

Melton J. G. Shinto // Melton J. G., Baumann M. Religions of the world. – 2nd ed. – Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010. – V. 6. – P. 2616-2619.

Millard A. Cradle of civilization: The Ancient Near East // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 58-69.

Miller D. L. The new polytheism: Rebirth of the gods and goddesses. – New York: Harper & Row, 1974. – 83 p.

Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – 480 p.

Ruffle J. Ancient Egypt: Land of the priest-king // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 70-79.

Schart A. Die "Gestalt" YHWYs. // Theologische Zeitschrift. 1999. 55. P. 26-43.

Smith C. C. The ancient religions of Greece and Rome // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 90-113.

Teiser S. F. Religions of China in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 88-122.

Tippett A. Oceania // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 140-142.

Turner H. World of the spirits // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 128-132.

Van Rheenen G. Communicating Christ in animistic contexts. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – 304 p.

Walls A. The old gods: Religions of Northern Europe // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 114-121.

Wright A. W. Buddhism in Chinese history. – Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1959. – 127 p.

~~~~~

Лупан А. Апологетические доводы относительно анимистической религии в России // Евангельская теологическая семинария, студенческий реферат. – Киев, 2012.

*Lupan A. Apologetic proof concerning animistic religions in Russia // Student research paper. – Kiev, Evangel Theological Seminary, 2012.*

~~~~~


Chapter 9: Pantheons of the Present

In the 19th century, a new religious movement appeared which quickly spread across the United States and worldwide – the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, commonly referred to as the “Latter Day Saints” (LDS), or the “Mormons.” We will devote some extended time to the exposition of this religion, which many feel embraces a polytheistic view.

A. History

The founder of the Mormon Church is Joseph Smith. In 1820, at age 14, young Smith entered a forest to pray and seek the answer to a question that vexed him: “Which Christian denomination was the true Church?” He claimed seeing the following vision: “When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (*History of Joseph Smith*, 17).⁷²⁵

Later, Smith claimed that in 1823, at age 17, another figure appeared to him by the name of Moroni. Moroni supposedly announced to Smith that he had been chosen to translate the “Book of Mormon,” a work written in the fourth century AD. The book had been written on golden plates, but Moroni did not reveal their location at that time.⁷²⁶

Mormons believe that after the Babylonian invasion of Israel, a group of Jews sailed to America, headed by their leader Nephi. Having arrived in America, they allegedly constructed a temple similar to Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. In time, some of these refugees rebelled against Nephi’s leadership and separated from him. This new group was the Lamanites. As a result of their rebellion, the Lamanites became dark-skinned. In the Book of Mormon, we read the following account:

And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them (2 *Nephi*, 5.21).

The followers of Nephi, the Nephites, were God-fearing people, but the Lamanites were not. War erupted between them, and the Lamanites emerged victorious and exterminated the Nephites, leaving no survivor.⁷²⁷ Before this occurred, however, according to legend, Jesus Christ visited the Nephites and gave them special revelation. The Nephites passed down that tradition to subsequent generations. The final recipient of the tradition, Mormon, reportedly recorded it in the Book of Mormon along with the history of the Nephite emigration to America.⁷²⁸

Moroni, it is thought, was the son of Mormon. He copied his father’s book and hid it in a stone container in the area now known as New York State. This Moroni appeared in a spiritual form to Joseph Smith, and four years after his initial appearance he allowed Smith to acquire the golden plates. Smith discovered that the plates were written in a sort of Egyptian hieroglyphic and proceeded to translate them employing a unique translation technique. He did not read the text directly, but used a combination of two “interpreters” (he

⁷²⁵History of Joseph Smith // Pearl of Great Price. – <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp?lang=eng>

⁷²⁶Ibid, 30-59.

⁷²⁷McDowell J., Stewart D. The deceivers – Nashville TN: Nelson, 1992. – P. 75; Tucker R. A. Another Gospel. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. – P. 55.

⁷²⁸Ibid.

referred to these as the Urim and Thumim), stones that he discovered with the plates, and a “seer stone.” He placed these tools in a hat, and the translation of the plates supposedly appeared on the stones.⁷²⁹

Interestingly, three other individuals testified that they saw the golden plates: Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and David Whitmer. Also intriguing is that Smith himself did not show them the plates, but an angel allegedly showed the plates to them in a vision. An additional eight people signed a declaration that they also saw the golden plates, but did not mention seeing them in a vision, but testified, “as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands.”⁷³⁰

Subsequently, Smith claimed to have seen John the Baptist in a vision, who entrusted Smith and Oliver Cowdery with the “priesthood according to Aaron.” This endowment qualified them to perform water baptism.⁷³¹ In that same year, Smith and Cowdery claimed to have had a visionary visitation from Peter, James and John, who gave them the “priesthood according to Melchizedek,” empowering them to lay hands on others to receive the Holy Spirit. One year after this vision, Smith founded the “Church of Christ” (not to be confused with the Stone-Campbell Church of Christ).⁷³²

Due to religious persecutions, Smith and his followers migrated from place to place. In Kirkland, Ohio, where they settled for a time, a scandal broke out concerning the use of funds by the LDS, obliging them to resettle in Missouri, from whence they were later again forced out. Nonetheless, the State of Missouri plays an important role in Mormon theology. According to Mormon apostle Bruce McConkie, Missouri was the site of the Garden of Eden (*Mormon Doctrine*, 1966, p. 20).⁷³³ In addition, it is claimed that Missouri will be the center of Christ’s millennial kingdom.⁷³⁴

Next, the Mormons settled in Illinois, where Smith founded the city of Nauvoo and constructed a Mormon temple. In time, the local paper of Nauvoo began publishing accusatory articles about Smith and other LDS leaders, prompting Smith to destroy the paper’s printing press. For this unlawful act, Smith was arrested and imprisoned. While he was in prison, a mob formed that broke into the jail and killed the Mormon founder.⁷³⁵

After Smith’s death, several LDS leaders vied for leadership of the movement. In the end, Brigham Young prevailed. Young’s main rival was Joseph’s Smith son, Joseph Smith III, who had the support of his mother Emma, the widow of Joseph Smith. The Mormons divided over the question of leadership succession, with the majority siding with Young.

Joseph Smith III and his followers then founded the “Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” now known as the “Community of Christ,” with their headquarters in Missouri. To this day, direct descendants of Joseph Smith serve as leaders of that movement. Young led his group cross-country to Utah territory, where they founded Salt Lake City and constructed the chief Mormon temple. At the time of Young’s death, the population of Utah had reached 140,000.⁷³⁶ At present, there are about 15 million Mormons worldwide, in part due to the aggressive missionary program the LDS conducts. The LDS enjoys substantial material resources.

Mormons have built temples across the globe, the primary center of worship being in Salt Lake City. The first temple appeared in Kirkland, Ohio. In the early years, though, the full temple order, which was later developed, was not in practice. One might characterize worship at that time as “pseudo-Pentecostal,” with such manifestations as tongues, prophecy and angelic visions (see *History of the Church*, vol. 2, chp. 29 [427-

⁷²⁹*History of Joseph Smith*, 30-64; Tucker, p. 52-55; <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/book-of-mormon-translation?lang=eng>

⁷³⁰*History of the Church*, vol. 1, chp. 6. The eight are Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Jr., John Whitmer, Hyrum Paige, Joseph Smith Sr., Hyrum Smith, and Samuel Smith.

⁷³¹*History of Joseph Smith*, 68-75.

⁷³²McDowell, p. 66.

⁷³³Taken from Decker E. Decker’s complete handbook on Mormonism. – Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995. – P. 26. Decker served in the LDS 20 years in various capacities until he embraced Evangelical Christian faith.

⁷³⁴Tucker, p. 83.

⁷³⁵*History of the Church*, vol. 6, chp. 30-34.

⁷³⁶McDowell, p. 69; <http://en.wikipedia.org>; Tucker, p. 69.

428]).⁷³⁷ The present temple order first came into practice in Nauvoo after Joseph Smith's introduction into Freemasonry. Not surprisingly, the rituals of both orders have striking similarities.⁷³⁸

The president of the LDS also serves as prophet of the movement and, consequently, issues authoritative revelations, supposedly from God. The "First Presidency" consists of the president and his two closest advisors.⁷³⁹ Twelve men serve under them, who make up the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Upon the death of the LDS president, the presiding president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles becomes president of the entire movement.⁷⁴⁰

B. Scripture

Along with the Bible, the main source of faith for the Mormon is the *Book of Mormon*, which reportedly relates the history and wisdom of the Nephites. To demonstrate the supposed harmony between the Bible and the Book of Mormon, Mormons cite Ezekiel 37:15-19, where the staff of Judah and the staff of Joseph unite. The "staff of Judah" represents the Bible, and the "staff of Joseph" – the Book of Mormon.

Mormons feel it was necessary to supplement the Bible, since the Early Church supposedly removed many truths, even entire biblical books. The Book of Mormon serves to restore God's original revelation. Mormon apostle Bruce McKonkie comments,

One of the great heresies of modern Christendom is the unfounded assumption that the Bible contains all of the inspired teachings now extant among men. Foreseeing that Satan would darken the minds of men in this way, and knowing that other scripture would come forth in the last days, Nephi prophesied that unbelieving Christians would reject the new revelation with the cry: "A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible" (*Mormon Doctrine*, 1966, p. 83).⁷⁴¹

In their canon of scripture, Mormons include other books. *Doctrines and Covenants* contains various revelations proclaimed, in general, by Joseph Smith. Other contributors to the book include Oliver Cowdery, John Taylor, Brigham Young, Joseph F. Smith, Wilford Woodruff, and Spencer W. Kimball. It is noteworthy that at one time *Doctrines and Covenants* included a section "Lectures on Faith," which advanced an unorthodox doctrine of the Trinity (see below). The "Lectures on Faith" were present in the 1835 edition, but are absent in modern editions.⁷⁴²

Also part of the canon is the collection *Pearl of Great Price*, which consists of the *Book of Moses*, the *Book of Abraham*, a translation of the Gospel of Matthew by Joseph Smith, the *History of Joseph Smith*, and the LDS Articles of Faith. Mormons respect other works, but not on the level of canonicity, namely, the *Journal of Discourses* and the *History of the Church*. The latter work was published in 1902 and makes up seven volumes. Smith wrote part of the *History*, and his followers contributed the remainder.⁷⁴³

The *Journal of Discourses* served as the official organ of the LDS from 1854 to 1886, published in 26 volumes. It preserves sermons from early leaders, and, in its time, was highly regarded. About the year 1861, Mormon Apostle George Cannon wrote of it:

⁷³⁷Smith J. Jr. *History of the Church* // Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

⁷³⁸Decker, p. 177-179; Tanner J., Tanner S. *The changing world of Mormonism*, <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changecontents.htm> – P. 536-541. Tanner is also a former Mormon.

⁷³⁹Decker draws a parallel between the LDS understanding of the Trinity and the structure of their First Presidency: it consists of one head (like the Father) and two advisors (like the Son and Spirit). See Decker, p. 405.

⁷⁴⁰Decker, p. 141.

⁷⁴¹*Ibid*, p. 80.

⁷⁴²*Ibid*, p. 168. Also see Tanner, p. 185.

⁷⁴³Tanner, p. 400-404.

The *Journal of Discourses* deservedly ranks as one of the standard works of the Church, and every rightminded Saint will certainly welcome with joy every Number as it comes forth from the press as an additional reflector of “the light that shines from Zion's hill” (*Preface to 8th edition*).⁷⁴⁴

Contemporary Mormons, however, do not recognize the *Journal of Discourses* as canonical scripture.

Unlike the Christian canon, the canon of Mormonism is not closed. God may still give authoritative revelation through the president of the LDS, who fills the role of prophet for the movement. Mormons claim that God expresses His will through modern prophets, just as He did in ancient times. Joseph Smith, of course, served as the first president-prophet. As of 2022, Russell Nelson serves as the seventeenth in that line.⁷⁴⁵

How can a new convert to Mormonism be sure that these above mentioned writings are really from God? Mormons rely on an inner, subjective sense that the writings are true. On a previously published LDS website page, we read the following about the Mormon scriptures: “Maybe you experienced peace, hope, comfort and happiness when you read this. If so, you already sense that the Holy Spirit is speaking to you, that this is true.”⁷⁴⁶

Similarly, in the *Book of Moroni* 10.4 we read, “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.” A former Mormon wrote, “We believe we know the truth by our feelings. We do not rely on and we will disregard any facts that contradict what our feelings tell us is true.”⁷⁴⁷

C. Teaching

1. God

The *Book of Mormon* speaks of the existence of only one God, who is a spiritual Being.⁷⁴⁸

And Zeezrom said unto him: Thou sayest there is a true and living God? And Amulek said: Yea, there is a true and living God. Now Zeezrom said: Is there more than one God? And he answered, No. (*Alma*, 11.26-29).

And then Ammon said: Believest thou that there is a Great Spirit? And he said, Yea. And Ammon said: This is God (*Alma*, 18.26-28).

In the teaching of contemporary Mormons, we also encounter an orthodox Christian understanding of God: “Heavenly Father is the Supreme Creator. Through Jesus Christ, He created heaven and earth and all things in them.”⁷⁴⁹ The Book of Mormon also suggests the existence of the Trinity: “...the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one” (3 *Nephi*, 11.36). Similarly, in the “Lectures on Faith” (originally part of *Doctrines and Covenants* until their removal), we read, “These three constitute the Godhead, and are one: The Father and the Son possessing the same mind, the same wisdom, glory, power and fullness” (*Lectures on Faith*, 5.2).⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁴⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journal_of_Discourses

⁷⁴⁵<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org>

⁷⁴⁶<http://www.lds.org>. Translation from Russian. (Note: the official LDS website no longer makes some pages, accessible at the time of the writing of this book, accessible at the present time).

⁷⁴⁷The fourteen fundamental articles or beliefs of Mormons, from <http://www.exmormon.org/fourteen.htm>

⁷⁴⁸Tanner, p. 172.

⁷⁴⁹<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/god-the-father?lang=eng>

⁷⁵⁰<https://www.lecturesonfaith.com>

On the other hand, if we look more closely at Mormon teaching, we observe a deviation from the biblical teaching on God. For example, in *History of the Church*, Smith preached about the existence of many gods (see *History of the Church*, v. 6, chp. 23 [474-476]):⁷⁵¹

I will preach on the plurality of Gods... I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods.

Speaking of the Trinity: "These three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods."

Hence, the doctrine of a plurality of Gods is as prominent in the Bible as any other doctrine. It is all over the face of the Bible. It stands beyond the power of controversy.

If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that He had a Father also.

In the canonical *Book of Abraham*, we encounter the same:

And then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth... the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters. And they (the Gods) said: Let there be light; and there was light. And they (the Gods) comprehended the light... (4.1-4).

Additionally, the canonical book *Doctrines and Covenants* speaks of "the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this world was" (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 121.32).⁷⁵² Brigham Young, Apostle Orson Pratt, and others confirm this teaching.⁷⁵³

How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds, and when men were not passing through the same ordeals that we are now passing through (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 7.334)

...we believe in the revelation given through Joseph Smith, which says there are many Gods, and that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are Gods, and that all good men in this Church shall become Gods... the number of Gods is infinite (Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 2.345)

So then, Tucker correctly concludes that "Polytheism is at the very core of Mormon teaching."⁷⁵⁴ Walter Martin confirms, "Mormon theology then is polytheistic, teaching in effect that the universe is inhabited by different gods who procreate spirit children which are in turn clothed with bodies on different planets."⁷⁵⁵

The polytheism that characterizes Mormonism is more correctly termed "Henotheism." Henotheism is faith in many gods, yet devotion is paid to only one God. Joseph Smith confirms this view: "I say there are Gods many and Lords many, but to us only one, and we are to be in subjection to that one" (*History of the Church*, v. 6, chp. 23 [474]).⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵¹Smith J. Jr. *History of the Church* // Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

⁷⁵²<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/121?lang=eng>

⁷⁵³Tanner, p. 174-175.

⁷⁵⁴Tucker, p. 82.

⁷⁵⁵Martin W. *Kingdom of the cults*. – Rev. ed. – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1985. – P. 204.

⁷⁵⁶Smith J. Jr. *History of the Church* // Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

The traditional Mormon teaching on the Holy Spirit also differs from Christian teaching. In Mormonism, the Holy Spirit is the mind of the Father. In *Lectures on Faith*, we read that the Son was “filled with the fullness of the Mind, glory and power, or, in other words, the Spirit, glory and power of the Father,” and “received a fullness of the glory of the Father – possessing the same mind with the Father, which mind is the Holy Spirit” (5.2). Also, “There are two personages who constitute the great, matchless, governing and supreme power over all things... They are the Father and the Son” (5.2).⁷⁵⁷

Another controversial teaching of the Mormon faith is the Father’s corporality – that He possess a human body. In the canonical book *Doctrines and Covenants*, we read, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (130.22).⁷⁵⁸ Mormons continue to defend this view and seek support for it in biblical passages speaking of parts of God’s “body” (such as 2 Chr 6:20; Ps 8:3; Ps 18:6-9).

Furthermore, the LDS believe that previously God was a man, and then received “promotion” to the status of God.

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted Man (Joseph Smith, Jr, *Journal of Discourses*, 6.3; also see *History of the Church*, 6.14 [305]).⁷⁵⁹

He is our Father – the Father of our spirits, and was once a man in mortal flesh as we are, and is now an exalted Being (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 7.334).

We may also cite the teaching of the sixth president-prophet of Mormonism, Joseph F. Smith: “Yet we have to pass through mortality and receive the resurrection and then go on to perfection just as our Father did before us” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1.1.40).⁷⁶⁰ Even in modern times, the teaching of Elohim’s deification remains in force. In 1966, Apostle Bruce McConkie wrote, “God ... is a personal Being, a holy and exalted man, a glorified, resurrected Personage having a tangible body of flesh and bones, an anthropomorphic Entity” (*Doctrines of the Mormons*, 1966, p. 250).⁷⁶¹

A former Mormon confirms this claim: “We believe that God was once a mortal man on another planet who progressed by living in obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel he had on his world, then he died. He became a resurrected man and evolved to become a god.... We worship only the one true god, which is really one god among millions or billions or more.”⁷⁶²

At one point, Brigham Young advanced the idea that Adam became the God of this world, that is, Elohim. His original teaching was as follows: “Adam ... He is MICHAEL, the Archangel, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! About whom holy men have written and spoken – HE is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do” (*Journal of Discourses*, 1.50). Young insisted that Mormons accept this doctrine: “Now, let all who may hear these doctrines, pause before they make light of them, or treat them with indifference, for they will prove their salvation or damnation” (*Journal of Discourses*, 1.51).

Young’s assistant in the First Presidency, Heber Kimball, echoes this teaching: “The God and Father of Jesus Christ was Adam.”⁷⁶³ An early Mormon hymn (1856) reflects it as well: “We believe in our God the great Prince of His race, The Archangel Michael, the Ancient of Days, Our own Father Adam, earth’s Lord, as is plain.”⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁵⁷<https://www.lecturesonfaith.com/>

⁷⁵⁸<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/130?lang=eng>.

⁷⁵⁹Smith J. Jr. *History of the Church* // Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

⁷⁶⁰Smith J. F. *Doctrines of salvation* // Ed. Bruce McConkie. – Bookcraft, 1954-56. – V. 1. – P. 8.

⁷⁶¹Taken from Tanner, p. 177.

⁷⁶²The fourteen fundamental articles or beliefs of Mormons, from <http://www.exmormon.org/fourteen.htm>

⁷⁶³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam-God_doctrine

⁷⁶⁴*Ibid.*

After some began challenging this teaching, however, Young began to backtrack. Later he wrote, “Whether Adam is the personage that we should consider our heavenly Father, or not, is considerable of a mystery to a good many. I do not care for one moment how that is; it is no matter whether we are to consider Him our God...” (*Journal of Discourses*, 4.217).

The teaching of Adam-Elohim is an embarrassment to contemporary Mormons and they reject it. Some feel it was just Young’s personal opinion, or a misinterpretation of his views. Others think a mistake occurred in transcription and that Young never taught that at all. Possibly, Young had in mind two different Adams: one lived in Eden, and the other was God-Elohim. Former Mormon president Spencer Kimbell, reflecting the view of modern Mormonism, wrote, “We denounce that theory and hope that everyone will be cautioned against this and other kinds of false doctrine.”⁷⁶⁵

Finally, Mormons reason that if there is a Father God, then there must also be a Mother God: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that all human beings, male and female, are beloved spirit children of heavenly parents, a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother.”⁷⁶⁶ Apostle James Talmage wrote, “We are expressly told that God in the Father of our spirits... We must know that a Mother of spirits is an existent personality.”⁷⁶⁷ Apostle Bruce McConkie relates,

Implicit in the Christian verity that all men are the spirit children of an *Eternal Father* is the usually unspoken truth that they are also the offspring of a *Eternal Mother*... This *doctrine* that there is a Mother in Heaven was affirmed in plainness by the First Presidency of the Church (Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund) (*Doctrines of the Mormons*, 1966, p. 516).⁷⁶⁸

2. Humanity

What do LDS teach about human beings? People supposedly existed in a spiritual form before their physical birth.⁷⁶⁹ Former LDS president Joseph F. Smith writes, “We lived in the presence of God in the spirit before we came here. We desired to be like him, we saw him, we were in his presence.” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1.4.4).⁷⁷⁰ The LDS website confirms, “We are all literally children of God, spiritually begotten in the premortal life.”⁷⁷¹

However, a rebellion against God occurred, led by Lucifer and one third of the spirits, who subsequently became Satan and the demons. One third of the spirits remained faithful to God and were subsequently born as white-skinned people. The remaining third wavered in their loyalties and were born with dark skin.⁷⁷² Joseph F. Smith again comments,

There is a reason why one man is born black and with other disadvantages, while another is born white with great advantages. The reason is that we once had an estate before we came here, and were obedient, more or less, to the laws that were given us there. Those who were faithful in all things there received greater blessings here, and those who were not faithful received less... There were no neutrals in the war in heaven. All took sides either with Christ or with Satan... men receive rewards here based

⁷⁶⁵Ibid, with reference to Conference Report, p. 115 (October 1-3, 1976).

⁷⁶⁶<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/mother-in-heaven?lang=eng>

⁷⁶⁷Talmage, J. Articles of faith. – Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, p. 443. Taken from McDowell, p. 82.

⁷⁶⁸Tanner, p. 178.

⁷⁶⁹Plan of Salvation from Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

⁷⁷⁰Smith J. F. Doctrines of salvation, v. 1, p. 36.

⁷⁷¹<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/god-the-father?lang=eng>

⁷⁷²Decker, p. 290.

upon their actions there... The Negro, evidently, is receiving the reward he merits" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1.4.20, 41-42).⁷⁷³

Although Mormon founder Joseph Smith held a more positive view of blacks (see *History of the Church*, v. 5, chp. 12 [217]), Young (see *Journal of Discourses*, 7:290) taught that the "mark" given to Cain by God (Gen 4:15) was a "flat nose and black skin." Young further writes, "You see some classes of the human family that are black, uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable and low in their habits, wild, and seemingly deprived of nearly all the blessings of the intelligence that is generally bestowed upon mankind." Furthermore, Young associates blacks with the curse of Canaan, that "a servant of servants he shall be to his brothers" (Gen 9:25).

The destiny of man is to become a god. The LDS website claims, "As His children, we can be assured that we have divine, eternal potential and that He will help us in our sincere efforts to reach that potential."⁷⁷⁴ Joseph Smith unapologetically claimed the same: "Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them" (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 132.20).

In the *Journal of Discourses*, Smith again affirms, "...and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you" (6.4). Young agrees, "After men have got their exaltations and their crowns – have become Gods, even the sons of God..." (*Journal of Discourses*, 6.275). Even in modern times, in 1974 Mormon president Spencer Kimball stated, "In each of us is the potentiality to *become a God*."⁷⁷⁵

To support this claim, Mormons cite the words of Jesus in John 10:34, "Jesus answered them, 'Has it not been written in your Law, "I said, you are gods"?' " Furthermore, Young described what will occur after people attain the status of Deity: "After men have got their exaltations and their crowns – have become Gods ... they have the power then of propagating their species in spirit; and that is the first of their operations with regard to organizing a world." Descending onto a planet, they must "produce mortal tabernacles for their spiritual children" (*Journal of Discourses*, 6.275).

So then, Mormons who faithfully serve God in this life become gods themselves, and in that state they will give birth to spiritual children, who, in turn, receive a body on another planet from their "spiritual parents." These "deified" Mormons, who give birth to this new generation, become the gods of that planet. Their spiritual children, continuing this process, may become gods on still another planet.

Another controversial topic in Mormon faith is the practice of polygamy. First, we note that in the 1835 version of *Doctrines and Covenants* polygamy is forbidden:

All legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into this church, should be held sacred and fulfilled. Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with [accused of] the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again (section CI, 1835 version, p. 251-252).⁷⁷⁶

This section, though, was later removed. Nonetheless, the Book of Mormon supports the initial view:

Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none (*Jacob*, 2.27).

⁷⁷³Smith J. F. *Doctrines of salvation*, v. 1, p. 39, 41.

⁷⁷⁴<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/god-the-father?lang=eng>

⁷⁷⁵Salt Lake Tribune, October 7, 1974. From Tanner, p. 188.

⁷⁷⁶Noted in Decker, p. 169.

In the present version of *Doctrines and Covenants*, polygamy is permitted:

And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood – if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him; for he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else. And if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him; therefore is he justified... for they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 132.61-63).

So then, for a period of time, Mormon society accepted polygamy. In 1890, however, the LDS released a statement again forbidding the practice. The LDS leaders offered this explanation:

The Bible and the Book of Mormon teach that monogamy is God's standard for marriage unless He declares otherwise (see 2 Samuel 12:7–8 and Jacob 2:27, 30). Following a revelation to Joseph Smith, the practice of plural marriage was instituted among Church members in the early 1840s (see section 132). From the 1860s to the 1880s, the United States government passed laws to make this religious practice illegal. These laws were eventually upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. After receiving revelation, President Wilford Woodruff issued the following Manifesto, which was accepted by the Church as authoritative and binding on October 6, 1890. This led to the end of the practice of plural marriage in the Church (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 1st Official Declaration).

The fact of the matter is that in order for Utah to receive recognition as a state in the United States, polygamy needed to be outlawed.

3. Jesus Christ

As in orthodox Christianity, the LDS believes that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world: "He suffered and died for our sins so that we can be forgiven when we repent."⁷⁷⁷ At the same time, Jesus is thought to have passed through the same process of deification that all gods do, which began with his birth as a spiritual child of Elohim.

Mormons claim that Elohim gave birth not only to the spirit of Jesus, but to his flesh as well. Young taught that Elohim and Mary conceived Jesus by a physical union: "Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven" (*Journal of Discourses*, 1.51). In another place, Young writes, "When the time came that His first-born, the Saviour, should come into the world and take a tabernacle, the Father came Himself and favoured that spirit with a tabernacle instead of letting any other man do it" (*Journal of Discourses*, 4.218).

In the words of Joseph F. Smith, "Christ was begotten of God. He was not born without the aid of Man, and that Man was God! (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1.2.6).⁷⁷⁸ Bruce McConkie echoes this view: "Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; he was born in the same personal, real, and literal sense that any son is born to a mortal father" (*Doctrines of the Mormons*, 1966, p. 742).⁷⁷⁹

Curiously, this teaching contradicts not only the New Testament, but the Book of Mormon as well. In the *Book of Alma* we read:

⁷⁷⁷<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/comeuntochrist/believe/overview-series/jesus-is-our-savior>

⁷⁷⁸Smith J. F. *Doctrines of salvation*, v. 1, p. 13.

⁷⁷⁹Tanner, p. 180

And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy (Alma, 7.10).

In the *Journal of Discourses*, Apostle Orson Hyde claimed that Jesus married. At the wedding feast of Cana (see John 2) “we say it was Jesus Christ who was married, to be brought into the relation whereby he could see his seed, before he was crucified” (*Journal of Discourses*, 2.82). Modern Mormons, however, reject this teaching.

4. Satan

The LDS teach that Satan was a spiritual child of Elohim and brother of Jehovah, i.e. Jesus. The Pearl of Great Price relates Satan’s story (see *Book of Moses*, 4.1-4). He aspired to become savior of the world, but his motives were not pure – he was seeking personal glory. Therefore, Elohim refused him that honor. As a result, Satan rebelled against Elohim, and the later subsequently punished him for his rebellion.

5. The Holy Spirit

At the present time, the Mormon church holds to an orthodox Christian view of the Holy Spirit. Mormons believe Him to be the third member of the Trinity, united in purpose with the Father and the Son, but a distinct Person. At the same time, orthodox Christianity would specify that the Spirit is not only united in purpose with the Father and the Son, but that They are also one in Divine essence. One must also consider that early Mormons equated the Holy Spirit with the mind of the Father. Finally, along with orthodox Christian teaching, the LDS deny that the Spirit has a physical body: “He is a personage of spirit, without a body of flesh and bones.”⁷⁸⁰

6. Salvation

According to the LDS, salvation is provided for by the redemptive work of Christ and requires the following: faith in Jesus, repentance, reception of water baptism, and reception of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸¹ At the same time, they place an added emphasis on obedience: “Through this covenant relationship, followers of Christ are assured salvation from the eternal consequences of sin if they are obedient.”⁷⁸² In the *Articles of Faith*, we read, “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (*Articles of Faith*, 3).

The LDS advances a unique eschatology. At the Judgement, one’s relation to Mormon teaching will determine its outcome. There are four possible results: placement in the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, the telestial kingdom, or perdition (*Doctrines and Covenants*, chp. 76).

Those who attain to the celestial kingdom will be reunited with their earthly spouse, and they will live together eternally. They become like God, even gods themselves, and go on to give birth to spiritual children and populate their own planet. In order to attain to this kingdom, one must fulfill the requirements for salvation, namely repentance, faith and obedience, and take part in several ordinances such as water baptism, confirmation (reception of the Holy Spirit), the “sealing ceremony,” and the “endowment ceremony.”⁷⁸³

⁷⁸⁰<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/holy-ghost?lang=eng>

⁷⁸¹<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/salvation?lang=eng>

⁷⁸²Ibid.

⁷⁸³<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/salvation?lang=eng>;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Degrees_of_glory

The “sealing ceremony” places an eternal seal on Mormon marriages, which means the marriage bond will last forever. The ceremony must be performed in a Mormon temple. This ceremony is mandatory for those aspiring to the celestial kingdom:

In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 131.1-4).

Without this “sealing,” the marriage will not be restored after the resurrection and, consequently, the couple will not bear spiritual children or populate a planet. Apostle Bruce McKonkie explains:

“Except a man and his wife enter into an everlasting covenant and be married for eternity, while in this probation, by the power and authority of the holy priesthood,” the Prophet says, “they will cease to increase when they die; that is, they will not have any children after the resurrection” (*Doctrines of the Mormons*, 1966, p. 238).⁷⁸⁴

Through the ordinance of “endowment,” the Mormon reportedly receives spiritual power to fulfill his/her obligations as a Mormon. This ceremony also takes place in a Mormon temple and consists of the following elements. At the initiation, the candidate bathes, is clothed in white garments and receives a new name. Included in the clothing are special undergarments (the “Temple Garment”) that the candidate must wear for the remainder of his/her life.⁷⁸⁵

Next comes instruction and examination of the candidate, who must demonstrate knowledge of the Mormon plan of salvation. At this time, the candidate learns special gestures and formulas. Without knowledge of these gestures, formulas or one’s new name, he/she cannot enter the celestial kingdom.⁷⁸⁶

It is said that a wife’s new name is revealed not to her, but to her husband, so that on resurrection day he may summon her from the grave. If a husband or wife should fall into serious sin without repentance, the other party will be joined to another spouse at the resurrection.⁷⁸⁷ In conclusion, the candidate promises not to reveal the proceedings of the ceremony.⁷⁸⁸ Apostle Bruce McKonkie summarizes the endowment ceremony:

Certain special, spiritual blessings given worthy and faithful saints in the temples are called endowments, because in and through them the recipients are endowed with power from on high. They receive an education relative to the Lord’s purposes and plans in the creation and peopling of the earth and are taught the things that must be done by man in order to gain exaltation in the world to come (*Doctrines of the Mormons*, 1966, p. 226-227).⁷⁸⁹

For those who, for whatever reason, cannot fulfill all the above-mentioned requirements, the LDS provide for their accomplishment by proxy after death. A living Mormon may serve as a proxy and, with the permission of the departed (located in the place of departed spirits), the ceremony may count for the deceased:

⁷⁸⁴Taken from Tanner, p. 519.

⁷⁸⁵<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/temples?lang=eng>; Decker, p. 386-387. Yet, Decker comments that since the 1980’s, it is not necessary to wear the undergarments if it would embarrass the wearer before others.

⁷⁸⁶Decker, p. 129.

⁷⁸⁷Ibid, p. 360.

⁷⁸⁸[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endowment_\(Mormonism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endowment_(Mormonism)); Decker, p. 99.

⁷⁸⁹Decker, p. 181.

People who have died without these essential gospel ordinances may receive those ordinances through the work done in temples. Acting in behalf of ancestors and others who have died, Church members are baptized and confirmed, receive the endowment, and participate in the sealings of husband to wife and children to parents (*LDS website*).⁷⁹⁰

This is why the Mormon Church so diligently assembles genealogies. Tanner comments, “The Mormons are spending millions of dollars doing genealogical research in order to find the names of those who have died so that they can do proxy baptism for them.”⁷⁹¹

Dedicated Mormons will discover their genealogy and undergo the required ordinances for their departed relatives. Then they will do so for others, not related to them. Decker comments, “The church believes that ultimately it must do the work for every dead person from the time of Adam to the present.”⁷⁹² At the same time, Decker reveals that only about 30% of all Mormons actually receive these temple ordinances themselves.⁷⁹³

Those Mormons who do not take their faith seriously in this life are assigned to the so-called “terrestrial kingdom”. More specifically, these are Mormons who acknowledge Mormonism and its prophets, but do not live in accord with the “word of wisdom” (see below), do not pay tithes, and do not regularly attend church services.⁷⁹⁴

Heirs of the terrestrial kingdom remain unmarried forever. They “are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever” (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 132.17). They will minister to those who inherit the celestial kingdom (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 132.16) and, at times, to those who inherit the telestial kingdom (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 76.88).

The telestial kingdom is appointed for those who reject Mormonism outright and for “common” sinners, who have not committed the unpardonable sin. They undergo temporary punishment, after which they enter a blissful condition. Their punishment awaits them at the thousand-year reign of Christ. In the words of Joseph F. Smith,

It is the duty of men in this life to repent. Every man who hears the gospel message is under obligation to receive it. If he fails, then in the spirit world he will be called upon to receive it, but he will be denied the fullness that will come to those who in their faithfulness have been just and true ... They will have to suffer the torments of the damned until they do (repent) (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2.10.7, 10).⁷⁹⁵

Furthermore, he writes:

It is decreed that the unrighteous shall have to spend their time during this thousand years in the prison house prepared for them where they can repent and cleanse themselves through the things which they shall suffer (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3.4.17).⁷⁹⁶

Perdition is for those who have committed the unpardonable sin, that is, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. This sin is when a believer (specifically, a Mormon) rejects his/her faith. Joseph Smith preached, “What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him,

⁷⁹⁰<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/temples?lang=eng>

⁷⁹¹Tanner, p. 515.

⁷⁹²Decker, p. 186.

⁷⁹³*Ibid*, p. 125.

⁷⁹⁴*Ibid*, p. 398.

⁷⁹⁵Smith J. F. *Doctrines of salvation*, v. 2, p. 114.

⁷⁹⁶*Ibid*, v. 3, p. 38.

and know God, and then sin against him... This is the case with many apostates of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, chp. 14).⁷⁹⁷ Those in perdition experience torment.⁷⁹⁸

Previously, early Mormons entertained the idea that in some cases a person may find redemption for his/her sins by shedding his/her own blood. Young so taught: "I know that there are transgressors, who, if they knew themselves, and the only condition upon which they can obtain forgiveness, would beg of their brethren to shed their blood, that the smoke thereof might ascend to God as an offering to appease the wrath that is kindled against them" (*Journal of Discourses*, 4.54). In spite of Young's authority, however, contemporary LDS reject this teaching.

Mormons observe a practice called the "word of wisdom." It consists of recommendations for a healthy diet, and requires abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, coffee and tea (see *Doctrine and Covenants*, 89).

7. Church

The LDS consider that other Christian denominations are in error. We observe this view, first of all, in the Book of Mormon:

And he said unto me: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth (*1 Nephi*, 14.10).

In the initial vision that Joseph Smith supposedly received, he relates the following:

I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right ... I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight (*History of Joseph Smith*, 18-19).⁷⁹⁹

Mormons feel that a "great apostasy" from the true faith has occurred: "After the deaths of the Savior and His Apostles, men corrupted the principles of the gospel and made unauthorized changes in Church organization and priesthood ordinances."⁸⁰⁰ Mormons believe, however, that, according to the promise of restoration in Acts 3:20-21, God is restoring His true Church today.

Several types of priesthood exist (or existed) in Mormonism, namely the priesthood of Aaron, the priesthood of Melchizedek and the patriarchal priesthood. The priesthood of Aaron is for youths from age 12-17 and for new converts. Within this priesthood, four divisions exist: bishop, deacon, teacher, and priest. Members of this class can advance to still higher positions in the church.⁸⁰¹

Youths who aspire to this class must meet several criteria. They must observe the "word of wisdom," be sexually pure, pass an interview with the bishop, and regularly attend worship services. Their activities include participation in worship services including preparing the Lord Supper, instruction of others, and baptism of new converts. Older members of this class engage in the more important of these functions.⁸⁰²

The priesthood of Melchizedek is for older members age 18 and up. Aspirants to this priesthood must also pass an interview with the bishop as well as receive approval from the congregation. They receive special

⁷⁹⁷Smith J. Jr. *History of the Church* // Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

⁷⁹⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Degrees_of_glory

⁷⁹⁹<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng>

⁸⁰⁰<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/apostasy?lang=eng>

⁸⁰¹<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/aaronic-priesthood?lang=eng>; Decker, p. 19-20;

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priesthood_\(Latter_Day_Saints\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priesthood_(Latter_Day_Saints)).

⁸⁰²*Ibid.*

authority in regards to their family: to lead it and bless it. Other ministries include the laying on of hands for receiving the Holy Spirit. In addition, they become eligible for further promotion in the Fellowship.⁸⁰³

The patriarchal priesthood was first given to the father of Joseph Smith as an honorary status in the church. Subsequently, it was passed down by heredity to Hyrum Smith, Joseph's brother, and so on. In 1979, the LDS discontinued the patriarchal priesthood.⁸⁰⁴

From the beginning of the LDS movement until 1978, only white males qualified for the priesthood. Since 1978, black males may also become priests. Officially, Mormons claim that this change resulted from a revelation from God (see *Doctrines and Covenants*, declaration 2). Critics, though, feel that the battle against discrimination, being waged at that time in the USA, compelled the LDS to change its policy. The LDS still denies priesthood status to women.⁸⁰⁵

Mormons limit the size of their congregations to 500 members, after which they must divide into two congregations. Besides attending worship services, Mormons conduct family devotions once a week and pay tithes to support the ministry. A "bishop" leads each local congregation and serves without pay for 5 years, after which another takes his place.⁸⁰⁶ The movement abounds in missionaries, who are fulfilling a mandatory term after finishing high school.

LDS headquarters is in Salt Lake City, Utah, where the main temple stands as well. Mormon congregations submit to the general leadership. Concerning the leadership's authority over congregations, Joseph Smith wrote, "And all they who receive the oracles of God, let them beware how they hold them lest they are accounted as a light thing, and are brought under condemnation thereby, and stumble and fall when the storms descend, and the winds blow, and the rains descend, and beat upon their house" (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 90.5).

Mormonism boasts 123 temples worldwide. Only in Mormon temples officials perform ordinances for the dead, sealing of marriages, and the endowment ceremony. Those desiring to participate in a temple service must pass interviews and receive a temple recommendation.⁸⁰⁷

D. Prophecies of Joseph Smith

The LDS claim that prophecies given by Joseph Smith provide supernatural confirmation that his ministry was from God. For example, in 1932, Smith correctly predicted that the American Civil War would begin in South Carolina:

I prophesy, in the name of the Lord God, that the commencement of the difficulties which will cause much bloodshed previous to the coming of the Son of Man will be in South Carolina. It may probably arise through the slave question. This voice declared to me while I was praying earnestly on the subject, December 25th, 1832 (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, chp. 17).⁸⁰⁸

Furthermore, after Smith and his followers were driven out of Missouri, he prophesied that he would never return to that state, even though authorities from Missouri attempted to arrest him and return him there. Smith, however, was never apprehended by them. Before his death in 1842, Smith predicted that the

⁸⁰³<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/melchizedek-priesthood?lang=eng>; Decker, p. 280-281; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priesthood_\(Latter_Day_Saints\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priesthood_(Latter_Day_Saints)).

⁸⁰⁴[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priesthood_\(Latter_Day_Saints\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priesthood_(Latter_Day_Saints)).

⁸⁰⁵McDowell, p. 67-68.

⁸⁰⁶[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop_\(Latter_Day_Saints\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop_(Latter_Day_Saints)); Tucker, p. 74-77.

⁸⁰⁷<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/temples?lang=eng>

⁸⁰⁸Smith Jr., Joseph. *History of the Church*. – Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

Mormon movement would prosper in the Rocky Mountains, which took place under Brigham Young's leadership.⁸⁰⁹

Other examples are cited. Smith predicted the presidential candidacy of Stephen Douglas. Upon leaving Jackson, Missouri, he prophesied its destruction, which occurred during the Civil War. Even though Smith and his movement were driven out of New York State, he predicted the successful founding of Mormon congregations there. Moreover, Smith correctly prophesied that after his next arrest he would be killed.⁸¹⁰

In addition, Smith predicted that his assistant Willard Richards would escape death at the hands of enemies. Although he was fired upon repeatedly, his would-be shooters missed their target. He gave similar assurances of divine protection to two other assistants, Orin Porter and Stephen Markham. Smith correctly predicted that his assistant and fellow-prisoner Dan Jones would be released and travel to Wales. Finally, Smith's establishment of the "word of wisdom" is considered prophetic, since only later, the toxic effects of tobacco and caffeine were discovered.⁸¹¹

E. Evaluation

1. Deviations from Biblical Teaching

The LDS claims that Christianity has been perverted and the Bible contains distortions and, therefore, Christian faith is in need of renewal and restoration. On the one hand, conscientious Christians agree that the Church needs renewal, yet they would differ from Mormons in how to accomplish that – not by going beyond Scripture, but by abiding more closely to it.

Many convincing proofs exist to confirm the reliability of the New Testament (see chapter 15). These books contain the truth about the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and His disciples. The veracity of the New Testament, and the Bible in general, provides a powerful refutation of Mormonism, since the latter's teachings in many respects deviate from it.⁸¹²

It will be sufficient to touch on just a few of these discrepancies. The Bible categorically rejects the existence of other gods and advances the truth that God is one (Deut 4:35, 39; 6:4). Mormons erroneously assign the name Elohim to God the Father, and the name Jehovah to Jesus Christ. Throughout Scripture, however, the names Elohim and Jehovah (more accurately, Yahweh) are used interchangeably.

Mormons take the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible literally. Yet, Scripture is clear that God is spirit (Jn 4:24). When biblical authors ascribe to God "body parts," they are employing a figure of speech (specifically, anthropomorphism). For a detailed discussion of the use of anthropomorphism in relation to God, see the section "God is spirit" in the second volume of this series.

Moreover, Mormon faith radically distorts the biblical role of the priesthoods of Aaron and Melchizedek. Also, Mormons claim that people can still convert to Mormonism after death, but the Bible offers no hope of salvation after death (Heb 9:27; Luke 16:19-31). Furthermore, the Mormon teaching of three different kingdoms that one may inherit after death finds no confirmation in Scripture. In addition, the Bible does not support the teaching that people existed as spirits before their physical birth.⁸¹³

Mormons also erroneously add conditions to salvation beyond the Biblical requirements of repentance and faith in Christ (Acts 20:21) by requiring participation in rituals and observing commandments, of which Scripture makes no mention. In addition, the teaching of eternal wedlock contradicts the words of Christ (see Mk. 12:25), who explained that the new bodies received by believers have no reproductive capacity.

⁸⁰⁹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_prophecies_of_Joseph_Smith; http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ_prophecies.shtml

⁸¹⁰Ibid.

⁸¹¹Ibid.

⁸¹²McDowell, p. 86-88.

⁸¹³Ibid, p. 70-73.

We can cite numerous other examples of deviations in LDS teaching from biblical teaching.⁸¹⁴ Therefore, this movement can in no way lay claim to being a restoration movement of true Christianity, or appeal to biblical faith in support of its positions.

2. Interpretation of John 10:34

To support their claim of future deification, Mormons appeal to the words of Jesus: “Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’?” (ИИ. 10:34). Here Jesus is quoting Psalm 82:6, where the title Elohim refers not to gods, but to the judges of Israel. We find a similar usage in Exodus 21:6 and 22:8. Therefore, the term Elohim can refer to leaders of God’s people as well as God Himself. Without question, Jesus had in mind the first meaning. Furthermore, in Psalm 82, God is not commending the judges for attaining deity, but rebuking them for injustice.

In light of the context, it is clear that Jesus’ goal in citing Ps. 82 was to contrast His status with that of the ancient judges of Israel. We may paraphrase His meaning as follows: “You Pharisees object that I speak of Myself as God. Yet, if the Law calls Israel’s leaders Elohim, then why do you object if I, the one the Father has sent into the world, speak of Myself as Elohim?”

Also significant is that Jesus did not say, “You will be gods,” but rather, “You are gods.” If Jesus had in mind the deification of believers, He would have used the future tense. His use of the present tense confirms our conclusion that He had in mind the leadership status of judges in Israel. In addition, Jesus is speaking here not to disciples, aspiring to deity, but to Pharisees, who rejected His claims.

So then, in spite of Mormon claims, this verse provides no justification for the Mormon teaching of the deification of believers.

3. Veracity of the Book of Mormon

Several factors cause us to doubt the reliability of the Book of Mormon. First, there is no archeological evidence that in the sixth century BC a group of Jews emigrated from Israel to America. In response to a false Mormon claim that the Smithsonian Institute used the Book of Mormon in their archeological studies, the Institute issued the following disclaimer:

It can be stated definitely that there is no connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the Book of Mormon.... hence the book cannot be regarded as having any historical value from the standpoint of the aboriginal peoples of the New World.⁸¹⁵

Second, it is curious to note that the LDS account of the migration of these Jews closely corresponds to the account given by Ethan Smith in his 1823 publication *View of the Hebrews*. It is highly likely that Joseph Smith borrowed this fabricated story from Ethan Smith’s book.⁸¹⁶ Tanner adds the observation, “During and even before Joseph Smith’s time it was believed by many people that the Indians were the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel.”⁸¹⁷

Furthermore, Decker lists changes made to the Book of Mormon and other canonical books of the LDS, which violate the sanctity of supposedly divinely inspired books⁸¹⁸. Smith himself claimed to receive divine confirmation that his translation was accurate. A voice from heaven reportedly announced: “These plates have

⁸¹⁴Ibid, p. 86-88.

⁸¹⁵From Tanner, p. 134.

⁸¹⁶Ibid, p. 125ff.

⁸¹⁷Ibid, p. 126.

⁸¹⁸Deker, p. 109ff

been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct" (*History of the Church*, vol. 1, chp. 6 [54]).⁸¹⁹

We also note that in the Book of Mormon, several biblical narratives are reproduced, but the characters are given new names. For example, in the Book of Ether, 8.10-12, the daughter of Jared's dance pleases the king and she asks in return the beheading of an enemy. The parallel with the daughter of Herodias and the beheading of John the Baptist is obvious. Moreover, Alma's conversion parallels the conversion of the apostle Paul (*Mosiah*, 27.11-19). Also, features of Lazarus' resurrection are borrowed in the story of Amon (*Alma*, chp. 19). The story of the calming of a storm in 1 Nephi 18 parallels the narrative in Mark 4.⁸²⁰

Tanner notes a quotation of Malachi 4:1 in 1 Nephi, 22.15, yet Malachi wrote his prophecy many years after the supposed "migration" of Jews to America. Tanner also notes many close parallels between wordings in the Book of Mormon and the New Testament, supposedly written several centuries later.⁸²¹ In addition, Jesus refers to Himself as the "Alpha and Omega" (3 *Nephi*, 8:18), yet the Nephites did not know Greek. We also encounter the Greek name Timothy (3 *Nephi*, 19.4). Parallels even exist between the Book of Mormon and the Westminster Confession of Faith, written in England in the 17th century, sometimes verbatim (see *Alma*, chp. 40 and the Westminster Confession, chp. 32).⁸²²

One must also wonder why the golden plates, from which Smith allegedly translated the Book of Mormon, are missing. Smith claims that Moroni retrieved the plates after they were translated. Yet, their absence is a fatal weakness in the LDS position. If the plates were available for inspection today, we could confirm their existence and verify Smith's translation. Their absence, however, undermines the claim of their veracity.

Especially interesting is the story of the three witnesses, who, apparently, saw the golden plates in a vision. Martin Harris and David Whitmer later explained that they saw the plates with "eyes of faith" (see *Palmyra Reflector*, March 19, 1831; *Clark J. A. Gleanings by the Way*, p. 256–257).⁸²³ It is also significant that Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer were later excommunicated from the LDS (*History of the Church*, vol. 3, chp. 2), yet in 1848, Cowdery was restored and publically affirmed his testimony concerning the golden plates.⁸²⁴

Concerning the other eight witnesses, Tanner comments, "The testimony of the eight witnesses could be explained simply by admitting that Joseph Smith had some type of plates."⁸²⁵ This testimony does not prove that Smith received them from a heavenly messenger, or that they contained the Book of Mormon.

Also of importance is that the present Book of Mormon is not, in fact, a translation of the golden plates, but rather a new revelation. According to Smith's own account, he did not read the plates, but read their "translation" off the seer stones. So then, the actual contents of the plates, if they existed at all, are unknown.

4. Veracity of Joseph Smith

Certain factors in Joseph Smith's history raise suspicions of his integrity. According to official state records, Smith was arrested, tried and found guilty in New York State for divining using seer stones. This occurred before his first alleged visitation. The method of divination Smith used at this time was very similar to the method used to "translate" the Book of Mormon.⁸²⁶ Tanner summarizes the proceedings:

⁸¹⁹Smith J. Jr. *History of the Church* // Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

⁸²⁰Tanner, p. 116-117.

⁸²¹For example: Helaman 8.14 = Jn 3:14; Alma 19.10 = Lk 7:9; Alma 7.15 = Heb 12:1; Alma 5.57 = 2 Cor 6:17; Mosiah 27.25 = Jn 3:7; Mosiah 23.13/Alma 58.40 = Gal 5:1; Mosiah 16.11 = Jn 5:29; Mosiah 16.7 = 1 Cor 15:55; Mosiah 5.15 = 1 Cor 15:58; 1 Nephi 10.10/2 Nephi 31.4 = Jn 1:29; 1 Nephi 4.13 = Jn 11:50; 1 Nephi 11.22 = Rom 5:5; 1 Nephi 12.11 = Rev 7:14; 1 Nephi 22.17 = 1 Cor 3:15 (see Tanner, p. 118-122).

⁸²²Tanner, p. 112-115, 124.

⁸²³Decker, p. 403.

⁸²⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Cowdery.

⁸²⁵Tanner, p. 108-109.

⁸²⁶McDowell, p. 68.

Now, it is interesting to note that in the court record Joseph Smith confessed that “for three years” prior to 1826 he had used a stone placed in his hat to find treasures or lost property. According to Joseph Smith's own statement, then, he began his money-digging activities in about 1823.⁸²⁷

We also recall the commonalities between the temple order of Mormons and the rituals of the Freemasons. Not only were Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum Freemasons, but also Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders. Decker concludes, “The philosophical and ritual influence of Freemasonry upon Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum was profound.... The influence of Masonry upon the development of the temple endowment ritual is unarguable.”⁸²⁸ So then, the temple rituals of Mormonism came not by revelation, but were likely borrowed from the Freemasons.

In 1835, Smith learned of an Egyptian document belonging to Michael Chandler and obtained it. At that time, no one had yet learned to read Egyptian hieroglyphics. Smith claimed the document contained writings from Abraham and translated from it the *Book of Abraham*, which to this day Mormons treasure as sacred scripture. After some time, the document was lost was thought to have perished.

However, in 1967, in a New York museum, the same document that Smith translated was discovered. Since scholars by that time had learned to read hieroglyphics, it became possible to verify Smith's translation. The opening words of Smith's translation was, “In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers, I, Abraham, saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence.” In reality, the document begins with instructions on how to prepare a mummy.⁸²⁹

As far as Smith's prophecies, first of all one must consider that most of them are found in latter publications of the LDS, for example, in the *History of the Church*, which was partially written after Smith's death. It is possible that some of the prophecies were ascribed to Smith and inserted into the text.⁸³⁰

The following example may serve to confirm that suspicion. In Smith's prediction of the Mormon migration to the Rocky Mountains, Tanner notes, “The ‘Rocky Mountain Prophecy’ was written in very small handwriting between the lines. In other words, it was obviously added at a later time to this manuscript.”⁸³¹ The inserted text includes the words:

I prophesied that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be driven to the Rocky Mountains, many would apostatize, others would be put to death by our persecutors or lose their lives in consequence of exposure or disease, and some of you will live to go and assist in making settlements and build cities and see the Saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, chp. 4 [85]).⁸³²

As mentioned, in 1832 Smith did successfully predict the commencement of the American Civil War in South Carolina. Yet, not long before that prediction, a rebellion has already broken out in that state, and others were predicting the conflict would begin there as well.⁸³³ Also significant is that Smith predicted the involvement of Great Britain in the struggle, and that the war would spread to other nations:

Verily, thus saith the Lord concerning the wars that will shortly come to pass, beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina, which will eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls; and the time

⁸²⁷Tanner, p. 75.

⁸²⁸Decker, p. 210.

⁸²⁹McDowell, p. 79-80; Tucker, p. 61; Tanner p, 347.

⁸³⁰Tanner, p. 400-404.

⁸³¹Ibid, p. 404-408.

⁸³²Smith J. Jr. *History of the Church* // Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

⁸³³Tanner, c. 424-428.

will come that war will be poured out upon all nations, beginning at this place. For behold, the Southern States shall be divided against the Northern States, and the Southern States will call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, as it is called, and they shall also call upon other nations, in order to defend themselves against other nations; and then war shall be poured out upon all nations (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 87.1-3).

In fact, Smith made many predictions that failed. For example, in 1832, he predicted the construction of a Mormon temple in Missouri “in this generation.” The temple was never built.

New Jerusalem, which city shall be built, beginning at the temple lot, which is appointed by the finger of the Lord, in the western boundaries of the State of Missouri ... the city New Jerusalem shall be built by the gathering of the saints, beginning at this place, even the place of the temple, which temple shall be reared in this generation. For verily this generation shall not all pass away until an house shall be built unto the Lord (*Doctrines and Covenants*, 84.2–5).

He also predicted the return of Christ in 1890, citing in support Revelation, chp. 14, and Hosea, chp. 6:

I prophesy in the name of the Lord God, and let it be written--the Son of Man will not come in the clouds of heaven till I am eighty-five years old (in 1890) (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, chp. 17 [336]).⁸³⁴

Smith foretold the destruction of the United States in the near future:

Unless the United States redress the wrongs committed upon the Saints in the state of Missouri and punish the crimes committed by her officers that in a few years the government will be utterly overthrown and wasted (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, chp. 20 [394]).⁸³⁵

He also spoke of a glorious future for the first twelve apostles of his movement. This prophecy was not fulfilled, since seven of the twelve were either excommunicated from the church, or quit the movement themselves.⁸³⁶

And I finally saw the Twelve in the celestial kingdom of God (*History of the Church*, vol. 2, chp. 27 [381]).⁸³⁷

Smith predicted a missionary ministry for Brigham Young and a miracle ministry for William M'Lellin. Neither expectation was fulfilled.⁸³⁸

I saw Elder Brigham Young standing in a strange land, in the far south and west, in a desert place, upon a rock in the midst of about a dozen men of color, who appeared hostile. He was preaching to them in their own tongue (*History of the Church*, vol. 2, chp. 27 [381]).⁸³⁹

⁸³⁴Ibid.

⁸³⁵Ibid.

⁸³⁶Excommunicated from the church or “apostatized”: in 1837 – John F. Boynton and Luke S. Johnson; in 1838 – Lyman Johnson, William E. McLellin, Thomas B. Marsh and Orson Hyde (1838); in 1845 – William Smith, yet, some of them were later reinstated (see Decker, p. 171f).

⁸³⁷Smith J. Jr. *History of the Church* // Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

⁸³⁸Tucker, p. 63.

⁸³⁹Smith J. Jr. *History of the Church* // Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

I also beheld Elder M'Lellin in the south, standing upon a hill, surrounded by a vast multitude, preaching to them, and a lame man standing before him supported by his crutches; he threw them down at his word and leaped as a hart, by the mighty power of God (*History of the Church*, vol. 2, chp. 27 [381]).⁸⁴⁰

Finally, many comment critically on the character of Joseph Smith, accusing him of polygamy and pride. Highly significant are the accusations of Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, two of Smith's closest associates, against his character, including an accusation of adultery (*History of the Church*, vol. 3, chp. 2). In 1844, at a Mormon conference, Smith was ordained as king of the world. In the words of George Miller, Presiding Bishop of the Church at that time:

Joseph said to me... "We will call together some of our wise men and proceed to set up the kingdom of God by organizing some of its officers." And from day to day he called some of the brethren about him, organizing them as princes in the kingdom of God, to preside over the chief cities of the Nation, until the number of 53 were called. In this council we ordained Joseph Smith as King on earth.⁸⁴¹

5. Faith without Foundation

Amazing at it seems, contemporary LDS not infrequently reject some of the key teachings of their founders. By so doing, though, they undermine the foundation of their faith. This is the fatal weakness of the Mormon position.

On the one hand, Mormons claim that Joseph Smith and Brigham Young were God's prophets and launched a time of restoration for the Church. On the other hand, contemporary Mormons only selectively embrace their teachings, rejecting such views as the existence of many gods, the identification of Elohim with Adam, redemption through shedding one's own blood, etc.⁸⁴² Tucker claims: "Early teachings are very different than those of the Brigham Young era, which differ significantly from beliefs today."⁸⁴³ He also writes,

Since its founding in 1830, the Mormon church has moved away from being a bizarre fringe movement and into the mainstream of religion. This is due in part to a very conscious effort by the church to present an image of respectability to the outside world.⁸⁴⁴

This shift has even led to the excommunication of individuals who persist in accepting some of these earlier views.⁸⁴⁵

If the founders of Mormonism turn out, in some respects, to be false teachers, then on what can their followers base their faith? On what basis can they determine when the teachings of Smith and Young are true, and when they are not true? If Smith and Young could err on some central aspects of God's plan, as modern Mormons claim, then it is quite possible that they erred in their understanding of God's plan in full.

Among the early LDS leaders existed the opinion, that in doctrinal questions the president-prophet cannot error. In the canonical book *Doctrines and Covenants*, former president Wilford Woodruff stated,

The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the programme. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that, the Lord

⁸⁴⁰Ibid.

⁸⁴¹Hill D. Joseph Smith: The first Mormon – Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977. – P. 368. Taken from Tucker, p. 67.

⁸⁴²The fourteen fundamental articles or beliefs of Mormons, из <http://www.exmormon.org/fourteen.htm>;

<http://trialsandascension.net/mormon/critics.html>

⁸⁴³Tucker, p. 80.

⁸⁴⁴Ibid, p. 90.

⁸⁴⁵Decker, p. 135.

would remove me out of my place, and so He will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty (*Doctrines and Covenants, 1st Declaration*).⁸⁴⁶

In the words of Brigham Young:

I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture (*Journal of Discourses, 13,95*).

The Lord Almighty leads this Church, and he will never suffer you to be led astray if you are found doing your duty. You may go home and sleep as sweetly as a babe in its mother's arms, as to any danger of your leaders leading you astray, for if they should try to do so the Lord would quickly sweep them from the earth (*Journal of Discourses, 9.289*).

Joseph F. Smith, the sixth LDS president, stated,

We depend, of course, upon the guidance of the brethren who are entitled to inspiration (*Doctrines of Salvation, 1.12.1*).⁸⁴⁷

No man ever went astray by following the counsel of the authorities of the Church (*Doctrines of Salvation, 1.14.35*).⁸⁴⁸

Are these brethren true – and I have quoted three of the Presidents of the Church, including the Prophet himself? Are they true, or are we to discard their teachings and the teachings of the scriptures because the philosophies of men today declare a contrary doctrine? (*Doctrines of Salvation, 1.7.26*).⁸⁴⁹

The inconsistency of the present Mormon view on authority is evident in the following quotation. In 1980, in the document “Fourteen Fundamentals for Following the Prophet,” Apostle (later President) Ezra Benson announced to the Mormon community “The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet,” and “Beware of those who would pit the dead prophets against the living prophets, for the living prophets always take precedence.”⁸⁵⁰ A former Mormon relates being taught this principle: “We believe that when the Prophet, the head of our church, says something that is definitely wrong he was not being inspired at that time.”⁸⁵¹

However, by rejecting aspects of their *founders'* teaching, including some views of Smith and Young, Mormons today find themselves in a very difficult position – they have a faith without a *foundation*. The claim that present presidents have precedence over former ones is self-defeating. On what do present LDS leaders base their authority, if not on the authoritative ministry of Joseph Smith? If Smith's authority is not absolute, then neither is the authority of those who claim to succeed him. Mormonism turns out to be a faith without a foundation.

The sixth president of Mormonism, Joseph F. Smith, was ready to admit:

⁸⁴⁶Sixty-first Semiannual General Conference of the Church, Monday, October 6, 1890, Salt Lake City, Utah. Reported in *Deseret Evening News*, October 11, 1890, p. 2

⁸⁴⁷Smith J. F. *Doctrines of salvation*, v. 1, p. 115.

⁸⁴⁸*Ibid*, v. 1, p. 150.

⁸⁴⁹*Ibid*, v. 1, p. 73.

⁸⁵⁰Ezra Benson, *Fourteen Fundamentals for Following the Prophet* (<https://www.mrm.org/fourteen-fundamentals>)

⁸⁵¹The fourteen fundamental articles or beliefs of Mormons; from <http://www.exmormon.org/fourteen.htm>

Church stands or falls with Joseph Smith. Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. He was either a prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1.12.15).⁸⁵²

Resources Used:

The Book of Mormon

Decker E. Decker's complete handbook on Mormonism. – Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995.

Doctrines and Covenants – <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament?lang=eng>

History of the Church. – In 7 Vols. – Packard Technologies. Kindle Edition.

Journal of Discourses. – In 26 Vols. – <http://www.jhuston.com/jod.htm>

Lectures on the Faith. – <https://www.lecturesonfaith.com>

Pearl of Great Price. – <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp?lang=eng>

Martin W. Kingdom of the cults. – Rev. ed. – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1985.

McDowell J., Stewart D. The deceivers – Nashville TN: Nelson, 1992.

Smith J. F. Doctrines of salvation // Ed. Bruce McKonkie. – In 3 Vol. – Bookcraft, 1954-56. – [https://archive.org/stream/Doctrines-of-Salvation-volume-1\(2\)\(3\)-joseph-fielding-smith](https://archive.org/stream/Doctrines-of-Salvation-volume-1(2)(3)-joseph-fielding-smith)

Tanner J., Tanner S. The changing world of Mormonism, <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changecontents.htm>

Tucker R. A. Another Gospel. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. – 406 p.

~~~~~

[www.churchofjesuschrist.org](http://www.churchofjesuschrist.org)

[www.exmormon.org/fourteen.htm](http://www.exmormon.org/fourteen.htm)

[www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ\\_prophecies.shtml](http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ_prophecies.shtml)

[wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)

---

<sup>852</sup>Smith J. F. Doctrines of salvation, v. 1, p. 116.



Image by Pexels from Pixabay

## V. God's Special Messenger

Having demonstrated the superiority of a monotheistic view, the next challenge before us is to discover, among the leading monotheistic religions of the world, which of them boasts God's true messenger. Islam claims he is Muhammad. Christianity – Jesus Christ. Judaism follows Moses. The Baha'i Faith – Baha'u'llah. Pluralism states there is no one special messenger from God, but that all great religious leaders taught truths about God. We will begin by investigating the claims of pluralism.

# Chapter 10: Are A Few Heads Better Than One?

## A. Pluralism: The Basic Idea

The term “pluralism” can have different meanings in different contexts. One can speak of cultural pluralism, philosophical pluralism, or religious pluralism. In this section, we will discuss the first two types. We will devote more attention later to religious pluralism.

### 1. Cultural Pluralism

Cultural pluralism implies respect for all races, cultures and religions present in any society. In other words, cultural pluralism seeks to eliminate discrimination. Tolerance of this type can indeed be beneficial, even imperative, for the peaceful coexistence of various people, both within a nation, and between nations of the world. Leslie Mark defines cultural pluralism as follows: “A pluralistic society is one in which diverse ethnic, racial, religious or social groups live and maintain an autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture within the confines of a common civilization.”<sup>853</sup> Donald Carson believes that cultural pluralism is beneficial for reducing “cultural prejudice, racial arrogance, and religious bigotry.”<sup>854</sup>

### 2. Philosophical Pluralism

Unlike cultural pluralism, philosophical pluralism is harmful and actually unworkable. According to this view, logical contradictions may exist in reality.

Mathematics serves as a powerful refutation of philosophical pluralism, since  $2 + 2$  can only equal 4, and not 5. Philosophical pluralism also contradicts empirical science. According to human observation, logical contradictions do not exist in reality. Contrasting claims are characterized by the relation “either ... or,” that is, either one option is true, or the other. Two logically contradictory statements cannot both be true. For example, we can claim that a person is travelling east, or travelling west. We cannot claim he is going both directions simultaneously. Yet, philosophical pluralism claims this very thing – contradictory phenomena may be characterized not by “either ... or,” but “both ... and.”

The claim that reality may contain logical contradictions is actually self-defeating. In order to prove that contradictions may exist in reality, adherents of that view must use the category “either ... or.” They must claim that since the formula “both ... and” accurately describes the presence of logical contradictions in reality, then the formula “either ... or” does not. In other words, the two options are mutually exclusive – either logical contradictions in reality are characterized by “both ... and” (their preferred option), or by “either ... or,” but not by both. In so doing, they establish their theory of the illogicity of reality by utilizing logic, and thus defeat their own position.<sup>855</sup>

Thus we discover, as Ronald Nash correctly notes, that philosophical pluralism robs us of “the very principles of logic that make all significant thought, action, and communication possible.”<sup>856</sup>

## B. Religious Pluralism

### 1. General Features

---

<sup>853</sup>Mark L. E. The role of the Church in a pluralistic society. – Direction 12. Apr. 1983. P. 8.

<sup>854</sup>Carson D. A. The gagging of God: Christianity confronts pluralism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – P. 17

<sup>855</sup>Geisler N. L., Bocchino P. Unshakable foundations. – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2001. – P. 19-20 (page numbers from Russian edition).

<sup>856</sup>Nash R. H. Is Jesus the only savior? – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – P. 55.

It is important to distinguish two types of religious pluralism: descriptive religious pluralism and normative religious pluralism. The first simply acknowledges that diversity exists among religions of the world. The second considers this diversity to be “normative,” that is, that all religions are equally valid.<sup>857</sup>

Steward notes that, although various world religions have always existed, advances in the areas of communication and transportation have increased our awareness of different cultures and their religious beliefs, forcing us to think more intentionally about our relation to other religions.<sup>858</sup> Feinberg adds that the influence of skepticism in the world today provides still another stimulus for a pluralistic worldview to take hold.<sup>859</sup> In such a milieu, religious pluralism can flourish.

According to normative religious pluralism, one God stands behind all religions, and each of them contributes one piece of the total picture of Him and His truth. A common and key feature, it is thought, between all faiths is the idea of the “Transcendent.”<sup>860</sup> Another common feature, which all faiths practice, is worship of the “Transcendent.”<sup>861</sup> Yet, there is no one special messenger from God. All great religious figures taught some aspect of His truth.

In addition, this theory holds that God is so great and unfathomable, that no one religion can comprehend or describe Him adequately. Since a single religion can only partially apprehend God’s nature and plan, we must unite all religions to better know and understand Him.

Furthermore, pluralists find arguments supporting one religion over another unconvincing. They claim that any “evidence” in favor of one faith over another derives from the worldview, which that faith itself creates. Newbigin describes this process: “What we see as facts depends on the theory we bring to the observation.”<sup>862</sup> Therefore, no one can offer objective proofs for his/her position, which are independent of the influence of his/her worldview.<sup>863</sup> The pluralist says that all faiths are equal alethically (in their truth claims), epistemically (in the basis for their claims) and soteriologically (in their ability to save).<sup>864</sup>

In answer to the question why religions differ, pluralists appeal to the influence of culture. In different cultures, people perceive God differently, which leads to differing faith systems. Correspondingly, Netland defines religious pluralism as “culturally conditioned human responses to the one ultimate Reality.”<sup>865</sup> Stewart reaches a similar conclusion: “All religions are valid *independent* responses to the real.”<sup>866</sup>

Pluralism differs from postmodernism (see chapter. 2) in the following way. Postmodernism is ready to respect all religions (even the rejection of religion) and treat them equally. Yet, postmoderns reject the claim that religious faith corresponds to reality. Pluralists, however, claim that we can know the truth about God.<sup>867</sup>

Pluralism categorically rejects the idea that a single religion possesses exclusive knowledge of God’s truth. Newbigin describes pluralism’s approach to truth as follows:

---

<sup>857</sup>Yandell K. E. Has normative religious pluralism a rationale? // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 164.

<sup>858</sup>Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? Considering this question // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 3.

<sup>859</sup>Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it’s true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. – P. 446.

<sup>860</sup>Geivett R. D. Religious diversity and the futility of neutrality // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 181-182.

<sup>861</sup>Corduan W. A tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – P. 18

<sup>862</sup>Newbigin L. The gospel in a pluralist society. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Geneva: WCC, 1989. – P. 21.

<sup>863</sup>Noted in Clark D. K., Geisler N. L. Apologetics in the new age: A Christian critique of pantheism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990. – P. 189, and Feinberg, p. 450.

<sup>864</sup>Geivett, p. 183-184.

<sup>865</sup>Netland H. Encountering religious pluralism: The challenge to Christian faith and mission. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2001. – P. 54.

<sup>866</sup>Stewart, p. 12.

<sup>867</sup>Carson, p. 147.

Is it not more fitting that we adopt the attitude of a humble seeker after truth, keeping an open mind, ready to listen to all that comes from the varied religious experience of the human race?... Only an open mind can hope to reach the truth, and dogma is the enemy of the open mind.<sup>868</sup>

Religious pluralism is “the belief that the differences between the religions are not a matter of truth and falsehood, but of different perceptions of the one truth; that to speak of religious beliefs as true or false is inadmissible.”<sup>869</sup>

As long as the Church is content to offer its beliefs modestly as simply one of the many brands available in the ideological supermarket, no offense is taken. But the affirmation that the truth revealed in the gospel ought to govern public life is offensive.<sup>870</sup>

As far as salvation goes, pluralists feel all religions can bring people to God, since they all provide genuine access to Him.<sup>871</sup> Clark describes their view: “Many different traditions can help their adherents achieve the religious goal of contact with the divine.”<sup>872</sup> So then, pluralism advances the following agenda: (1) all world religions need to acknowledge that they speak of the same Supreme Being, and (2) all world religions need to seek common ground and eliminate doctrines that contradict the doctrines of others.

In support of their cause, pluralists have formed the so-called “World Parliament of Religions.” The first of these meetings between representatives of various world religions took place in 1893, and the second only 100 years later in 1993. After the second meeting, subsequent parliaments were held every five years, and at present – every three years. The goal of these gatherings is to enhance dialog between world religions, as well as “to celebrate, discuss and explore how religious traditions can work together on the critical issues which confront the world.”<sup>873</sup>

Participants at these parliaments numbered from 8000-9000, representing various faiths worldwide. Nations hosting the meetings included the USA, South Africa, Spain and Australia. Topics discussed included religious violence, ecology, care for the poor, elimination of debt in developing countries, spirituality among youths, and others.

Some of the more notable proponents of pluralism include John Hick, Paul Knitter and William Cantwell Smith. We will devote special attention to how these three approach pluralism, and in conclusion make brief mention of several others. Since many leading proponents of pluralism have their roots in Christianity, they devote special attention to its qualification, if not refutation. Thus, their evaluation of Christianity and our response to it will receive special attention in the following pages.

## 2. John Hick

Like all pluralists, Hick believes that one Supreme Being stands behind all world religions. God is so unfathomable that humans cannot know His essence or describe Him in human language. God also exceeds the categories of good and evil, personal and impersonal. We may not even claim that “God is love.” He is totally beyond description.<sup>874</sup>

---

<sup>868</sup>Newbiggin, p. 7.

<sup>869</sup>Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>870</sup>Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>871</sup>Feinberg, p. 462.

<sup>872</sup>Clark, p. 186.

<sup>873</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Parliament\\_of\\_Religions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Parliament_of_Religions).

<sup>874</sup>Nash, p. 43-44.

Hick felt compelled to so think about God because of the many contradictory claims made about Him by various religious faiths. Since God is beyond description, Hick would say, we can understand why inconsistencies appear when people attempt to describe Him. In addition, Hick considers religious language mythological. Therefore, logical consistency is not required.<sup>875</sup> There are no contradictions in God Himself, though, just in how people perceive and describe Him.<sup>876</sup>

Hick theorizes that people understand God differently because in various cultures He is perceived from different cultural perspectives. This supposedly explains why people usually adopt the religion of their culture. Conversion to a religion foreign to one's culture is an infrequent phenomenon.<sup>877</sup>

Furthermore, in defense of his position Hick employs Immanuel Kant's distinction between the "noumenal" and "phenomenal." In His being, God is a "noumenal" entity, yet people have access to Him only phenomenally.<sup>878</sup> To describe God, Hick uses his unique formulation "the Real." He writes, "We do not worship the Real in itself but always one or other of its manifestations to humanity."<sup>879</sup>

According to Hick, the task of all religions should be to eliminate all contradictions between them in recognition of the fact that they all speak of the same God. Hostilities between religions arise because each faith insists they are correct and fails to understand the others.<sup>880</sup> Hick writes, "People of the other world religions have exactly the same view of their own faith as we do of ours."<sup>881</sup> At the same time, Hick is willing to critique various religions and consider some more successful than others.<sup>882</sup>

Hick calls for a radical change in religious thinking, like what occurred during the Copernican revolution, when the general worldview changed from an earth-centered to a sun-centered model. Similarly, Hick recommends giving center stage not to Christianity, but to God: "We have to realize that the universe of faiths centers upon *God*, and not upon Christianity or upon any other religion."<sup>883</sup>

Hick views salvation in a similar way. Salvation is the rejection of "self-centeredness," and acceptance of "reality-centeredness."<sup>884</sup> He defines salvation as "the gradual transformation of men and women from natural self-centeredness to a new orientation centered in the divine reality we call God, liberating us into love and compassion for our fellow beings."<sup>885</sup> This goal is thought to be common to all religions, and that they all accomplish it to some degree.<sup>886</sup>

Hick feels that Christianity does not surpass other world religions and occupies no pride of place among them. He claims to know many fine, morally upright people from non-Christian faiths. He sees no great difference in moral character among followers of different religions: "I do not think that history shows Christian civilization through the centuries to have been morally superior to all other civilizations."<sup>887</sup> Hick also accuses Christianity of failing to transform the world: "(History) would be very different if Christianity, commensurate with its claims to absolute truth and unique validity, had shown a unique capacity to transform human nature for the better."<sup>888</sup>

---

<sup>875</sup>Ibid, p. 33, 64-65.

<sup>876</sup>Hick J. *Is Christianity the only true religion, or one among other?* // Stewart R. B. *Can only one religion be true?* – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 114.

<sup>877</sup>Ibid, p. 105-106.

<sup>878</sup>Nash, p. 40-41.

<sup>879</sup>Hick J. *A pluralistic view* // Gundry S.N., Okholm D. L., Phillips T. R. *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world.* – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – P. 50.

<sup>880</sup>Nash, p. 86.

<sup>881</sup>Hick, *Is Christianity the only true religion*, p. 105.

<sup>882</sup>Noted in Clark, p. 193.

<sup>883</sup>Hick J. *God has many names.* – London: MacMillan Press, 1980. – P. 52.

<sup>884</sup>Hick J. *The non-absoluteness of Christianity* // *The myth of Christian uniqueness.* London: SCM Press, 1987. – P. 23.

<sup>885</sup>Hick, *Is Christianity the only true religion*, p. 109.

<sup>886</sup>Ibid, p. 110-111.

<sup>887</sup>Ibid, p. 112.

<sup>888</sup>Hick, *The non-absoluteness of Christianity*, p. 17.

Additionally, Hick claims that all great religions “promote this transformation in one form or another to about the same extent.”<sup>889</sup> He writes:

But if we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness (with all the human evils that flow from this) to a radically new orientation centered on God and manifested in the “fruit of the Spirit,” then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world’s religions – and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent.<sup>890</sup>

Hick also observes that even within Christianity, different movements exist. Christianity itself is not a unified faith.<sup>891</sup>

When critics of pluralism claim that progress in European countries resulted from the positive presence and influence of Christianity, Hick responds that the key to Europe’s development, rather, were factors like the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Christianity, in fact, opposed these movements. Hick also thinks this claim is an oversimplified generalization. Non-Christian peoples also show progress, and Christian nations have their share of problems as well.<sup>892</sup> Hick also cites examples in world history of harm caused by Christians, such as the Crusades, persecution of Jews, etc.

Furthermore, Hick cannot tolerate the idea that a loving God would condemn those who never heard the gospel. He believes that in the end all people will be saved.<sup>893</sup> Everyone has access to God’s saving grace, since all religions lead to God.<sup>894</sup> Hick rejects the Christian teaching of salvation through the death of Jesus Christ. This idea, he feels, derived from ancient pagan culture. It would be unjust for the innocent to die for the guilty.

In addition, if God required a sacrifice for sin, then the pardon He offers is not true forgiveness, since He received retribution for sin – the death of Christ.<sup>895</sup> In the Parable of the Prodigal Son and in the Lord’s Prayer, Hick sees no mention of a mediator between God and people. Therefore, one can come directly to God and find acceptance with Him without mediation.<sup>896</sup>

Hick rejects the Deity of Christ as well. The Early Church, under the influence of Greek philosophy, ascribed to Him this exalted status.<sup>897</sup> Jesus never claimed to be God. He was a mere mortal, yet possessed a highly developed God-consciousness.<sup>898</sup> If He really rose from the dead, Hick would not accept even this as evidence of His Deity.<sup>899</sup> The idea of the Incarnation is also a myth, borrowed from pagan “mystery religions” of New Testament times, in order to glorify Christ.<sup>900</sup> When the Bible speaks of Jesus as the Son of God, it simply means one having a special relationship with God. Even the kings of Israel, in their time, were called God’s sons.<sup>901</sup>

Although Hick rejects the foundational truths of Christian faith, he still considers himself a Christian and seeks to live consistently with his personal understanding of Christianity. He writes, “We should live wholeheartedly within our own faith, so long as we find it to be sustaining and a sphere of spiritual growth, but we should freely recognize the equal validity of the other great world faiths for *their* adherents.”<sup>902</sup>

---

<sup>889</sup>Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>890</sup>Hick, A pluralistic view, p. 43.

<sup>891</sup>Hick, God has many names, p. 48.

<sup>892</sup>Hick, The non-absoluteness of Christianity, p. 24-26.

<sup>893</sup>Hick, A pluralistic view, p. 45.

<sup>894</sup>Noted in Nash, p. 33.

<sup>895</sup>Hick, The non-absoluteness of Christianity, p. 33.

<sup>896</sup>Ibid.

<sup>897</sup>Hick, Is Christianity the only true religion, p. 108.

<sup>898</sup>Hick, The non-absoluteness of Christianity, p. 17.

<sup>899</sup>Nash, p. 71-75.

<sup>900</sup>Ibid.

<sup>901</sup>Erickson, How shall they be saved, p. 92-93; Carson, p. 319-321.

<sup>902</sup>Hick, Is Christianity the only true religion, p. 105.

### 3. Paul Knitter

Paul Knitter also believes that behind all religions stands one Supreme Being, that He is so unfathomable, that humans cannot comprehend Him, and that no one religion can fully describe Him. Knitter names this Being “Mystery.” He has revealed Himself to different religious groups in different ways. Consequently, each religion expresses only a partial understanding of this “Mystery.” Therefore, we must treat all religions with respect and seek unity between them.

Knitter defends the position that the most important tasks for religions to accomplish are eliminating poverty and oppression in the world, and protecting the environment. He evaluates the quality of world religions by their success in accomplishing these goals.

Knitter feels that pursuing the above-mentioned goals will secure religious unity as well. In order to effectively deal with poverty, oppression, and pollution of the planet, followers of all religions must cooperate and participate. As they begin to work together on these issues, Knitter assumes, they will discover how much they have in common, and walls between them will start to come down. The end result will be the unification of all religions.<sup>903</sup>

Religious unity is possible, according to Knitter, because various faiths not so much contradict one another, as complement each another. For the sake of unity, world religions must refrain from claiming exclusive possession of truth. They must be willing to admit that, in one issue or another, they may be mistaken.<sup>904</sup>

Knitter sees still other advantages to religious unification. It will lead to less conflicts between religious groups. In addition, since God wills to save all, He makes saving grace available through all religions. Therefore, cooperation between faiths will make God’s grace more accessible, since one can draw on that grace from different avenues.<sup>905</sup>

Regarding Christianity, Knitter feels that Jesus centered His teaching not on Himself, but on God. We must follow that example. The “way” of Jesus is openness to other “ways.” Knitter writes, “The God whom Jesus reveals is a God who reaches beyond the revelation that Jesus offers.”<sup>906</sup> God is greater than the Incarnate Word – He is an eternal and ever-present Spirit. The death of Christ is interpreted as His identification with all who suffer in the world. The resurrection of Christ points to and guarantees ultimate victory for those who suffer now. Passages of Scripture that speak of an exalted Christ come not from the Jesus Himself, but from the Early Church.<sup>907</sup> In this way, the Early Church sought to express its love and respect for Jesus.<sup>908</sup>

Knitter believes that the Bible was written not to transmit precise truth, but to motivate its readers to action. Therefore, there is no need to limit our understanding of God to what is written there. He writes:

Religious truth is truth for me when it opens me to meaning and purpose that gives me an inner peace and strength, and when it enables me to engage in a life in which I am furthering the well-being of myself and others.<sup>909</sup>

Knitter theorizes that the Early Church rejected other religions because of the threat they posed to nascent Christianity. In today’s world, however, other religions no longer present a threat to Christianity’s

---

<sup>903</sup>Stewart, p. 12.

<sup>904</sup>Knitter P. F., Netland H. A. Can only one religion be true? A dialogue // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 40-41, 50.

<sup>905</sup>Ibid, p. 30-31.

<sup>906</sup>Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>907</sup>Carson, p. 325-236.

<sup>908</sup>Knitter and Netland, p. 34-35.

<sup>909</sup>Ibid, p. 39.



existence, and so Christians may embrace a more positive attitude toward them. Additionally, Knitter applauds the attitude of tolerance gaining acceptance among many Christians today.<sup>910</sup>

#### 4. William Cantwell Smith

The unique feature of our next proponent of pluralism, William Cantwell Smith, is his defense of the practice of idolatry. He claims we wrongfully charge idol worshippers with the worship of objects. They actually worship the gods represented by the idols.<sup>911</sup>

Since God is unfathomable and exceeds all human understanding, idols are useful, Smith believes, in that they provide the worshipper with a visible image to worship the invisible God. In his opinion, all religions, including Christianity, utilize symbols (i.e. “idols”) in worship. Idol worship is detrimental only when one insists that his/her idol is the only genuine reflection of the true God.<sup>912</sup>

Another feature of Smith’s view is differentiating “convictions” and “faith.” On the one hand, adherents of all religions hold to their own confessional convictions. On the other hand, faith is a personal matter – the attitude of one’s heart toward God. Faith is “the way a person feels and lives when encountering transcendence.”<sup>913</sup> Personal faith is something adherents of all religions have in common.<sup>914</sup> In other words, it is not important what a person believes (his/her convictions), but rather the presence of personal faith in the heart. Convictions can give birth to faith, but they do not determine its content.<sup>915</sup>

#### 5. Other Pluralists

In conclusion, we may make mention of several other defenders of pluralism. Stanley Samartha, for example, considers the essence of all religions to be “mystery.” Varying understandings of God and His plan derive from different interpretations people have of their mystical experience with God.<sup>916</sup> In Samartha’s words, different religions are “different responses to the Mystery of God.”<sup>917</sup> Mystery is “an ontological status to be accepted.”<sup>918</sup> Furthermore: “To claim that the Judeo-Christian-Western tradition has the *only* answer to all problems in all places for all persons in the world is presumptuous, if not incredible.”<sup>919</sup>

Some adherents of pluralism in the “Christian camp” attempt to establish ties between pluralism and Christianity. Raimon Panikkar, along with others, suggests the existence of a “cosmic Christ,” who is a “link” between God and people. Yet, this “cosmic Christ” is not to be identified with Jesus of Nazareth. He is supposedly present in all religions and provides adherents of all faiths access to God.<sup>920</sup> Similarly, Schubert Ogden theorizes a “representative Christology,” where God’s activity in Christ does not lead to salvation, but is simply a symbolic representation and reflection of God’s desire to save all people in all faith confessions.<sup>921</sup>

Robert Bellah accuses conservative Christians of using the Bible as a “book of facts,” with which one can define a universal worldview. Yet, he considers that “facts” of any kind cannot serve as a foundation for knowledge. Even scientific “facts” are determined by the culture of science. Christianity is better understood

---

<sup>910</sup>Ibid, p. 27-28.

<sup>911</sup>Erickson, *How shall they be saved*, p. 95-96.

<sup>912</sup>Ibid, p. 95-96.

<sup>913</sup>Noted in Nash, p. 59

<sup>914</sup>Noted in Carson, p. 173-174.

<sup>915</sup>Nash, p. 60.

<sup>916</sup>Samartha S. J. *The cross and the rainbow // The myth of Christian uniqueness*. – London: SCM Press, 1987. – P. 75.

<sup>917</sup>Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>918</sup>Ibid, p. 75-76.

<sup>919</sup>Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>920</sup>See Panikkar R. *The meaning of Christ’s name in the universal economy of salvation // Pathrapankal J. Service and salvation*. – Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1973. – P. 235-263; Carson, p. 44, 328.

<sup>921</sup>Noted in Carson, p. 149.

as “the living practice of the Christian community.”<sup>922</sup> Bellah suggests that Christianity speaks its own language, but the world of pluralism is a multilingual world, where one can learn the “language” of other faiths. At the same time, Christians should preserve the uniqueness of their faith so that they can make their contribution in interfaith dialog.<sup>923</sup>

### C. Evaluation of Religious Pluralism

We can begin by highlighting several positive aspects of religious pluralism. One must agree with Netland, that nearly every faith possesses some degree of truth, goodness and beauty.<sup>924</sup> Netland states, “We can think of the religions as displaying, in varying degrees, a rudimentary awareness of God’s reality through creation and general revelation.”<sup>925</sup> Similarly, Heim writes, “The adequacy of one’s own tradition is correlative with the ability to make room for what is valid in others.”<sup>926</sup> Corduan adds: “Even though other religions cannot bring about a person’s salvation, they are nonetheless still not totally devoid of any truths.”<sup>927</sup>

Netland and Corduan, though, qualify the above by saying that the presence of some truths in a religious system does not mean that the system, in its entirety, presents a picture of true religion.<sup>928</sup>

Another positive feature is the potential cooperation between followers of various faiths for resolving social problems and questions, although this item fits better as an example of cultural pluralism, than religious pluralism.<sup>929</sup> Finally, Newbigin reminds us that pluralism is likely a reactionary measure against the hostile relationship that sometimes exists between religions, and therefore calls us to walk in humility toward others.<sup>930</sup>

On the other hand, religious pluralism has many serious defects. First, pluralists claim that no one religion can proclaim the whole truth about God. Yet, if all religions are limited in their perception of God and His truth, then how can proponents of pluralism claim that their understanding of God is true and comprehensive? Are they not limited in their perspective as well? If their perception is limited, then why should we accept their system as the true approach to religion and consider other views incomplete?<sup>931</sup>

The claim that pluralism possess the “truth” about God is actually an unsubstantiated presupposition. Hick recommends a transfer from “self-centeredness” to “reality-centeredness, but can Hick precisely define what exactly reality is?<sup>932</sup> If so, where did he get this knowledge? Furthermore, if pluralism is correct in saying that God is so unfathomable that no one can know Him in essence, then how do pluralists know that God’s will is to save all people? Maybe God, in essence, is evil? Have not pluralists borrowed from Christianity the concepts of God’s love and mercy?<sup>933</sup>

---

<sup>922</sup>Bellah R. N. Christian faithfulness in a pluralist world // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 79.

<sup>923</sup>Ibid, p. 74-91.

<sup>924</sup>Knitter and Netland, p. 17-24.

<sup>925</sup>Netland, Encountering religious pluralism, p. 333.

<sup>926</sup>Heim, S. M. No other name: The gospel and true religions // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 80.

<sup>927</sup>Corduan, p. 195.

<sup>928</sup>Knitter and Netland, p. 17-24; also see Netland, Encountering religious pluralism, p. 334ff, and Corduan, p. 71-75.

<sup>929</sup>Knitter and Netland, p. 17-18.

<sup>930</sup>Newbigin, p. 10-12.

<sup>931</sup>Hick responds to this objection by saying that pluralists do not claim to have a “privileged position” in knowing the truth, but simply attempt to make sense of religious life as such. (Hick, A pluralistic view, p. 182-183). Still, can Hick guarantee that the pluralist’s solution to the religious question is superior to others?

<sup>932</sup>Copan P. Why the world is not religiously ambiguous: A critique of religious pluralism // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 145; Yandell, p. 167.

<sup>933</sup>Pinnock P. An inclusivist view // Gundry S.N. Okholm D. L. Phillips T. R. Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – P. 147.

Pluralism also underestimates God's ability to reveal Himself. The knowledge of God depends more on His ability to reveal Himself, than on people's ability to perceive His revelation. If we properly assess God's ability to reveal Himself, then it behooves us not to unite all religions, but seek that religion in which God has truly made Himself known.

Pluralists claim that a person's faith basically depends on the cultural milieu, in which he/she was raised. If that be so, does it not follow that pluralism itself simply a product of modern Western culture?<sup>934</sup> In addition, Erickson notes that Hick himself left his faith of origin – the Anglican Church. So then, one's mature faith is not always determined by one's cultural upbringing.<sup>935</sup>

Additionally, the fact that someone is born in a certain culture and raised in the faith of that culture does not automatically rule out the validity of other worldviews.<sup>936</sup> Since logical thinking is common to all humanity, a thinking person can reconsider his/her convictions in the light of arguments in favor of other views. A person, in fact, is born without predetermined presuppositions and can potentially be persuaded away from the faith he/she was initially convinced of in favor of another.<sup>937</sup> Carson adds the following thought: "Clearly the interpretive community, the nurturing community, the community of faith, plays an important role in an individual's understanding, but it is not necessarily a determinative or decisive role."<sup>938</sup>

Another factor weighing against pluralism is the fact that the basic doctrines of various religions sharply differ from one another. How can one conclude that they all testify of the same Supreme Being? How does combining various contradictory views about God aid us in knowing Him better?<sup>939</sup>

Pluralists often assume that one can judge the quality of religions based on certain criteria. Yet, what are these criteria based on? If all faiths are valid paths to God, then who has the right to judge that one is better than another? On what basis, for example, can one exclude occultism as a viable option for religious devotion?<sup>940</sup> The lack of concrete criteria for recognizing truth unavoidably leads the pluralist to mysticism, i.e. truth based on a subjective, inner feeling or awareness.<sup>941</sup> In chapter 1, we have already demonstrated mysticism's inadequacy as a system of knowledge. It cannot serve as a reliable foundation for faith.

We must also take into consideration that each faith has its own concept of salvation and its own understanding of how to attain it.<sup>942</sup> As Heim writes, "There is no way to the Buddhist end but the Buddhist way."<sup>943</sup> Accordingly, each religion can provide its devotees only with salvation as defined by that system.<sup>944</sup>

Moreover, Heim raises the question of "true religion."<sup>945</sup> If by the word "true," we mean: (1) internal logical consistency within the religious system, and (2) a degree of success in attaining the goals of that system, then any religion can claim to be "true." Yet, if "true" implies "corresponding to reality," then all religions cannot claim to be true, since they fundamentally differ from one another.

Furthermore, because of the substantial differences between religions, any attempt to unite them will unavoidably lead to compromise. As a result, each religion will lose its uniqueness and essentially cease to exist, at least in its traditional form. Copan shares this insight:

The pluralist makes ample exclusivist truth claims in support of religious pluralism, to the exclusion of traditional Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and other religionist truth claims.... Pluralism exceeds this by

---

<sup>934</sup>Nash, p. 96.

<sup>935</sup>Erickson, *How shall they be saved*, p. 101

<sup>936</sup>Copan, p. 158.

<sup>937</sup>Feinberg, p. 469.

<sup>938</sup>Carson, p. 126.

<sup>939</sup>Nash, p. 44.

<sup>940</sup>*Ibid*, p. 43.

<sup>941</sup>Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. *Handbook of Christian apologetics*. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – P. 356; Newbigin, p. 160.

<sup>942</sup>Stewart, p. 11; Yandell, p. 175-176; Heim, p. 80-81.

<sup>943</sup>Heim, p. 86.

<sup>944</sup>Knitter and Netland, p. 22.

<sup>945</sup>Heim, p. 79-80.

homogenizing (and thus distorting) traditional religious doctrines in order to accommodate its own perspective.<sup>946</sup>

Nash correctly notes that no religion is ready to allow such a minimizing and distortion of its faith: “It defies common sense to suppose that the people who uttered all the competing claims we find in the major religions believed they were doing anything other than truly describing the nature of reality.”<sup>947</sup> So then, the religion that results from the merging of all existing religions is, in fact, a new religion, which fundamentally differs from the faiths that preceded it and replaces them. Pluralism does not unite religions, but replaces them with a new religion – pluralism.

As far as Smith’s claim that “convictions” differ from “faith,” and that only the former is directed towards some object, Nash responds that personal faith is *based* on convictions and truth claims.<sup>948</sup> By the term “faith,” Smith is really talking about “trust.” Yet, trust also requires an object. As Netland states, a person will put their trust in something only when he/she is convinced on an intellectual level of its truthfulness.<sup>949</sup>

Newbigin develops this thought further.<sup>950</sup> It is true that genuine faith (i.e. “convictions”) are directed toward some object. However, we must also distinguish the “object of faith” from “fact.” The question is, “Does the object of our faith actually correspond to reality or not?” People may embrace different convictions and interpretations, but facts remain facts: “We are pluralists in respect to what we call beliefs but we are not pluralists in respect to what we call facts.”<sup>951</sup> This means that among people of varying convictions, someone has his/her facts right, and someone has his/her “facts” wrong.

Carson makes the insightful observation that pluralism does not result in religious liberty. The fact is that pluralism as a system is intolerant of those who claim that their faith is exclusively true: “If any religion claims that in some measure other religions are wrong, a line has been crossed and resentment is immediately stirred up.”<sup>952</sup> We are reminded of Newbigin’s comment: “As long as the Church is content to offer its beliefs modestly as simply one of the many brands available in the ideological supermarket, no offense is taken. But the affirmation that the truth revealed in the gospel ought to govern public life is offensive.”<sup>953</sup>

Carson continues this thought, explaining that true tolerance does not mean suppressing all competing views, but rather means that one can have “strong views yet remain committed to listening honestly to countervailing arguments.”<sup>954</sup> Feinberg adds that tolerance does not mean accepting views one does not actually believe in.<sup>955</sup> Even the term “tolerance” itself implies the presence of disagreement.<sup>956</sup>

So then, the tolerant individual shows respect for adherents of other religions on a personal level, but at the same time defends his/her own faith tradition.<sup>957</sup> Additionally, as Netland comments, disagreement over religious questions does not necessarily have to lead to violence between members of different faiths.<sup>958</sup>

Carson also feels that the formation of the World Parliament of Religions in no way confirms the validity of pluralism. The questions raised during these parliaments concern social and not religious issues. At the 1993 parliament, to every statement endorsed by it “any decent atheist could happily sign on.”<sup>959</sup> So then, if

---

<sup>946</sup>Copan, p. 141.

<sup>947</sup>Nash, p. 66.

<sup>948</sup>Ibid, p. 57, 63-64.

<sup>949</sup>Knitter and Netland, p. 20-21.

<sup>950</sup>Newbigin, p. 14-20.

<sup>951</sup>Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>952</sup>Carson, p. 32.

<sup>953</sup>Newbigin L. The gospel in a pluralist society. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Geneva: WCC, 1989. – P. 7.

<sup>954</sup>Carson, p. 35.

<sup>955</sup>Feinberg, p. 478.

<sup>956</sup>Clark, p. 199.

<sup>957</sup>Kreeft, p. 356.

<sup>958</sup>Knitter and Netland, p. 37.

<sup>959</sup>Carson, p. 30.

representatives of the world religions, assembled with the goal of promoting unity, cannot find enough common ground to engage in meaningful discussions about religious questions, then what hope is there of unifying all religions into one?

Concerning John Hick's claim that Christianity does not demonstrate higher moral living than other religions, such a claim can only be made by one who possesses the qualities of omnipresence and omniscience. Hick here makes a hollow claim that he is not able to substantiate, which he himself once admitted.<sup>960</sup>

As already argued above, the unified faith required by pluralism would essentially nullify the faiths it seeks to incorporate. This would be true for all religions, taken in their traditional sense. We will take biblical Christianity as a test case.

First, the biblical attitude toward other religions, in both Old and New Testaments, is consistently negative.<sup>961</sup> The apostle Paul, in fact, engaged in turning adherents of other religions "from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). Jesus called leaders of other faiths not "coworkers" or "brothers," but "thieves and robbers" (Jn 10:8). He claimed to be the exclusive path to God (Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Carson cites other New Testament passages in refutation of pluralism.<sup>962</sup> If someone preaches another gospel, "he is to be accursed" (Gal 1:8; also 2 Cor 11:4). The apostle John warned, "Many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn 4:1). In Acts 17, Paul preached to adherents of pluralism (more precisely, polytheism), seeking to turn them to Christ.

Carson concludes, "Once we recognize that the world in which the epistles were written was a world steeped in religious pluralism, the exclusive claims of the epistles take on an even starker hue."<sup>963</sup> Wells, who also acknowledges the presence of religious variety in the world of the apostles, confirms, "The first Christians knew that their faith was absolutely true, that it could brook no rivals, and so they sought no compromises."<sup>964</sup> Netland adds, "If the writers of the NT intended to put forward pluralistic views, they certainly had the resources to do so, and such pluralism would have been a very popular view in the first-century Mediterranean milieu."<sup>965</sup>

Another key passage concerns Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2), a God-fearing man, but still in need of the gospel of Christ to be saved. Peter did say that "the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34-35), but earlier the angel announced to Cornelius that Peter would speak "words to you by which you will be saved" (Acts 11:14). This means that the phrase "is welcome to Him" refers not to salvation without Christ, but to God's willingness to receive all who accept the gospel, whether Jew or Gentile.

The Old Testament likewise speaks against syncretism (pluralism). God forbade Israel to participate in pagan worship (see Isa 40:5-5; Josh 22:21ff; Deut 4; 6:13-19; 7:21-26; 13:6-8). Even if Old Testament commandments sometimes resemble the norms of the Ancient Near East, this can be explained by the influence of God's general revelation through nature and the human conscience.<sup>966</sup>

Carson comments on Hick's biblical citations in support of pluralism in the following way.<sup>967</sup> The absence of a mediator in the Parable of the Prodigal Son and the Lord's Prayer does not establish the biblical doctrine of salvation. Biblical doctrines are defined by the testimony of all Scripture, not just two passages in isolation.

We may touch on several other objections by pluralists. It is true that the kings of Israel were called God's sons. Nevertheless, when Jesus uses that term in relation to Himself, He means much more. In the third

---

<sup>960</sup>See Hick, *The Non-absoluteness of Christianity*, p. 24.

<sup>961</sup>See 2 Chr 13:9; Isa 20:3-6; 37:18-19; 40; Jer 2:11; 5:7; 16:20; Acts 19:26; 26:17-18; 1 Cor. 1:21; 8:6; 10:19-20; Gal 4:8; Col 1:13; 1 Thess 1:9; 2:16; 2 Thess 1:8.

<sup>962</sup>Carson, p. 273.

<sup>963</sup>Ibid, p. 272.

<sup>964</sup>Wells D. F. *No place for truth: Or whatever happened to evangelical theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993. – P. 104.

<sup>965</sup>Knitter and Netland, p. 47.

<sup>966</sup>Carson, p. 249-252.

<sup>967</sup>Ibid, p. 320-323.

volume of this series, chapter 9, we discuss Jesus' use of this term. Concerning the charge that the Early Church created a "glorified Christ," chapter 15 of this book deals with the historical reliability of the New Testament. More likely, pluralists, not the Early Church, have created their own version of Jesus.<sup>968</sup>

Copen comments that in order to become a pluralist, a Christian must "give up core Christian doctrines like Jesus' incarnation, saving uniqueness, and bodily resurrection."<sup>969</sup> Yet, how can we call the resulting faith "Christian?"<sup>970</sup>

Finally, Church history rejects pluralism. Early Christianity was birthed in a pluralistic milieu, but the Early Church recognized no other religion as valid. Pluralism thus runs contrary to the historical position of the Church in regards to other faith traditions. In addition, the Early Church was very careful to prevent the spread of heresy. Yet in pluralism, there is no heresy. All religious teaching is thought in some way to reflect the truth about God.

#### **D. Conclusions**

The need for defining true religion is clearly apparent. As Newbigin cautions, only in this way can we guard ourselves from the harmful influence of false faiths.<sup>971</sup> Yet, can religious pluralism really provide us with true religion, one that actually corresponds to reality and can lead to a genuine salvation?

In light of the fact that pluralism is based purely on presuppositions and assumptions and is unable to convincingly prove the thesis that all rival religions really speak of the same Supreme Being, we can with confidence reject pluralism's claim to truth.

In conclusion, it is advisable to show tolerance in the sense of respect and protection of rights for each person, independently of religious faith (that is, embrace cultural pluralism). Yet, at the same time, we must reject religious pluralism, which, in essence, is intolerant and compels worshippers of all religions to abandon their faiths and join a new movement – pluralism, which differs from them all.

#### **Resources Used:**

Bellah R. N. Christian faithfulness in a pluralist world // Burnham F. Postmodern theology. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989. – P. 74-91.

Carson D. A. The gagging of God: Christianity confronts pluralism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – 569 p.

Clark D. K., Geisler N. L. Apologetics in the new age: A Christian critique of pantheism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990. – 235 p.

Copan P. Why the world is not religiously ambiguous: A critique of religious pluralism // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 139-162.

Corduan W. A Tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – 239 p.

---

<sup>968</sup>Feinberg, p. 482-483.

<sup>969</sup>Copan, p. 155.

<sup>970</sup>Copan, p. 155.

<sup>971</sup>Newbigin, p. 162.

Erickson M. J. How shall they be saved? – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – 269 p.

\_\_\_\_\_. Postmodernizing the faith. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – 157 p.

Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it's true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. – 487 p.

Geisler N. L., Bocchino P. Unshakable foundations. – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2001.

Geivett R. D. Religious diversity and the futility of neutrality // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 181-200.

Heim S. M. No other name: The gospel and true religions // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 79-88.

Hick J. A pluralistic view // Gundry S.N., Okholm D. L., Phillips T. R. Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_. God has many names. – London: MacMillian Press, 1980.

\_\_\_\_\_. Is Christianity the only true religion, or one among other? // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 105-115.

\_\_\_\_\_. The non-absoluteness of Christianity // The myth of Christian uniqueness. London: SCM Press, 1987.

Knitter P. F., Netland H. A. Can only one religion be true? A Dialogue // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 17-51.

Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. Handbook of Christian apologetics. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – 400 p.

Mark L. E. The role of the Church in a pluralistic society. – Direction 12. Apr. 1983. P. 7-14.

Nash R. H. Is Jesus the only savior? – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – 175 p.

Netland H. Encountering religious pluralism: The challenge to Christian faith and mission. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2001. – 366 p.

Newbigin L. The gospel in a pluralist society. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Geneva: WCC, 1989. – 244 p.

Panikkar R. The meaning of Christ's name in the universal economy of salvation // Pathrapankal J. Service and salvation. – Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1973. – P. 235-263

Pinnock C. An inclusivist view // Gundry S.N., Okholm D. L., Phillips T. R. Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – P. 147.

Samartha S. J. The cross and the rainbow // The myth of Christian uniqueness. – London: SCM Press, 1987. – P. 69-88.

Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? Considering this question // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 1-14.

Wells D. F. No place for truth: Or whatever happened to evangelical theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993. – 318 p.

Yandell K. E. Has normative religious pluralism a rationale? // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 163-178.

~~~~~

wikipedia.org

Chapter 11: Under the Crescent Moon and Star

Recent generations have seen a number of celebrities embrace the faith proclaimed by the Prophet of Allah – Muhammad. Lew Alcindor became Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Cassius Clay became Muhammad Ali, and Cat (now Yusuf) Stevens wrote “Boy with a Moon and Star on His Head.” What attracted these famous figures, and many others, to choose this route to Ultimate Truth? Did they make the correct choice? Let us investigate the Muslim faith.

A. History of Islam

1. The Pre-history of Islam

The founder of Islam, Muhammad, was born in 570 AD to the Quraysh tribe in Mecca, which at that time was only a small settlement. Mecca was already famous, though, as a place of worship of the “Black Stone,” which was housed in a structure called the “Kabba.”⁹⁷²

Muhammad’s grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, was an important figure in Mecca. He was in charge of maintenance for the Kabba and provisions for worshipping pilgrims. According to legend, Abd al-Muttalib discovered the well (named “Zamzam”), which God opened for Agar and Ishmael (see Gen 21;19), and successfully repulsed an attack on Mecca by invaders from Yemen.⁹⁷³

The time before Muhammad is called the “Age of Ignorance.” Arabs at that time worshipped natural forces and idols of every kind. Every tribe claimed its own “patron-god.” The “patron-god” of Mecca was Allah, whose dwelling was the Kabba. Along with Allah, the inhabitants of Mecca revered other gods and goddesses, including the three daughters of Allah. Before his enlightenment, Muhammad himself worshipped idols (see Surah 93:6-8).⁹⁷⁴

Evidence exists that even before Islam appeared in Mecca, there was already movement toward monotheism. Notable in this regard is the teaching of Zayd ibn Amr (died 605 AD), who proclaimed faith in one God and rejected idol worship.⁹⁷⁵ A monastic order, the Hanifs, also rejected polytheism and preached faith in one God.⁹⁷⁶

2. The Birth of Islam

Muhammad was raised in humble circumstances by foster parents, who eventually evicted him. He then settled with his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, who taught him about worship at the Kabba. After his grandfather’s death, Muhammad lived with an uncle. Muhammad’s early years, then, were unremarkable, except for a legend that as a youth two angels visited him and “cleansed his heart.”⁹⁷⁷

At age 25, Muhammad married an affluent 40-year-old woman and subsequently managed her flocks. This gave him opportunity to spend time alone in prayer and reflection, which was already his custom since youth. He was dissatisfied with the polytheism that surrounded him and sought a better religious experience. Muhammad was likely acquainted with Judaism and Christianity, but failed to embrace either.

⁹⁷²Peters F. E. Muhammad and the origins of Islam. – New York, NY: State University of New York Press. – P. 1, 23-24.

⁹⁷³Peters, p. 78-79, 86-78; Payne R. The history of Islam. – New York, NY: Dorset Press, 1959. – P. 9.

⁹⁷⁴Peters, p. 105-112, 131.

⁹⁷⁵Ibid, p. 126-127.

⁹⁷⁶Peters, p. 126-127; Payne, p. 15.

⁹⁷⁷Payne, p. 10-15.

It is claimed that in the year 610, when Muhammad was 40 years old, during a time of prayerful reflection in a cave, he saw in a vision the angel Gabriel, who conveyed to him revelation from Allah, the only true God.⁹⁷⁸ The first Surah is often dated from this visitation.⁹⁷⁹

In the Name of Allah – the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. All praise is for Allah – Lord of all worlds. The Most Compassionate, Most Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help. Guide us along the Straight Path, the Path of those You have blessed – not those You are displeased with, or those who are astray.⁹⁸⁰

Reportedly, Muhammad initially expressed doubts that his experience was genuine, but, with the encouragement of his wife, he embraced it as from God.⁹⁸¹ After his initial vision, Muhammad claimed to receive subsequent visions in the cave, which concerned, in general, Allah's judgment.⁹⁸²

When Muhammad began preaching his revelations, the people of Mecca rejected them and launched a persecution against him, especially because he reproved them for idol worship and corruption. In the end, he was driven from Mecca to the city of Yathrib, whose inhabitants welcomed and received him. Having become chief of Yathrib, he renamed the city *Madīnat an-Nabī*, or the "City of the Prophet," now known as Medina. Muhammad's flight (now called *Hijrah*), took place in 622, which is the first year of the Islamic calendar.⁹⁸³

A sizeable community of Jews lived in Mecca, and Muhammad hoped to attract them to his movement by having his followers circumcised. Nonetheless, the Jews rejected his teaching resulting in many being evicted from Medina and others being killed.⁹⁸⁴ Peters reports the following: "At first Muhammad offered himself as a prophetic reformer to the Jews of Medina, and then, when they rejected him, turned his back on them and began to refashion 'Islam' as an *alternative* to Judaism."⁹⁸⁵

From Medina, Muhammad staged raids on caravans from Mecca and other places, often treating his victims mercilessly, not sparing any. Peters comments, "The Muslim community in Medina had become dependent on (or perhaps simply accustomed to) the booty from the Prophet's raids."⁹⁸⁶ Nigosian adds, "Subsequent and repeated attacks on unbelieving merchants yielded successes that were interpreted as divine victories."⁹⁸⁷

For many years, Muhammad warred with Mecca, basically to a standstill. In the year 630, Muhammad gathered an army of 10,000 troops to wage a massive assault on Mecca. Faced with certain defeat, the city surrendered. Remarkably, instead of seeking revenge, Muhammad forgave his enemies in Mecca. He proceeded to introduce reforms in the city, including removing from the Kabba the names and images of the various gods worshipped there, leaving intact only images of Jesus and Mary.⁹⁸⁸

After the victory over Mecca, other Arab tribes began acknowledging Muhammad as the prophet of Allah. Muhammad also conquered other Arab territories and tribes, compelling them to abandon idolatry and accept

⁹⁷⁸Halverson D. C. Islam / Halverson D. C. The compact guide to world religions. – Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1996. – P. 104; Hexham I. Understanding world religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. – P. 402; Braswell G. W. Understanding world religions. – Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. – P. 112.

⁹⁷⁹Hexham, p. 403.

⁹⁸⁰<https://quran.com/>

⁹⁸¹Shia Muslims, though, insist that Mohammed immediately accepted it (see Hexham, p. 403, 408).

⁹⁸²Payne, p. 15-17.

⁹⁸³Payne, p. 19, Hexham, p. 403; Halverson, p. 104; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medina>.

⁹⁸⁴Payne, p. 30; Geisler N. L., Saleeb A. Answering Islam: The crescent in light of the cross. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 81.

⁹⁸⁵Peters, p. 203.

⁹⁸⁶*Ibid*, p. 240. See also p. 202-203, 219-220.

⁹⁸⁷Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – P. 423.

⁹⁸⁸Halverson, p. 104; Peters, p. 191-199; Payne, p. 55.

Islam. In the end, all the Arab tribes converted to the faith of Muhammad.⁹⁸⁹ In 632, Muhammad died in Medina.

3. The Spread of Islam

After Muhammad's death, began the era of the "Rashidun Caliphs": Abu Bakr (632–634), Umar ibn al-Khattab (634–644), Uthman ibn Affan (644–656), and Ali ibn Abi Talib (656–661), the final three being assassinated by their enemies.⁹⁹⁰

Abu Bakr was a close friend and disciple of Muhammad, one of the first (if not the first) convert to Islam. Upon coming to power, he immediately engaged in suppressing rebellions among some Arab tribes. He also faced resistance from those vying for leadership in the movement. Abu Bakr directed the initial gathering of Muhammad's teachings. During his administration, the Muslims conquered Palestine. Historians characterize him as a modest and dedicated leader. Payne writes, "He was the greatest of the Caliphs, the most generous, the most devout, the most learned."⁹⁹¹ He died in 634.

Before departing this life, Abu Bakr appointed Umar ibn al-Khattab the next caliph. Umar was an ascetic, and Payne describes him as "calm, unyielding, demanding and receiving instant obedience, he sometimes gave way to ferocious bursts of temper."⁹⁹² During his administration, the Muslim Arabs seized Egypt, Jerusalem, Syria and Iraq. In addition, he evicted non-Muslims from Arabia and pressured non-Muslims in occupied lands to accept Islamic faith.⁹⁹³

Next, Uthman ibn Affan was chosen as caliph. A rift occurred, though, since the citizens of Medina preferred Ali ibn Abi Talib, the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad. Uthman reigned over the Islamic empire for 12 years. He is described as a cowardly figure, yet under his leadership the empire continued to expand. His most notable achievement was publishing the standard version of the Quran, after which he destroyed all previous versions of the *surahs* (life/teachings) of Muhammad.⁹⁹⁴

The last of the Rashidun Caliphs was Ali ibn Abi Talib, the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad. Many resisted his leadership, including Aisha, the favorite wife of Muhammad and daughter of Abu Bakr. On the other hand, the Persians greatly respected him, even more than Muhammad. Until this day, among the Muslims of Iran, he and the direct descendants of Muhammad hold pride of place (see "Shia Muslims" below).⁹⁹⁵

After Ali's demise, Mu'awiya I took the reigns as the leader of Islam. He made the monumental move of shifting the capital of the Muslim Empire from Mecca to Damascus and thereby became the founder of the Umayyad Caliphate, which headed Islam until the mid-eighth century. Mecca, together with Medina, revolted against Mu'awiya, but were defeated and the cities were sacked. This dynasty saw the construction of the famous Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the expansion of the Islamic empire from Spain to China.⁹⁹⁶

In 747, Abu Muslim, leader of the "Abbasids" in Persia, led a successful rebellion against the Umayyad Caliphate and established the Abbasid Caliphate, which dominated the Islamic world with the exception of Spain, which remained under Umayyad control for another 300 years. The Abbasid Caliphate fought against the European Crusaders and remained in power essentially until the Mongol invasion in the 13th century (in Egypt, until the 16th century). The Abbasid Caliphate centered their authority in Bagdad, and for the first time,

⁹⁸⁹Halverson, p. 104; Peters, p. 236-237; Payne, p. 58-59.

⁹⁹⁰<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashidun>.

⁹⁹¹Payne, p. 95. Also see Hexham, p. 408

⁹⁹²Payne, p. 95.

⁹⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁹⁴Nigosian, p. 425; Payne, p. 106-108.

⁹⁹⁵Payne, p. 110-116.

⁹⁹⁶Nigosian, p. 427; Payne, p. 126-133.

Arabs no longer led the movement, but Persians. Interestingly, the Mongol invasion resulted in the Mongols becoming Muslims as well.⁹⁹⁷

The Turks finally drove the Mongols out and subsequently established the Ottoman Empire, which lasted until the beginning of the 20th century. Outstanding among the Turkish sultans (later called “caliphs”) was Muhammad I, who showed great lenience toward Christians, established friendly relations with other nations, and showed honor to Mecca. Muhammad II, however, was a cruel tyrant, who conquered Constantinople (now Istanbul), and waged wars against European states.⁹⁹⁸

In 1924, upon the cessation of World War I, during which the Ottoman Empire suffered defeat, the Turkish government abolished the caliphate. Since that time, no caliph has ruled Islam. Turkey retains the right to re-establish the caliphate,⁹⁹⁹ but, as Kerr comments:

The *ijma* (i.e. “consensus”) of contemporary Sunni Islam seems to be that if the *Shari’a* (i.e. “Islamic Law”) is observed by the national governments of Muslim states, there is no need for the transnational office of caliph to be restored.¹⁰⁰⁰

After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, England and France partitioned the Middle East, and for a period of time, the Islamic world experienced colonization by non-Muslim governments. After World War II, though, the influence of Western Europe on the Middle East waned, and the Arab nations regained independence. From that time, in several Islamic states, Islamic law has been reinstated (such as in Iran), but some countries observe the separation of religion and state.¹⁰⁰¹

At the present time, Islam boasts just over 2 billion followers, which comprises nearly a quarter of the world’s population, occupying second place among world religions behind Christianity. It continues to grow and expand, especially in Europe. Most Muslims live in the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, and Indonesia.¹⁰⁰²

4. Final Items of Interest

The historical relationship between caliphs and Islamic scholars, i.e. *ulamas*, is worth noting. In the political sphere, the caliph always held sway, but it was less clear who had the authoritative voice in religious questions. The publication of the Quran eased tension some, since it directly declared the will of Allah.¹⁰⁰³ At the same time, concerning questions not addressed by the Quran, both the caliphs and the *ulamas* claimed prophetic authority. In the end, the *ulamas* prevailed, and to this day Islamic scholars are the official organ for determining Islamic Law.¹⁰⁰⁴

Finally, the Muslim attitude toward non-Muslims has varied. The strictest restrictions have historically been directed toward worshippers of idols. Toward Christians and Jews, however, Muslims have traditionally been more lenient.¹⁰⁰⁵

⁹⁹⁷Hexham, p. 410-411; Payne, p. 146-150, 222-224; Nigosian, p. 428; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbasid_Caliphate.

⁹⁹⁸Payne, p. 254-268.

⁹⁹⁹<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliph>

¹⁰⁰⁰Kerr D. The unity and variety in Islam // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 332.

¹⁰⁰¹Esposito J.L., Fasching D. J., Lewis T. World religions today. – New York, NY: Oxford, 2002. – P. 231ff.

¹⁰⁰²Halverson, p. 103; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam>.

¹⁰⁰³<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliph>

¹⁰⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁵Nigosian, p. 431; Payne, p. 97.

B. Branches of Islam

The followers of Muhammad are divided into several groups. We will briefly look at special features of each: the Sunni Muslims, the Shia Muslims, and a mystical movement within Islam called Sufism. Most Muslims are Sunni. Shia Muslims are found in Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Bahrain.¹⁰⁰⁶

1. Sunni and Shia Islam

The main difference between Sunni and Shia Muslims concerns the question of leadership. Sunni Muslims choose their leaders. Shia, however, recognize only the descendants of Muhammad, whom they call Imams.¹⁰⁰⁷ This means that Shia Islam rejects the legitimacy of the first three Rashidun Caliphs.¹⁰⁰⁸

The Shia believe that the first true Imam (or Caliph) was Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad. They feel that Muhammad appointed him head of his movement before his death. Although Ali was not a direct descendant of Muhammad, the second and third Imams, Hasan ibn Ali and Husayn ibn Ali, since they were children of Ali and Muhammad's daughter Fatimah, were true descendants.¹⁰⁰⁹

This hereditary line in Shia Islam continued to the twelfth Imam, who mysteriously disappeared in the ninth century at age 7. At present, Shia teachers, the ulamas and ayatollahs, serve as representatives of the "hidden" twelfth Imam, who is expected to return at the end of time under the name Mahdi.¹⁰¹⁰

Between these two branches, other significant differences exist. Sunni accept as authoritative both the Quran and the Sunnah (the words and deeds of Muhammad), as recorded in the Hadith (see below). They also accept as authoritative the corporate decisions of Islamic scholars (ulamas). Shia, on the other hand, accept the Quran, the Sunnah (but not from the Hadith), and the teachings of Imams, ulamas and ayatollahs. For the Shia, though, the authority of the Imams is absolute.¹⁰¹¹

Sunni and Shia also have different understandings of the relationship between religion and government. Sunni hold to the separation of religion and state, while Shia apply Islamic law (*Sharia*) to all aspects of life, including government.¹⁰¹²

Furthermore, Sunni believe Abu Bakr was Muhammad's first convert, while Shia ascribe that honor to Ali. Finally, Sunni feel that Muhammad doubted his first visitation from Gabriel, but Shia insist that he immediately accepted it.¹⁰¹³

2. Sufism

Sufism appeared in the eighth-ninth centuries as a reaction to legalism and ritualism in Islam. It encourages personal, mystical contact with Allah and unification with him. Curiously, Sufism, as all mystical movements, emphasizes God's imminence, which stands in sharp contrast with the picture of the transcendent

¹⁰⁰⁶https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia_Islam

¹⁰⁰⁷In Sunni Islam, the term "imam" refers not to a descendant of Mohammed, but to the leader of the local mosque (see Kerr, *The unity and variety in Islam*, p. 333; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imam>).

¹⁰⁰⁸Halverson, p. 104-105; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia_Islam.

¹⁰⁰⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹⁰Halverson, p. 104-105; Payne, p. 185-186.

¹⁰¹¹Halverson, p. 104-105; Arkoun, p. 69; Braswell, p. 114; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunnah>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayatollah>; Kerr, *The unity and variety in Islam*, p. 451.

¹⁰¹²Halverson, p. 104-105.

¹⁰¹³Hexham, p. 403, 408.

God presented in the Quran.¹⁰¹⁴ In regards to Islamic leadership, Sufis belong to either the Sunni or the Shia branches. Yet, in distinction from them, they seek mystical contact with Allah.¹⁰¹⁵

Follower of Sufism study under a master (called a *pir*), which resembles the relationship between a guru and his disciple. The *pir*, allegedly, has reached the final stage before unification with Allah.¹⁰¹⁶

In their mystical search for Allah, Sufis employ special techniques, like yoga and singing the 99 names of Allah. They also seek to develop “inner purity” through asceticism, meditation and personal discipline. Only a purified individual can unite with the holy Allah. The seeker may hasten his progress by practicing celibacy or joining a monastery. It is thought that Allah engages in this process as well, giving worshippers a type of grace (*haal*), which aids them in their spiritual progress.¹⁰¹⁷

The more renowned of the Islamic mystics include Al-Hallaj (9th-10th century), Bayazid (11th century), and Ibn Arabi (12th-13th century). The popularity of Al-Hallaj threatened the caliph so much, that the latter executed him. Some mystics travel to Mecca to meditate before the Kabba. Some claim to have attained unification with Allah. Reports exist of supernatural phenomena associated with them. Sufis are also famous for the Mevlevi, or the “whirling dervishes,” and their special worship dance.¹⁰¹⁸

Some commentators note the close ties between mystical movements in different religions. Mystics may actually have more in common with one another than with their host religion. Arkoun, for example, writes, “The ultimate purpose of mysticism is, first and foremost, a lived experience of an internal, unifying experience between believer and his or her personal God.”¹⁰¹⁹ Payne adds:

There is a meeting place of the spirit among the mystics. The Muhamadan mystic recognizes Jesus as his exemplar. The great Persian poet Jalalu’l-Din Rumi is brother to St. John of the Cross, and St. Teresa of Avila would have understood the words which fell so simply from the lips of the saintly Rabi’a al-Adawiyya.¹⁰²⁰

C. Beliefs of Islam

The word “Islam” means “submission,” which well characterizes the nature of this faith. The goal of Islam is subjection of the world to the rule of Allah and the moral renewal of society. In the words of British Muslim leader Jakub Zaki:

Islam seeks to bring about the rule of God on earth through the activities of his people, and these activities include military as well as cultural, intellectual, and every other legitimate activity of human life.¹⁰²¹

The teachings of Islam are traditionally divided into the following categories: God, Prophets, Angels, Scripture and the Last Day. We will follow this scheme as well.

1. God (Allah)

¹⁰¹⁴Davis R. Religions of India in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton: Princeton Press, 1999. – P. 38-40; Parshall, P. The cross and the crescent. – Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1989. – P. 155; Kerr, The unity and variety in Islam, p. 334; Nigosian, p. 452; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 298.

¹⁰¹⁵Davis, p. 38-40; Parshall, p. 155; Kerr, The unity and variety in Islam, p. 334; Nigosian, p. 452.

¹⁰¹⁶Geisler and Saleeb, p. 299.

¹⁰¹⁷Davis, p. 38-40; Kerr, The unity and variety in Islam, p. 335-336; Nigosian, p. 452-453.

¹⁰¹⁸Payne, p. 193-250.

¹⁰¹⁹Arkoun Mohammed. Rethinking Islam / trans. and ed. Robert D. Lee. – Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994. – P. 81.

¹⁰²⁰Payne, p. xii.

¹⁰²¹Taken from Hexham, p. 401.

Foundational to Islam is the doctrine of one God. His most prominent characteristic is His “oneness.” Particularly, the Quran specifies that he has no son: “It is not for Allah to take a son!” (Surah 19:35; also see 10:68).¹⁰²²

Allah has 99 names, which describe not so much his character, as his will and works. His primary name is Allah. The essence of his character is unknown. It is not as important to understand Allah, as it is to obey him. Muslims sometime use a string of beads to recite the names of Allah. It is said that he has yet another name, the 100th, but only mystics (sufis) know it.¹⁰²³

Allah is the “Originator of the heavens and the earth!” (Surah 2:117). He predetermines all things (Surah 54:51), even the eternal destiny of people (Surah 17:13). He directs activities on earth (Surah 35:2; 57:22). He is described as “Most Compassionate,” “Most Merciful,” “Most Holy,” “All-Perfect” (Surah 59:22-24). He is almighty, sovereign, all-wise, ever-present (Surah 57:1-6; 59:22-24). He is immanent, but does not dwell in people. Allah does not like “wrongdoers,” (Surah 3:140), the “deceitful, sinful” (Surah 4:107), or “disbelievers” (Surah 3:32).¹⁰²⁴ Allah possess total freedom. Accordingly, his actions proceed not so much from his nature, as from his will. Consequently, it is impossible to predict exactly how he will act in a given situation.¹⁰²⁵

In relation to people, Haneef feels that Allah behaves more like a Judge than a Heavenly Father: “God is not concerned with the human being, however, as the sole or necessarily the most important of His creations.”¹⁰²⁶ In a similar way, Payne, summarizing the witness of the Quran about Allah, states that he is “a stern and unrelenting God, suspicious of men, an all-knowing and all-powerful Arbiter, demanding the absolute submission of men and only occasionally tempering His justice with mercy.”¹⁰²⁷ In contrast to the above, Arkoun defends the position that Islam not only requires submission, but also reveals “a relationship of loving and grateful obedience between Creator and creature.”¹⁰²⁸

2. Prophets

Islam acknowledges 124,000 prophets from different people groups, twenty-five of which are mentioned in the Quran. The most honored are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. It is thought that Muhammad is now in heaven interceding before Allah. He is, of course, the most honored of all the prophets. The message of other prophets was intended for a certain people group at a certain time, but the message of Muhammad is for all. All of Allah’s prophets led sinless, or near sinless lives.¹⁰²⁹

Among the earlier prophets, Abraham receives the most attention.¹⁰³⁰ He is, in Peters’ words, “the central figure in the development of God’s relations with his human creation.”¹⁰³¹ Arkoun considers him the ideal Muslim, “who acts in loving obedience to God.”¹⁰³² It is thought that by focusing on Abraham, Muhammad was

¹⁰²²Исса Р. Мусульманский взгляд на Троицу в христианстве // Студенческий доклад. – Киев: Евангельская теологическая семинария, 2016; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 64.

¹⁰²³Geisler and Saleeb, p. 21, 32-33, 141; Kerr D. The worship of Islam // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 321; Parshall, p. 28.

¹⁰²⁴Рулёв В., Очереднюк Н., Гансери А., Аббасов Р., Граждари П. Ислам // Студенческий доклад. Матвеев Р. Ислам // Студенческий доклад. – Киев: Евангельская теологическая семинария, 2002; Haneef S. What everyone should know about Islam and Muslims. – Library of Islam, 1996. – P. 13-14; Parshall, p. 25, 98-99; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 29, 136.

¹⁰²⁵Geisler and Saleeb, p. 28.

¹⁰²⁶Haneef, p. 15.

¹⁰²⁷Payne, p. 71.

¹⁰²⁸Arkoun, p. 15.

¹⁰²⁹Haneef, p. 20; Peters, p. 267; Halverson, p. 106; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 46, 56; Parshall, p. 176-179.

¹⁰³⁰Payne, p. 71.

¹⁰³¹Peters, p. 2.

¹⁰³²Arkoun, p. 15.

able to distinguish his movement from Judaism and Christianity: “Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian; he submitted in all uprightness and was not a polytheist” (Surah 3:67).¹⁰³³

The Quran reports that Abraham and his son Ishmael constructed the Kabba in Mecca (Surah 2:124-127). Supposedly, Abraham did the first circuit (*tawaf*) around the Kabba. Muslims also believe that the Black Stone, imbedded in the wall of the Kabba, came from the Garden of Eden, or from heaven via Gabriel.¹⁰³⁴

In distinction from Judeo-Christian faith, Muslims consider Ishmael, not Isaac, the heir and favorite son of Abraham. Moreover, Abraham “offered in sacrifice” not Isaac, but Ishmael.¹⁰³⁵ Arabs consider themselves descendants of Ishmael and, accordingly, heirs of God’s covenant with Abraham.

A problem arises, though, in that the ruling Arab tribe at the time of Muhammad, the Quraysh, apparently does not trace its descendancy from Ishmael, and they settled in Mecca not from Abraham’s time, but only a short time before Muhammad. Defenders of Islam respond that Ishmael’s descendants intermarried with the Quraysh, and, in this way, Arabs joined the hereditary line of Ishmael.¹⁰³⁶ It is also suggested that the Quraysh had lived in Mecca at an earlier time and, before their return there, local inhabitants inserted pagan elements into worship at the Kabba.¹⁰³⁷

Scholars dispute when exactly Muhammad first encountered Christianity. Since both synagogues and churches existed in Arabia at that time, one might assume he was acquainted with both of these faiths from his early years. Others contend that since Muhammad could not read or write, he had no acquaintance with the Judeo-Christian Scriptures and that he had no contact with Christians until the capture of Mecca.¹⁰³⁸

The Quran devotes a substantial amount of attention to the person of Jesus. He is mentioned in 93 *ayahs* (verses). He is called “the Messiah... the fulfilment of His Word through Mary and a spirit created by a command from Him” (Surah 4:171), and a “sign for humanity and a mercy from Us” (Surah 19:21). The Quran acknowledges his virgin birth (Surah 3:45-51; 19:19-21) and his miracle ministry (Surah 5:110).¹⁰³⁹

Nevertheless, Muhammad rejected most of the basic doctrines of Christianity. For him, Jesus was not God’s Son (Surah 19:34-35, 88-93; 4:171), but only a great prophet (Surah 2:136; 3:84-85), i.e. Allah’s messenger (Surah 4:171-172; 5:17-19). In addition, Muhammad opposed the teaching of the Trinity: “So believe in Allah and His messengers and do not say, ‘Trinity.’ Stop! – for your own good. Allah is only One God” (Surah 4:171).¹⁰⁴⁰

Muhammad taught that Jesus did not die on the cross. Some Muslims believe that Allah exchanged him with another person, maybe Judas Iscariot. Jesus, however, was taken up to heaven (Surah 4:157-158), from whence, according to many Muslims, he will return. In their accounts of Jesus’ life, the New Testament and the Quran diverge in other ways as well. Muslims explain these discrepancies by saying that the Early Church exaggerated certain details of Jesus’ life in order to attract Gentiles to the faith. So then, Islam rejects the full historical veracity of the New Testament.¹⁰⁴¹

Still other passages from the Quran speak positively about Jesus and the Gospel:¹⁰⁴²

¹⁰³³Geisler and Saleeb, p. 56

¹⁰³⁴Peters, p. 3-13.

¹⁰³⁵Braswell, p. 122.

¹⁰³⁶Josephus shared this opinion (see Peters, p. 120).

¹⁰³⁷Peters, p. 1-7.

¹⁰³⁸Peters, p. 141; Watt M. Islam: The Way of the Prophet // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 311-312; Wilsom, The Qur’an // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 319.

¹⁰³⁹Halverson, p. 108; Рулёв и другие; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 63, 67.

¹⁰⁴⁰Коран. Перевод смыслов: Э. Р. Кулиев. – Режим доступа: <http://xn----8sbemuhsaeiwd9h5a9P.xn--p1ai/smyslovoj-perevod-kulieva-sury-1-po-20.html#topofthepage>; taken from Исса Р.

¹⁰⁴¹Haneef, p. 198-206; Payne, p. 83.

¹⁰⁴²Also see Surah 2:136; 3:3-4; 4:163; 5:68, 69, 110; 10:94; 19:34.

Then in the footsteps of the prophets, We sent Jesus, son of Mary, confirming the Torah revealed before him. And We gave him the Gospel containing guidance and light and confirming what was revealed in the Torah – a guide and a lesson to the God-fearing (Surah 5:46).

Do not argue with the People of the Book unless gracefully, except with those of them who act wrongfully. And say, “We believe in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to you. Our God and your God is only One. And to Him we fully submit” (Surah 29:46).

However, some feel that after Christians rejected Islam, Muhammad’s attitude toward them hardened, as reflected in the following *ayahs*:

Fight those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day, nor comply with what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor embrace the religion of truth from among those who were given the Scripture, until they pay the tax, willingly submitting, fully humbled. The Jews say, “Ezra is the son of Allah,” while the Christians say, “The Messiah is the son of Allah.” Such are their baseless assertions, only parroting the words of earlier disbelievers. May Allah condemn them! How can they be deluded from the truth? (Surah 9:29-30).

3. Angels

According to Islamic doctrine, Allah created angels from light, and they exist to worship and serve him. They also guard Allah’s faithful followers and bring them messages from him. Since angels lack free will, they carry out Allah’s bidding without fail.¹⁰⁴³

Angels are arranged in a hierarchy with four at the head: Gabriel, Michael, Israfil and Azrael, the chief among them being Gabriel. There are also scribal angels, who record the good and bad deeds of each person in preparation for Judgement Day (Surah 82:10-12).¹⁰⁴⁴

The lowest class of angels are the jinn (or “genies”), some of whom are good, and others – evil. They are especially active at night and may manifest as cats, dogs or snakes. Certain groups are especially susceptible to their influence: newlyweds, infants and their mothers, and those easily frightened. It is thought that jinn can cause disease or even possess an individual. One may appease them by a food offering, or ward them off with light, powder or reading the Quran.¹⁰⁴⁵

Islam recognizes the existence of Satan (called Iblis), who was cast out of heaven, tempted Adam and Eve, is the incarnation of evil, and directs hell. He sinned in that he failed to honor Adam (Surah 7:12–18). Muslims practice exorcism of demons.¹⁰⁴⁶

4. Scripture

a. Quran

The most sacred book of Islam is, of course, the Quran. It is thought that it contains revelations received by Muhammad over the course of 22-23 years,¹⁰⁴⁷ and that he dictated these revelations to his disciples, who recorded them. Since Muhammad could not read or write, Muslims believe that Muhammad contributed

¹⁰⁴³Haneef, p. 16.

¹⁰⁴⁴Halverson, p. 106; Nigosian, p. 442; Payne, p. 74-75; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 37.

¹⁰⁴⁵Halverson, p. 106; Nigosian, p. 442; Van Rhee, p. 257-258.

¹⁰⁴⁶Van Rhee, p. 265; Braswell, p. 119; Parshall, p. 169; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 39, 43.

¹⁰⁴⁷Parshall, p. 45; Peters, p. 258.

nothing to the composition of the book, but simply conveyed verbatim what he received from Allah.¹⁰⁴⁸ Wilsom relates the conviction that the Qumran “is seen as... a faithful reproduction of an original engraved on a tablet in heaven which has existed from all eternity.”¹⁰⁴⁹

Muslims, therefore, consider the Quran to be the faultless revelation of Allah’s will and his final word. Unlike previous generations, to whom Allah sent earlier prophets, the people of Muhammad’s time were sufficiently mature to receive Allah’s revelation in all its fullness. This means that in the future a work comparable to the Quran will never appear.¹⁰⁵⁰

As noted above, Abu Bakr, Muhammad’s chief disciple, began the process of gathering the documents that eventually became the Quran. The third of the Rashidun Caliphs, Uthman ibn Affan, commissioned Muhammad’s secretary, Zayd bin Thabit, to compose a standard version of the Quran, called the *Mus’haf*. He then destroyed all previous versions of the Quran that were in use at that time.¹⁰⁵¹

In its organization of material, the Quran does not follow a chronological order. Nonetheless, Islamic scholars are able to distinguish surahs written in Mecca from those written in Medina. The Quran sequences surahs by length – the longest to the shortest, with the exception of the first surah. It is imperative to write and read the Quran in Arabic. Translations exist, but they no longer possess the quality of full inspiration.¹⁰⁵²

Muslims are encouraged to read the Quran. In school, children learn *ayahs* (verses) by heart. Those who memorize the entire Quran earn a place of special honor and receive the title *hafiz*.¹⁰⁵³

At times, the Quran is used in a more magical way. Some use the Quran as a fetish, that is, the physical book itself and its pages are considered holy and protect those who carry it. Corduan relates the Muslim conviction that it “mediates God’s presence into their lives.”¹⁰⁵⁴ The Quran is thought to contain much *baraka* (see below). Some open the Quran to a random passage and receive what is written there as a personal word from Allah. Finally, some dissolve the words of the Quran into a liquid and administer it as medicine.¹⁰⁵⁵

b. Other Writings

Ibn Ishaq (704-767) composed the initial biography of Muhammad, *Life of the Messenger of Allah*, but some question its reliability.¹⁰⁵⁶ The Hadith, composed in the ninth century, is a more respected version of his word and deeds (that is, the *sunnah* of Muhammad). Although Muslims consider the Hadith authoritative, it does not share the same level of inspiration as the Quran. Its teachings are not on the level of commandments, but rather on the level of advice and examples. As was mentioned earlier, Shia and Sunni Muslims prefer different sources for the *sunnah* of Muhammad. The Sunni give preference to the Hadith.¹⁰⁵⁷

Islam recognizes the following as Allah’s Word as well: from the Old Testament – the Pentateuch (*Tawrat*) and the Psalter (*Zabur*); from the New Testament – the Gospels (*Ingil*). Muslims accept these books because of their connection with recognized prophets (Moses, David, Jesus).¹⁰⁵⁸ According to the Quran:

He has revealed to you ‘O Prophet’ the Book in truth, confirming what came before it, as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel previously, as a guide for people... (Surah 3:3-4).

¹⁰⁴⁸Parshall, p. 43; Haneef, p. 21.

¹⁰⁴⁹Wilsom, p. 319.

¹⁰⁵⁰Haneef, p. 28.

¹⁰⁵¹Arkoun, p. 35; Parshall, 52; Hexham, p. 408; Peters, p. 257; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 93.

¹⁰⁵²Parshall, p. 45; Peters, p. 258; Nigosian, p. 440-441.

¹⁰⁵³Parshall, p. 52; Wilsom, p. 319

¹⁰⁵⁴Corduan W. A Tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – P. 62-63.

¹⁰⁵⁵Van Rhee G. Communicating Christ in animistic contexts. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – P. 201; Parshall, p. 50-51.

¹⁰⁵⁶Arkoun, p. 43; Peters, p. 145.

¹⁰⁵⁷Corduan, p. 61-62; Hexham, p. 60; Arkoun, p. 45-46; Haneef, p. 151.

¹⁰⁵⁸Also see Surah 10:94.

Say, O Prophet, “O People of the Book! You have nothing to stand on unless you observe the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to you from your Lord” (Surah 5:68; also see 5:66).¹⁰⁵⁹

Indeed, We have sent revelation to you O Prophet as We sent revelation to Noah and the prophets after him. We also sent revelation to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and his descendants, as well as Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon. And to David We gave the Psalms (Surah 4:163).

Over time, though, Muslims considered that the Torah and Gospels were altered and no longer present an accurate account of God’s nature or his plan. At first, it was thought that the Judeo-Christian scriptures were simply misinterpreted (see Surah 2:40-42, 78; 3:71, 78; 4:46-47). Later, Muslims came to believe that these scriptures were intentionally changed.¹⁰⁶⁰ The Islamic apologist Ajjola wrote:

The first five books of the Old Testament do not constitute the original Torah, but parts of the Torah have been mingled up with other narratives written by human beings and the original guidance of the Lord is lost in that quagmire. Similarly, the four Gospels of Christ are not the original Gospels as they came from Prophet Jesus... The fact is that the original Word of God is preserved neither with the Jews nor with the Christians.¹⁰⁶¹

Therefore, the purest and most reliable source of truth is the Quran. Only the Quran gives the proper interpretation of the Torah and the Gospels.¹⁰⁶²

Beside sacred scripture, Muslims observe “Islamic Law” (*Shari’a*), which defines a person’s behavior in all spheres of life. Several sources contribute to the formation of *Shari’a*: the Quran, the Sunnah, *ijma* (the consensus of the Islamic community and its scholars), and finally *qiyas* and *’aql* (analogical and dialectic reflections). Kerr qualifies that the *ijma*, for all practical purposes, is the consensus of scholars, not the entire Islamic community.¹⁰⁶³

There are five categories of law: commandments, recommendations, matters of indifference, matters discouraged, and matters forbidden. There are different schools of interpretation and application of Islamic Law as well. In some Muslim states, Islamic Law concerns only personal behavior, but in others, it dictates societal norms as well.¹⁰⁶⁴

5. The Last Day

In this section, we will learn not only the Islamic view of eschatology, but also its view of man, sin and salvation in general. Allah created humans to serve and worship him. The idea of “Lord to servant” best describes the relation between Allah and humanity. The goal of humanity is not to be like Allah, but to submit to his will.¹⁰⁶⁵

Muslims reject the doctrine that people have a sinful nature. When Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, they inherited not depravity, but “forgetfulness.” This means that people are not sinful by

¹⁰⁵⁹Noted in Брюхина Е. Коран – утверждения, ошибки и противоречия // Студенческий доклад. – Киев: Евангельская теологическая семинария, 2014.

¹⁰⁶⁰Geisler and Saleeb, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶¹Ajjola Alhaj A. D. The essence of faith in Islam. – Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, Ltd., 1978. – P. 60; Taken from Geisler and Saleeb, p. 60.

¹⁰⁶²Braswell, p. 111; Halverson, p. 108.

¹⁰⁶³Kerr, The unity and variety in Islam, p. 332; Anderson N. Islamic law // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 326-328; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulama>.

¹⁰⁶⁴Anderson, p. 326-328.

¹⁰⁶⁵Geisler and Saleeb, p. 48-49.

nature, but simply forget to act properly. Therefore, people do not need deliverance from the power of sin, but simply reminders of Allah's laws. Through knowledge of the law and personal discipline, a person can restrain their sinful impulses and submit to Allah.¹⁰⁶⁶

The most serious sin (even unpardonable) is *shirk*, which is associating anyone or anything with Allah as Deity. In Surah 4:116 we read, "Surely Allah does not forgive associating others with Him in worship, but forgives anything else of whoever He wills. Indeed, whoever associates others with Allah has clearly gone far astray." Muslims accuse Christians of doing just that, by ascribing deity to Jesus.¹⁰⁶⁷

Although Allah predestines all things, people are still responsible for their sins. Allah offers forgiveness of sins, but does not require a substitutionary sacrifice. He forgives sin out of his mercy in response to repentance, without need for any recompense or satisfaction.¹⁰⁶⁸

The Quran devotes much attention to the afterlife. The Judgement takes into consideration both the deeds of people and the motives behind them. Good deeds must outweigh bad ones. Those receiving a positive verdict at the Judgment enter Paradise – a place of pleasure for faithful Muslims (Surah 43:68-73; 98:7-8; 13:35). Muhammad's intercession can tip the scales in favor of those under judgement, as can Allah himself as an act of grace.¹⁰⁶⁹

Those failing to pass the Judgement are assigned to hell – a place of fire and torment (Surah 37:64-68; 55:54; 46:34; 43:74-76). It is felt that those whose sins were not committed brashly may serve only a temporary sentence. This may apply, at the least, to disobedient Muslims.¹⁰⁷⁰

Those who perish in *jihad*, i.e. "holy war," have guaranteed access to Paradise (Surah 3:157-158). It is possible that this promise is an extension of a similar guarantee given by Muhammad to his troops before the battle against Mecca at Badr.¹⁰⁷¹

In the last days, Muslims expect a period of ungodliness on the earth headed by Antichrist. A future deliverer from Allah will appear and punish the wicked, slay Antichrist, and establish the Allah's rule on the earth. Sunni Muslims expect this great deliverer to be Jesus Christ. Shia Muslims assign the role to Mahdi, the return of the "hidden" twelfth Imam. Some say both will participate in these events. Several imposters have already appeared, claiming to be the promised Mahdi.¹⁰⁷²

Finally, Islamic eschatology includes the teaching of earth's destruction and the resurrection of the dead before the Judgment (Surah 84:1-19; 80:33-42). Nothing is written in the Quran, however, of an incorporeal state after death. Some feel that the souls of the departed simply "sleep" until the resurrection.¹⁰⁷³

D. Religious Life and Practice in Islam

The cornerstone of Islamic devotional life is the so-called "Five Pillars of Islam": the creed, prayer, alms, fasting and pilgrimage.¹⁰⁷⁴

1. Islamic Creed of Faith (*Shahada*)

¹⁰⁶⁶Halverson, p. 106-108; Corduan, p. 108-109.

¹⁰⁶⁷Коран. Перевод смыслов: Э. Р. Кулиев. – Режим доступа: <http://xn----8sbemuhsaeiwd9h5a9P.xn--p1ai/smyslovoj-perevod-kulieva-sury-1-po-20.html#topofthepage>. Taken from Иссы, Р. Also see Geisler and Saleeb, p. 20, 62, 129.

¹⁰⁶⁸Haneef, p. 206; Corduan, p. 108-109; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 49.

¹⁰⁶⁹Braswell, p. 116; Corduan, p. 91; Nigosian, p. 443-444; Haneef, p. 41-44; Payne, c, 75-76; Halverson, p. 106; Parshall, p. 190, 196; Peters, p. 213; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 119-120, 127-128.

¹⁰⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁰⁷¹Ibid.

¹⁰⁷²Corduan, p. 183-185; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 114-117.

¹⁰⁷³Haneef, p. 41-42; Parshall, p. 189-190.

¹⁰⁷⁴Halverson, p. 106-107.

The Islamic creed emphasizes the unity of Allah and mediation of Muhammad. When someone converts to Islam he/she confesses: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.”¹⁰⁷⁵ This creed is a combination of Surah 2:163 and Surah 48:29.¹⁰⁷⁶

2. Prayer (*Salah*)

Muslims beyond the age of 10 are required to pray as least five times a day: at sunrise, at noon, in the afternoon, at sunset and before sleep. One may be excused from prayer for reasons of illness, travel or engagement in battle, yet one must make up the missed prayer time at a later date.¹⁰⁷⁷

Before prayer, the devotee washes face and hands. One is forbidden to pray knelling on the ground, but only on some covering. Shoes are removed. Prayer is directed to the Kaaba in Mecca and is accompanied by bowing. Prayer consist of reading *ayahs* (verses) from the Quran that express worship, devotion or submission to Allah. Prayer may also include personal requests. Muslims do not ask as much for deliverance from troubles, as for Allah’s will to be done. They know that Allah predetermines all that happens, even calamities.¹⁰⁷⁸

In addition, Allah’s name is invoked before meals and before sexual activity: “In the Name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate.”¹⁰⁷⁹ Along with the prescribed times of prayer, the Quran invites the Muslim to continually think of Allah and reflect on him (Surah 3:191; 8:45).¹⁰⁸⁰

3. Alms (*Zakat*)

The consecrated Muslim contributes 1/40 of his income to the poor and in support of the mosque. “Income” means only that which exceeds necessary expenses.¹⁰⁸¹

4. Fasting (*Sawm*)

Islam observes a special period of fasting every day during the month of Ramadan, which extends from sunrise to sunset. Some, though, may be excused: the ill, travelers, pregnant and nursing women, the elderly and the mentally ill.¹⁰⁸²

Ramadan is especially set apart due to the claim that in that month Muhammad received his first revelation, specifically on the 27th of the month. This is called the “Qadr Night,” or the “Night of Power.” Those Muslims who cannot celebrate the Qadr Night in Mecca do so in their local mosque, praying and reading from the Quran. The last day of the fast is a festive day (*Eid al-Fitr*). During the entire month, one must read the Quran entirely or hear it read.¹⁰⁸³

5. Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)

All Muslims must visit the holy city of Mecca once in a lifetime. This pilgrimage is call the *Hajj*. Those who accomplish it receive a title of honor – *Al-Hajji*. The “Great Pilgrimage” (*Hajj*) is scheduled from the 8th to the

¹⁰⁷⁵<https://thequrancourses.com/our-blog/shahada>

¹⁰⁷⁶Parshall, p. 25.

¹⁰⁷⁷Haneef, p. 54, 141.

¹⁰⁷⁸Hexham, p. 444-445; Parshall, p. 28; Haneef, p. 52-53, 88-89.

¹⁰⁷⁹Parshall, p. 28.

¹⁰⁸⁰Parshall, p. 26; Haneef, p. 74-75

¹⁰⁸¹Haneef, p. 58, 148.

¹⁰⁸²Ibid, p. 58, 146.

¹⁰⁸³Payne, p. 4, 78; Parshall, p. 44; Haneef, p. 58, 146, 149.

12th day of the twelfth lunar month of the Islamic calendar. If a pilgrim accomplishes the feat at a different time, it is called the “Lesser Pilgrimage” or *Umrah*.¹⁰⁸⁴

The pilgrims arrive in Mecca and, clothed in white attire (*ihram*), circle the Kabba seven times (*tawaf*), kissing or touching the Black Stone, if possible. In addition, pilgrims travel between two neighboring mountains – Safa and Marwa. This is done in remembrance of Agar seeking water for herself and Ishmael, supposedly, at this place (Gen 21:14). Pilgrims may also drink from the well *Zamzam*, which Allah supposedly opened for Agar and her son.¹⁰⁸⁵

The second half of day 2 is spend in prayer and repentance before Mount Arafat, where the pilgrims “stand before Allah.” On day 3, the participants gather stones to cast at a stone pillar (or wall) that represents Satan. Next is the sacrifice of a lamb in remembrance of the “sacrifice” of Ishmael by Abraham. At the very same time, Muslims across the world celebrate the same event, called *Eid al-Adha*. After the sacrifice, male pilgrims in Mecca shave their heads.¹⁰⁸⁶

The pilgrims spend the final days of the *Hajj* in the village of Mina and continue observing rituals. Often pilgrims also visit the grave of Muhammad in Medina.¹⁰⁸⁷

6. Other Practices

a. The Mosque and the Islamic Community

Islam lacks a priesthood or clergy that fulfills a mediatorial function. As Arkoun explains, “Each believer enters into a direct relationship with God.”¹⁰⁸⁸ Nonetheless, Islam does have a class of scholars, the *ulamas*.¹⁰⁸⁹ Also, every mosque has local leadership.

The mosque is the place of prayer and worship. At noon, the call to prayer sounds from the mosque. Each Friday, men gather at the mosque for prayer and preaching. Possibly, this practice derives from similar weekly meetings Muhammad held with his disciples.¹⁰⁹⁰

The mosque serves as the center of the Muslim’s social life. The Islamic community is called the *ummah*. Nigosian comments, “The Islamic community is at once a political and religious community... All of life is sacred and must conform to the larger whole – the identity of the Islamic faith.”¹⁰⁹¹

b. Family and Home Life

In the traditional Islamic family, the husband is the breadwinner, and the wife cares for the home. Parents arrange marriages for their children – the intended partners might not even be acquainted with each other. Contact between men and women outside the context of marriage is strictly limited.¹⁰⁹²

Men may have up to four wives, but a wife is allowed only one husband. Men may marry non-Muslims, but women may not. Adultery is forbidden, but divorce is allowed. A unique, but not universally accepted practice, is *nikah mut’ah*, that is, “temporary marriage,” which may last only one day.¹⁰⁹³

¹⁰⁸⁴Braswell, p. 120; Haneef, p. 64-70; Kerr, *The worship of Islam*, p. 323; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hajj>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umrah>.

¹⁰⁸⁵Braswell, p. 120; Haneef, p. 64-70; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hajj>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zamzam_Well

¹⁰⁸⁶<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hajj>; Nigosian, p. 435-436.

¹⁰⁸⁷Braswell, p. 120; Haneef, p. 64-70; Nigosian, p. 435-436.

¹⁰⁸⁸Arkoun, p. 66.

¹⁰⁸⁹Haneef, p. 104.

¹⁰⁹⁰Braswell, p. 120-126; Peters, p. 182; Hexham, p. 444.

¹⁰⁹¹Nigosian, p. 418.

¹⁰⁹²Haneef, p. 113-117, 153-171.

¹⁰⁹³Nigosian, p. 436, 453; Parshall, p. 169.

Finally, some dietary restrictions exist. In particular, Muslims many not consume blood or pork. Alcohol and narcotics are also forbidden.¹⁰⁹⁴

c. Personal Behavior

Besides observing the Five Pillars of Islam, Muslim must also develop good personal character. They should be sincere, honest, responsible, kind, modest, generous and considerate. They must strive to attain *jihad bil nafs*, i.e. improvement of character, and also to attain *jihad fi sabeel*, i.e. elimination of injustice. They are to lend money without interest. They should not discriminate those of other faith, or force them to convert to Islam. Occultism is forbidden. They must not entertain doubts about their faith or allow others to challenge it.¹⁰⁹⁵

Islamic culture demands exemplary behavior in all spheres of life. Schimmel comments, "Wherever one may be, one knows how to behave when entering a house, which formulas of greeting to employ, what to avoid in good company, how to eat, and how to travel. For centuries Muslim children have been brought up in these ways."¹⁰⁹⁶

However, not all Muslims live by these principles. Some are sincere in their devotion, while others are nominal Muslims or Muslims by tradition only.¹⁰⁹⁷

d. Baraka

Islamic faith includes a concept called *baraka*, which is an impersonal, spiritual force. Van Rheezen describes it as follows: *Baraka* is "divine blessing, grace and mercy... protection from danger and trouble, charisma for leadership, and power to protect and heal."¹⁰⁹⁸ Orthodox Muslims believe that *baraka* comes as a blessing from Allah, but that one cannot transfer it to others. In popular Islam, *baraka* is a magical power, which one can transfer to others.¹⁰⁹⁹

Muslims also believe that one may "accumulate" *baraka* for oneself by observing the Five Pillars of Islam, including the pilgrimage to Mecca and touching the Kabba. Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, recognizes "*pirs*," who are spiritual leaders possessing much *baraka*, received directly from Allah.¹¹⁰⁰

e. Jihad

Literally, the term *jihad* means "zeal for God." It describes a zeal to do the will of Allah. It can manifest in various ways: a struggle against sin, efforts to convert others to Islamic faith, or war in defense of Islam.

Some Muslims reject the suggestion that *jihad* includes "holy war" at all, while others freely acknowledge this. The following comments by Nigosian reflect the inconsistency that exists about this question. On the one hand, he writes, "The object of *jihad* is not so much the conversion of individuals to Islam as the gaining of political control over societies, in order to govern them in accordance with the principles of Islam."¹¹⁰¹ On the other hand, he states, "*Jihad* is no longer thought of as an offensive engagement for expansion, but as a defensive reaction against liberalism, modernism and Westernization."¹¹⁰²

¹⁰⁹⁴Haneef, p. 101, 108; Parshall, p. 169.

¹⁰⁹⁵Haneef, p. 90-91; 122-130; Parshall, p. 26.

¹⁰⁹⁶Schimmel, A. And Muhammad is His messenger. – Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985 – P. 31. Taken from Geisler and Saleeb, p. 84.

¹⁰⁹⁷Haneef, p. 129ff.

¹⁰⁹⁸Van Rheezen, p. 199.

¹⁰⁹⁹Ibid, p. 199ff.

¹¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹¹⁰¹Nigosian, p. 448.

¹¹⁰²Ibid.

Afia Tabbarah investigates the concept of *jihad* in more detail.¹¹⁰³ In his opinion, war can be a positive development in world events, even a “social necessity.” He sees the record of history testifying to a lack of progress among nations not experiencing war.¹¹⁰⁴ He finds confirmation of his view in the philosophy of Hegel, in that a contrary force must act on the status quo to produce a synthesis, that is, a new and better result.¹¹⁰⁵

Accordingly, wars for Islamic expansion were necessary to promote religious and social development.¹¹⁰⁶ The Old Testament conflicts, he feels, accomplished the same goal. Citing Surah 2:244; 4:74-75; and 22:78. Tabbarah states, “The Islamic nation is commanded to establish justice on earth, and... establish the Word of God on earth without doubtful intentions. The cause of God is the cause of justice... the Qur’an demands believers to fight in the cause of God.”¹¹⁰⁷ So then, Tabbarah concludes that Islam is in a continual struggle to establish Allah’s Word on the earth, which will ultimately bring humanity blessing.¹¹⁰⁸

In addition, Tabbarah claims that early Islam executed Allah’s judgement on the nations of their day, who were guilty of oppression. The same applies to Islam’s crusade against Israel today – it is a fight against injustice.¹¹⁰⁹

E. Evaluation of Islam

One must applaud Islam for its strenuous defense of monotheism, even though its methods of reform and conversion may leave something to be desired. Islam also promotes a high moral standard in distinction from the permissive nature of modern society. Also admirable is the conviction that one’s faith should permeate every aspect of life and not consist of merely religious ritual.

On the other hand, a number of factors caution us against giving Islam a positive appraisal. We must look into these factors in detail.

1. Response to Islam’s Claims

Traditionally, defenders of Islamic faith propose five proofs of Muhammad’s true prophetic call.¹¹¹⁰ We will investigate each individually.

a) Both the Old and New Testaments clearly predict Muhammad’s advent.

According to Islamic doctrine, Muhammad is the fulfillment of the promise in Deut 18:18 of a great future prophet: “I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” Yet, God here promises to raise up a prophet “from among their countrymen,” that is, from Israel. Additionally, Christians claim that Jesus Christ fulfilled this prophecy (Jn 5:45-46; Acts 3:22-26).

Muslims also see Muhammad’s coming predicted in John 14:16: “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper (*paraclete*), that He may be with you forever.” Muslims here read not *paraclete*, but *periclytos*, which means “the praised one,” and which is equated with the title for Muhammad “Ahmad” in Surah 61:6.¹¹¹¹

¹¹⁰³Tabbarah A. A. The spirit of Islam – Beriut: Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayin, 1978. – P. 377-385.

¹¹⁰⁴Ibid, p. 377.

¹¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁶Ibid, p. 378.

¹¹⁰⁷Ibid, p. 382.

¹¹⁰⁸Ibid, p. 384.

¹¹⁰⁹Haneef, p. 197

¹¹¹⁰Noted in Pfander P. G., The Mizanu’l Haqq (Balance of Truth) / Rev. by W. Tisdale – London: Religious Tract Society, 1910. – P. 225-226.

¹¹¹¹Geisler and Saleeb, p. 157-158; <https://quran.com/61?startingVerse=6>

However, later in this context Jesus clearly equates the *Paraclete* with the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26). Moreover, he made this promise to his disciples, who would see its fulfillment in their day. Additionally, Jesus promised that the *Paraclete* would be with them forever, which Muhammad did not do. The *Paraclete* would abide “in” the disciples, that is, He is a spiritual person. Finally, there are no Greek manuscripts of the New Testament that contain the variant *pericytos* – they all say *paraclete*.¹¹¹²

Muslims also claim that the promise of Deuteronomy 33:2 was fulfilled when Muhammad led an attack on Mecca with 10,000 soldiers: “The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.” Mount Paran, however, is not near Mecca, but in the Sinai Peninsula near Egypt.¹¹¹³

Finally, Muhammad supposedly fulfilled the prediction of John the Baptist: “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt 3:11). Muslims claim that this prophecy must apply to someone who came *after* John, yet Jesus and John were contemporaries. In addition, John did not become Jesus’ disciple, as one might expect, but actually doubted his messiahship (Matt 11:2-3).¹¹¹⁴

On the other hand, Jesus did in fact begin his ministry after John’s, and John acknowledged that Jesus was greater than he was (Matt 3:14). John publicly proclaimed Jesus as Son of God and Savior of the world (Jn 1:29-34).¹¹¹⁵

b) The Quran’s quality of language and teaching is incomparable with other religious literature.

Several factors cast doubt on this claim. First, the material in the Quran follows no chronological scheme, which complicates the task of its interpretation. Peters comments, “The Muslim authorities were as uncertain as we are about which of the revelations recorded in the Quran was the earliest received by the Prophet.”¹¹¹⁶ Another complicating factor, according to Payne, is the lack thematic or logical cohesiveness: “Here everything is fragmentary... Ideas, visions, laws, opinions fragments of myth and legend, follow one another pell-mell.”¹¹¹⁷

Second, some doubt that the Quran actually contains the revelations that Muhammad supposedly received. Caliph Uthman ibn Affan, who released the standard version of the Quran, is suspected of editing the material. According to Payne, “Abdallah ibn-Masud, Muhammad’s secretary, announced publicly that the canonical version of the Quran as revised by Uthman was a monstrous falsification.”¹¹¹⁸ Curiously, after Uthman published his version, he destroyed all previous versions.

Finally, students of the Quran have discovered not a few contradictions that are difficult to explain. We will enumerate some of those in section 2 below.

c) Miracles performed by Muhammad confirm his prophetic calling.

Here we must take into consideration that the majority of miracles, attributed to Muhammad, are recorded not in the Quran, but in the Hadith. According to the latter, Muhammad miraculously provided water, changed water into milk, multiplied food, healed the sick, conversed with trees, changed a branch into a sword, and did similar works.¹¹¹⁹

¹¹¹²Матвеевко; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 157-158.

¹¹¹³Geisler and Saleeb, p. 154; Brisco T. V. Paran // Bromiley G. W. The international standard Bible encyclopedia. – Revised ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 3. – P. 662.

¹¹¹⁴Geisler and Saleeb, p. 154-157.

¹¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹¹⁶Peters, p. 147.

¹¹¹⁷Payne, p. 68.

¹¹¹⁸Ibid, p. 108.

¹¹¹⁹Geisler and Saleeb, p. 169-171.

However, the Hadith may well be a legendary account. This history was assembled over 100 years after Muhammad's death, and eyewitness confirmations of these miraculous events are absent. Additionally, even Islamic scholars express doubts concerning the validity of most of these accounts. Also significant is the fact that, unlike the Quran, the Hadith is not an inspired book in the Islamic faith.¹¹²⁰

The Quran paints an entirely different picture of the miracle ministry of Muhammad. On the one hand, the Quran records that Moses and Jesus positively responded to challenges to confirm their ministries with miracles by performing them (Surah 5:112-115; 7:106-108). On the other hand, we encounter similar challenges presented to Muhammad, yet unlike Moses and Jesus, no miraculous confirmation ensued. Let us examine the following examples:

The People of the Book demand that you O Prophet bring down for them a revelation in writing from heaven (Surah 4:153).

Those are the same people who say, "Allah has commanded us not to believe in any messenger unless he brings us an offering to be consumed by fire from the sky." Say, O Prophet, "Other prophets did in fact come to you before me with clear proofs and even what you demanded – why then did you kill them, if what you say is true?" If you are rejected by them, so too were messengers before you who came with clear proofs, divine Books, and enlightening Scriptures (Surah 3:183-184).

Those who have no knowledge say, "If only Allah would speak to us or a sign would come to us!" The same was said by those who came before. Their hearts are all alike. Indeed, We have made the signs clear for people of sure faith (Surah 2:118).

They challenge the Prophet, "We will never believe in you until you cause a spring to gush forth from the earth for us, or until you have a garden of palm trees and vineyards, and cause rivers to flow abundantly in it, or cause the sky to fall upon us in pieces, as you have claimed, or bring Allah and the angels before us, face to face" (Surah 17:90-92).

Surah 6:35 does not confirm the claim that Muhammad performed miracles: "If you find their denial unbearable, then build – if you can – a tunnel through the earth or stairs to the sky to bring them a more compelling sign. Had Allah so willed, He could have guided them all. So do not be one of those ignorant of this fact." This is only a hypothetical possibility, not a real event being described.¹¹²¹

Neither does the account of Muhammad's ascension to heaven (the *Isra* and *Mi'raj*) described in Surah 17, provide miraculous confirmation of his prophetic calling. There is no objective confirmation of these events. Geisler and Saleeb report that many Islamic scholars do not take these accounts in a literal sense.¹¹²²

The Quran records a miracle story that disconcerts even many Muslims – that Muhammad split the moon in two. The story, of course, lacks any historical confirmation.¹¹²³

The Hour has drawn near and the moon was split in two. Yet, whenever they see a sign, they turn away, saying, "Same old magic!" They rejected the truth and followed their own desires – and every matter will be settled (Surah 54:1-3).

As a rule, the miracles ascribed to Muhammad concern his military victories (especially at Badr) and the protection he enjoyed in battle. Yet, Geisler and Saleeb voice the objection:

¹¹²⁰Ibid, p. 169-171.

¹¹²¹Ibid, p. 163.

¹¹²²Ibid, p. 164.

¹¹²³Parshall, p. 167-173.

If Badr's victory is a sign of divine confirmation, then why was not the subsequent clear defeat at Uhud a sign of divine disapproval? Muhammad is not the first outnumbered military leader in history to win a big victory.¹¹²⁴

As far as fulfilled prophecies, Muslims cite the prediction of Rome's victory over Persia recorded in Surah 30:2-4.¹¹²⁵ Yet, this single instance, which could have been predicted without supernatural aid, does not especially impress.

Finally, in response to the argument that the beauty and literary excellence of the Quran testifies of its divine origin, Geisler and Saleeb write:

It is God's established way to confirm his prophets through miracles. Furthermore, it is a whole lot easier to produce a beautiful piece of religious literature than it is to perform miraculous feats of nature.¹¹²⁶

d) Muhammad led an exemplary life. His character confirms his calling.

In distinction from the above claim, it appears, however, that Muhammad led a lifestyle of violence and robbery, launching attacks on caravans, even of peaceful tribes, and often taking no prisoners. Payne reports on the transformation of Muhammad's character at that time:

Imperceptibly his character was changing. He was still warm and human toward his intimates, still laughed hugely, still demonstrated a kind of gentle amusement in the world around him; but toward those of his followers who were not included within the charmed circle of his friendship, he showed a kind of defiant tolerance.¹¹²⁷

Furthermore, Payne describes the multifaceted personality of Muhammad as follows: "His ideas and visions were continually changing at the mercy of events"; "Violence and gentleness were at war within him."¹¹²⁸

In connection with his military actions, Payne writes, "Muhammad never doubted that war was a blessed thing when fought on behalf of the faith. No other religious leader of comparable stature has every urged such un pitying wars against his enemies."¹¹²⁹ "He exchanged spiritual violence for physical violence, and gloried in it, and perhaps saw very little difference between them."¹¹³⁰

Moreover, it is problematic to consider Muhammad's relation to women as exemplary behavior. He had about ten wives, which exceeded the limit set by the Quran (Surah 4:3). He also took to wife a nine-year-old girl Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr.¹¹³¹

The most discussed supposed transgression of Muhammad's life is known as the "Satanic verses."¹¹³² According to Muhammad's biography, *Life of the Messenger of Allah*, at one time he compromised his monotheistic convictions. While he was still in Mecca, before his flight to Medina, he announced the 53rd Surah, in which he states the following about the three daughters of Allah, worshipped at that time as

¹¹²⁴Geisler and Saleeb, p. 166.

¹¹²⁵Ibid, p. 107.

¹¹²⁶Ibid, p. 173.

¹¹²⁷Payne, p. 47.

¹¹²⁸Ibid, p. 67, 66.

¹¹²⁹Ibid, p. 84.

¹¹³⁰Ibid, p. 61-67.

¹¹³¹Матвеевко; Parshall, p. 180.

¹¹³²Peters, p. 160-162; <http://www.answering-islam.org/Green/satanic>.

goddesses: “Now, have you considered the idols of Lât and ‘Uzza, and the third one, Manât, as well?” (Surah 53:19-20).

Then, as Ibn Ishaq relates it, Muhammad listened to the voice of Satan, who gave him the following words in recognition of these goddesses: “These are the high flying cranes; verily their intercession is to be hoped for.” After this, Gabriel rebuked Muhammad, and the latter received a new Surah, which now appears in the Quran: “Do you prefer to have sons while you attribute to Him daughters?” (Surah 53:21). The omitted words are now called the “Satanic *ayahs* (verses),” because Satan suggested them. Although many early Islamic leaders accepted this history as genuine, today it is highly offensive to Muslims.

Finally, the Quran contains other passages where Allah calls Muhammad to ask forgiveness for sins that he committed, which undermines the belief in Muhammad’s irreproachable character (see Surah 40:55; 47:19; 48:2).¹¹³³

e) The rapid expansion of Islam proves the genuineness of this revelation.

The weakness of this argument is self-evident. For the most part, Islam spread as a result of violent assaults by Muslims on other tribes and oppressive control over converts to Islam. Defection from Islam could lead to death.

2. Inconsistencies in the Islamic Faith

Some critique Islam in regard to its origins, specifically, the origins of the *Hajj*. Before the advent of Islam, the ancient Arab tribes practiced the worship of stones, which may explain the origin of many rituals practiced during the *Hajj*, like circling the Kabba and kissing the Black Stone, which was in practice long before Muhammad’s time. The Kabba, at that time, contained the names of 360 pagan gods. In addition, pagan worship included travelling between the mountains Safa and Marwa, casting stones at a stone pillar, drinking from a sacred well and observing a holy month.¹¹³⁴ Payne comments on the phenomenon:

Of all the places which Muslims are enjoined to visit in their pilgrimage, or *Hajj*, only one is intimately connected with the Prophet; all the other places, and all the sacrifices performed at them, derive from the age when the Arabs worshipped stones.¹¹³⁵

Peters comes to the following conclusion: “The Prophet took what he found, discarded some elements of the cult, reshaped others, and integrated whatever was suitable into a new, specifically Muslim *Hajj*.”¹¹³⁶ According to Arkoun:

History teaches, too, that Islam has retained many of the rites and beliefs characteristic of earlier Arab religion: the rites of pilgrimage to Mecca, the belief in jinn, the mythological representations of ancient peoples, and many edifying tales with clear references to preceding cultures.¹¹³⁷

Geisler and Saleeb claim that Muhammad borrowed outside material not only for conducting the *Hajj*, but also for writing the Quran:

¹¹³³Geisler and Saleeb, p. 178.

¹¹³⁴Peters, p. 129; Payne, p. 5-6.

¹¹³⁵Payne, p. 5.

¹¹³⁶Peters, p. 250.

¹¹³⁷Arkoun, p. 72.

W. St. Clair-Tisdall, in his classic *The Sources of Islam*, also demonstrates the direct dependence of certain Qur'anic stories of the Old Testament on the Jewish Talmud. The influence of the Jewish apocrypha can be seen on the Qur'anic stories of Cain and Abel, Abraham and the idols, and the Queen of Sheba... The direct influence of Christian apocrypha can be seen in the story of seven sleepers and the childhood miracles of Jesus. For the existence of Zoroastrian doctrines in the Qur'an we can cite the Qur'anic descriptions of the houries (virgins) in Paradise and the *sirat* (the bridge between hell and Paradise).¹¹³⁸

Peters challenges the trustworthiness of Muhammad himself, showing examples of inconsistencies in his teaching.¹¹³⁹ First, the Quran often speaks respectfully of Isaac and Jacob (see Surah 19:49; 6:84-86; 21:72-85; 38:45-48). The last example even contains the common Old Testament formula: "And remember Our servants: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the men of strength and insight." (Surah 38:45). This creates the impression that Ismael was not always a focal point for Islamic faith. The theory exists that only in Medina Muhammad began to show deference to Ishmael.

Second, once when the followers of Muhammad violated one of the four sacred months observed by the Arabs (see Surah 9:36) by attacking a caravan, Muhammad supposedly received a new revelation that justified the act. The biographer of Muhammad, Ibn Ishaq, wrote, "And when the Quran came down about that and God relieved the Muslims of their anxiety in the matter, the Apostle took the caravan and the prisoners."¹¹⁴⁰

Third, Muhammad claimed that Gabriel gave him revelation from Allah. Yet, Surah 6:7-8 casts doubt on this claim:

Had We sent down to you O Prophet a revelation in writing and they were to touch it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still have said, "This is nothing but pure magic!" They say, "Why has no visible angel come with him?" Had We sent down an angel, the matter would have certainly been settled at once, and they would have never been given more time to repent.

Other contradictions in the Quran are apparent. On the one hand, the Quran records that Muhammad received its contents over time: "The disbelievers say, 'If only the Quran had been sent down to him all at once!' We have sent it as such in stages so We may reassure your heart with it. And We have revealed it at a deliberate pace" (Surah 25:32; also see 17:106). On the other hand, other passages show that he received it all at one time (Surah 97:1-5; 44:1-4).

At first, Muhammad instructed his disciples to pray toward Jerusalem, but later – toward the Kabba (see Surah 2:143-144). Originally, the yearly fast lasted 10 days in the month of Ashura, as the Jews observed it, but later it was changed to 30 days in the month of Ramadan.¹¹⁴¹

We may cite other difficulties.¹¹⁴² Different punishments are prescribed for illicit sexual conduct:

As for those of your women who commit illegal intercourse – call four witnesses from among yourselves. If they testify, confine the offenders to their homes until they die or Allah ordains a different way for them (Surah 4:15).

As for female and male fornicators, give each of them one hundred lashes. A male fornicator would only marry a female fornicator or idolatress. And a female fornicator would only be married to a fornicator or idolater. This is all forbidden to the believers (Surah 24:2-3)

¹¹³⁸Geisler and Saleeb, p. 317.

¹¹³⁹Peters, p. 118-119, 156-157, 205-206, 219-213.

¹¹⁴⁰Taken from Peters, p. 213. See also Geisler and Saleeb, p. 78.

¹¹⁴¹Geisler and Saleeb, p. 99.

¹¹⁴²Ibid, p. 201ff; Parshall, p. 67.

Toleration toward unbelievers (Surah 2:256) became aggression (Surah 9:5, 29). Humans are responsible for their behavior (Surah. 18:29), but at the same time their judgment is predetermined by Allah (Surah 17:13). In one place the Quran records six days of creation (Surah 7:54), but in another – eight days (Surah 41:9-12).

Muslims justify these changes on the basis of Surah 2:106: “If We ever abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We replace it with a better or similar one. Do you not know that Allah is Most Capable of everything?” Similarly, we read in Surah 16:101: “When We replace a verse with another – and Allah knows best what He reveals – they say, ‘You Muhammad are just a fabricator.’ In fact, most of them do not know.” Yet, even these verses seem to stand in contradiction to Surah 6:115, “The Word of your Lord has been perfected in truth and justice. None can change His Words,” and Surah 10:64: “There is no change in the promise of Allah” (also see Surah 6:34).¹¹⁴³

Bruhana mentions other examples where the Quran contradicts either the Bible, science or itself.¹¹⁴⁴ For example, in Surah 19:28, Aaron is the brother not of Miriam, but of Mary. In Surah 19:23, Jesus was born not in an animal stall, but under a palm tree. According to Surah 19:10, Zachariah remained unable to speak not until the birth of John the Baptist, but only for three nights. In Surah 18:86, a certain Zul-Qarnain travelled to the place of the setting of the sun and found it descending into a spring of murky waters. Finally, in one place Allah spared Pharaoh (Surah 10:90-92), but in another place, Pharaoh perished (Surah 17:103, 20:78). Amazingly, the Quran seems aware of its own contradictions: “Do they not then reflect on the Quran? Had it been from anyone other than Allah, they would have certainly found in it many inconsistencies” (Surah 4:82).

3. Islam’s Objections to Christianity

Muslims hotly dispute the claim that Jesus is the Son of God. According to Islamic faith, God is one and cannot bear a son. Such a claim is blasphemous. Yet, here we encounter a misunderstanding of the Christian use of the term “Son of God.” Muslims incorrectly interpret the phrase as *walad*, i.e. a physical son of God. A better term to use, however, is *ibn*, which does not necessarily refer to physical descent, but to likeness in character.¹¹⁴⁵

Rafi Issa cites the following example the non-literal use of *ibn*. In Surah 17:26 we read, “Give to close relatives their due, as well as the poor and needy travelers (literally, “son [*ibn*] of the way”).”¹¹⁴⁶ Issa also notes the Muslim misunderstanding about the nature of the Trinity – that it consists of Allah, Mary and Jesus: “And on Judgment Day Allah will say, ‘O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you ever ask the people to worship you and your mother as gods besides Allah?’” (Surah 5:116).

On the other hand, Issa cites Fahretdin ar-Razi, “one of the leading Islamic scholars,” who had a better (but still not precise) understanding of the Christian teaching:

Christians say about God, “He is one Being, having three persons (hypostases). And these three are one God, just as the sun has a disk, rays and heat.” They understand that the “Father” is a Person, the “Son” is a word, and the “Holy Spirit” is life. They call Isa, the son of Mary, “Son of God” in a sense similar to the expressions: “sons of the way” or “sons of the light.” They say, “The ‘Word,’ which is the Word of God, was united with the body of the Messiah, Jesus, as water is united with wine, and fire is mingled with fire.”¹¹⁴⁷

¹¹⁴³Geisler and Saleeb, p. 202; Брюхина.

¹¹⁴⁴Брюхина.

¹¹⁴⁵Halverson, p. 113-114.

¹¹⁴⁶Коран. Перевод смыслов: Э. Р. Кулиев. – Режим доступа: <http://xn----8sbemuhsaeiwd9h5a9P.xn--p1ai/smyslovoj-perevod-kulieva-sury-1-po-20.html>; taken from Иссы.

¹¹⁴⁷Камень Веры: духовное наследие Христианства и Ислама. – М., 2011. – Р. 29; taken from Иссы.

Muslims also deny that Jesus died on the cross. Allah would never subject Jesus to such suffering and shame. Yet, from a Christian point of view, the cross was not a place of shame, but of glory in that Jesus died to redeem the world from sin. In addition, the death of Jesus would then represent the greatest example of submission to the will of God, which is the goal of Islamic faith. The term “Islam” itself means “submission.”¹¹⁴⁸ Additionally, Christians claim that God did deliver Jesus from his enemies by raising him from the dead. In this way, He conquered humanity’s greatest enemy – death.¹¹⁴⁹

In response to the claim that the Bible is distorted, one must keep in mind the existence of multiple early copies of the New Testament that differ little from one another, which supports the originality of their contents. We will say more about the reliability of the New Testament in chapter 14.

Even the Quran calls the Muslim to receive the Torah and Gospels as from Allah (Surah 2:75; 5:46, 67-69; also see 10:94; 4:136). Additionally, the Quran claims that God’s Word cannot change (Surah 6:115; also see 6:34; 10:64). If Islam accepts the Torah, Psalter and Gospels as God’s Word, then they must accept their contents as God’s unchanging Word.¹¹⁵⁰

4. Final Considerations

Several other factors give us pause about embracing Islamic faith. We note that Muhammad received his revelations alone. No one else saw the angel Gabriel. No one can confirm the testimony that an angel from heaven visited him. It is possible that his vision was a purely subjective phenomenon. We recall that Muhammad himself doubted the genuineness of this experience, until his wife encouraged him to accept it.¹¹⁵¹

Furthermore, in theory men and women are equal in Islam.¹¹⁵² Yet in practice, this is far from the truth. Men can have multiple wives, but wives – only one husband. Women must wear confining attire (*hijab*) in public, walk at a distance behind their husbands and kneel behind them during prayer. Husbands are allowed to beat their wives. Women must also observe the Five Pillars, but can complete the *Hajj* only in the company of a male. Finally, the pleasures of Paradise that await the faithful Muslim cater more to men than to women.¹¹⁵³

In conclusion, it is difficult to deny that traditional Islamic faith promotes violence to accomplish its goals. Muslims have, in this way, historically propagated their faith. As noted above, the Quran itself calls the followers of Muhammad to employ violence:¹¹⁵⁴

Fight in the cause of Allah... (Surah 2:244).

But once the Sacred Months have passed, kill the polytheists who violated their treaties wherever you find them, capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them on every way. But if they repent, perform prayers, and pay alms-tax, then set them free. Indeed, Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful (Surah 9:5).

Fight those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day, nor comply with what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor embrace the religion of truth from among those who were given the Scripture, until they pay the tax, willingly submitting, fully humbled (Surah 9:29).

¹¹⁴⁸Halverson, p. 117.

¹¹⁴⁹Geisler and Saleeb, p. 284.

¹¹⁵⁰Halverson, p. 111-112; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 217ff.

¹¹⁵¹Матвеевко. Material taken from Делькамбр Анн-Мари Магомет, слово Аллаха, Гилкрист Дж. Мухаммад пророк ислама, Васильев Л..Р. История религий востока.

¹¹⁵²Nigosian, p. 434; Haneef, p. 155.

¹¹⁵³Parshall, p. 197-198; Nigosian, p. 434-436; Geisler and Saleeb, p. 177.

¹¹⁵⁴<http://quran-online.ru>

F. Conclusions

Our study of Islam has revealed significant problems with internal inconsistencies within the system itself, lack of objective verification of Muhammad's revelations, the questionable moral quality of Muhammed's lifestyle, the aggressive nature of Islamic expansion, and other factors as noted above. It appears that these negative factors far outweigh the positive contributions made by Islam to world religion. By their own standard, to stand in the Judgement one's good works must outweigh the bad. Islam fails to pass the test.

Resources Used:

Anderson N. Islamic law // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 326-328.

Arkoun Muhammad. Rethinking Islam / trans. and ed. Robert D Lee. – Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994. – 130 p.

Bell R. The origin of Islam in its Christian environment. – London: Frank Cass, 1968. – 224 p.

Braswell G. W. Understanding world religions. – Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. – 189 p.

Brisco T. V. Paran // Bromiley G. W. The international standard Bible encyclopedia. – Revised ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988.

Corduan W. A Tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – 239 p.

Davis R. Religions of India in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton: Princeton Press, 1999. – 174 p.

Esposito J.L., Fasching D. J., Lewis T. World religions today. – New York, NY: Oxford, 2002. –550 p.

Geisler N. L., Saleeb A. Answering Islam: The crescent in light of the cross. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – 329 p.

Kerr D. The unity and variety in Islam // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 332-336.

_____. The worship of Islam // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 321-325.

Halverson D. C. Islam / Halverson D. C. The compact guide to world religions. – Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1996. – P. 103-120.

Haneef S. What everyone should know about Islam and Muslims. – Library of Islam, 1996.

Hexham I. Understanding world religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – 480 p.

Parshall P. The cross and the crescent. – Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1989. – 211 p.

Payne R. The history of Islam. – New York, NY: Dorset Press, 1959. – 312 p.

Peters F. E. Muhammad and the origins of Islam. – New York, NY: State University of New York Press. – 268 p.

Pfander C. G. The Mizanu'l Haqq (Balance of Truth) / Rev. by W. Tisdale – London: Religious Tract Society, 1910. – 370 p.

Таббапах А. А. The spirit of Islam / Trans. H. T. Shoucair. – Beirut: Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayin, 1978. – 479 p.

Van Rhee G. Communicating Christ in animistic contexts. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – 304 p.

Wilsom C. The Qur'an // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 319.

~~~~~

Брюхина Е. Коран – утверждения, ошибки и противоречия // Студенческий доклад. – Киев: Евангельская теологическая семинария, 2014.

*Brouhina E. Quran – claims, errors and contradictions // Student research paper. – Kiev: Evangel Theological Seminary, 2014.*

Исса Р. Мусульманский взгляд на Троицу в христианстве // Студенческий доклад. – Киев: Евангельская теологическая семинария, 2016.

*Issa R. The Muslim view of the Trinity in Christianity // Student research paper. – Kiev: Evangel Theological Seminary, 2016.*

Матвеенко С. Ислам // Студенческий доклад. – Киев: Евангельская теологическая семинария, 2005.

*Matveenko S. Islam // Student research paper. – Kiev: Evangel Theological Seminary, 2005.*

Рулёв В., Очереднюк Н., Гансери А., Аббасов Р., Граждари П. Ислам // Студенческий доклад. – Киев: Евангельская теологическая семинария, 2002.

*Rulyev V, Ocherednouk N., Ganseri A., Abbacov R., Grazhdari P. Islam // Student research paper. – Kiev: Evangel Theological Seminary, 2002.*

~~~~~

wikipedia.org

quran.com

thequrancourses.com/our-blog/shahada

Chapter 12: Lesser-Known Contenders

Two movement emerged in connection with Islam, which are lesser known on the world's religious stage: the Baha'i Faith and Sikhism. Both advance their candidates for God's special messenger: Baha'u'llah and Nanak respectively. Let us get better acquainted with these lesser-known Eastern faiths.

A. The Baha'i Faith

1. History

The Baha'i Faith is a relatively new religious movement, birthed in the 19th century. Its founder was the Iranian Sayyed 'Ali Muḥammad Shírází (1819-1850), a merchant by profession. On May 23, 1844, he proclaimed himself the predecessor of Man-yuzhiruhu'llah, who is the "Promised one of all religions," and named himself "Bab", which means "the gate."

According to some reports, 'Ali Muḥammad claimed to be the Hidden Twelfth Imam, "Mahdi," who Shia Muslims expect to appear at the end of time. Muslims of that time, in fact, had a heightened expectation for Mahdi's appearance, since 1000 years had passed since his disappearance in 873. In addition, some believed that the Hidden Imam had previously communicated through other "gates" or "Babs." 'Ali Muḥammad claimed to be the last in that series.¹¹⁵⁵

The Persians highly respected the Bab, because he honored ancient Persian customs, which the ruling Muslims in Iran of that time had been neglecting.¹¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the Bab met a tragic end. In 1850, he was executed on the charge of heresy. In addition, his popularity had posed a threat to the Shah of Iran. The disciples of the Bab, the "Letters of the Living" or "Babis," also suffered cruel persecution.¹¹⁵⁷

Garlington comments on the atmosphere of expectation that the Bab's predictions had created:

Although one of Babism's leading modern scholars has concluded that the Bab saw Man-yuzhiruhu'llah as appearing later rather than sooner (sixty-six years at minimum and probably more than six hundred years), in the period immediately following the Bab's death, at least twenty-five such claims were made.¹¹⁵⁸

The next leader of the Bab's movement was Mírza Ḥusayn-'Ali Nuri (1817-1892). Like his predecessor, Ḥusayn-'Ali also endured persecution and was eventually incarcerated for his teaching. In 1862, while imprisoned in Tehran, he allegedly received a vision of the "Virgin of Heaven," who revealed to him that he was the promised Man-yuzhiruhu'llah of whom the Bab had spoken. As a result, he named himself "Baha'u'llah," which means "the glory of God," or "the greatness of God."¹¹⁵⁹ Here is Baha'u'llah's account of the event:

While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head.
Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden – the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord –

¹¹⁵⁵Stockman R. Bahia Faith // Melton J. G., Baumann M. Religions of the world. – Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2002. – P. 102; Garlington W. The Baha'i faith in America. – Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008. – P. 3-5; Corduan W. A tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – P. 186.

¹¹⁵⁶Payne R. The history of Islam. – New York: Dorset Press, 1959. – P. 300.

¹¹⁵⁷Corduan, p. 186; Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – P. 460; Payne, p. 300-301; Stockman, p. 102; Martin W. Kingdom of the cults. – Rev. ed. – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1985. – P. 272; <http://www.bahai.ru>; Garlington, p. 4.

¹¹⁵⁸Garlington, p. 7.

¹¹⁵⁹Martin, p. 271; <http://www.bahai.ru>; Stockman, P. 104; Garlington, p. 8; Payne, p. 301; Momen W., Momen M. Understanding the Baha'i faith. – Edinburg, Scotland, Dunedin Academic Press, 2006. – P. 141

suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants. Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand.¹¹⁶⁰

Baha'u'llah, with the support of the Russian authorities, obtained release from prison and labored in Baghdad for 10 years, strengthening his movement. He was subsequently exiled to Istanbul, where he founded a religious community and authored books. He spent his final years in Palestine, in Acre and Bahji.¹¹⁶¹ Baha'u'llah presumed to even send letters to world leaders, including British Queen Victoria, French Emperor Napoleon, Russian Tsar Alexander II and others, encouraging world peace and cooperation. Garlington comments on this act:

As his letters to the kings and rulers indicate, he was asserting that he was the latest of God's earthly spokesmen and that his message was a universal one that was destined to unite the nations of the earth into a new world commonwealth.¹¹⁶²

Payne comments on the evolution of the Baha'i Faith from its primitive to its more developed form:

Originally an expression of a characteristically Persian desire to revive elements of Zoroastrianism within Islam, the movement later embraced a new form of religion without ritual, without priests and without laws... Finally, all trace of Islam and Zoroastrianism vanished.¹¹⁶³

Baha'u'llah died in 1892 in Bahji, Palestine. Before his death, he appointed his son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, as successor. One of the latter's major contributions to the movement was interpreting his father's writings. He was confined to Acre until the fall of the occupying Ottoman Empire. Upon obtaining freedom to travel, he toured Europe and the United States, preaching the Baha'i Faith. Due to his charismatic personality, he was well received.¹¹⁶⁴

The third leader of the Baha'i Faith was Shoghi Effendi, son of 'Abdu'l-Baha. He translated the Baha'i writings into English and continued the administrative development and extension of Baha'i, following a seven-year plan created by his father. One of his main goals was to show the difference between the Baha'i Faith and other faiths. Effendi died without naming a successor, but entrusted the movement to 27 "keepers of the faith," called "Hands of the Cause of God."¹¹⁶⁵

Since that time, the Baha'i Faith has continued to spread and can be found in 188 countries of the world, enjoying notable popularity in the United States. As of 2022, the Baha'i Faith boasts from 5-8 million followers, most of whom live in India. Since 1979, followers of Baha'u'llah in Iran suffer severe persecution from the fundamentalist Islamic government, which considers the Baha'i Faith an apostasy from Islam.¹¹⁶⁶

¹¹⁶⁰Baha'u'llah, Summons of the Lord of Hosts, 6-7, taken from <http://bahai-library.com/writings/bahauallah/slh/haykal.html>

¹¹⁶¹<http://www.bahai.ru>

¹¹⁶²Garlington, p. 10.

¹¹⁶³Payne, p. 301.

¹¹⁶⁴Stockman, p. 105-106; Martin, p. 272; <http://www.bahai.ru>; Garlington, p. 8-12.

¹¹⁶⁵Stockman, p. 105-106; Martin, p. 273; <http://www.bahai.ru>; Garlington, p. 14-17.

¹¹⁶⁶Martin, p. 273; <http://www.bahai.ru>; Garlington. p. 19; Tucker R. A. Another Gospel. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. – P. 285.

The sacred writings of the Baha'i Faith are available in 802 languages. The administrative center of the movement is in Haifa, Israel. Its ornate temples are found worldwide.¹¹⁶⁷

2. Scripture

Baha'is regard all the writings of Baha'u'llah, which number over 100, inspired, especially a book of laws, the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* (the "Most Holy Book").¹¹⁶⁸ Also highly respected is the book *Kitab-i-Iqan* (the "Book of Certitude"), which explains the allegorical nature of scripture. In the book *Hidden Words*, Baha'u'llah deals with ethical and spiritual issues. *Seven Valleys* and *Four Valleys* are mystical writings.¹¹⁶⁹

Also highly respected, but not accepted as inspired, are the works of 'Abdu'l-Baha. His *Secret of Divine Civilization* proposes a plan for national and economic development. *Traveler's Narrative* narrates a history of the Baha'i Faith, while *Tablets of the Divine Plan* anticipates the future expansion of the Baha'i Faith. The works of Shoghi Effendi and the International House of Justice (see below) are less authoritative.¹¹⁷⁰ Baha'is also respect the basic elements of other religions, since they consider themselves to be the fulfillment of these faiths.

3. Teachings

In accordance with the basic position of the Baha'i Faith (that it is the culmination of all world religions), its members acknowledge and revere the leading prophets and founders of other religions. Specifically, they recognize nine primary prophets: Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Bab, and Baha'u'llah.¹¹⁷¹ The distinguishing mark of a true prophet is the creative power of his words to transform individuals and society. Baha'is work off the assumption that subsequent prophets excel previous ones in authority. In addition, only these recognized prophets have authority to establish doctrine.¹¹⁷²

Baha'u'llah, like the other recognized prophets, is not only a prophet, but also a "Manifestation of God." They are all of one Spirit, but appear in different times.¹¹⁷³ They are not incarnations of God, but people who occupy the highest level of spiritual development. As Garlington describes it, in the prophets "are found all the names and attributes of God," yet they have "bodily and cultural limitations as other humans."¹¹⁷⁴ Their teachings may sometimes seem to differ because of improper interpretations, or that in the course of time God's revelation became more precise.¹¹⁷⁵

'Abdu'l-Baha describes the variety found among the "Manifestations of God" as follows: "The Divine Manifestations are so many different mirrors because They have a special individuality, but that which is reflected in the mirrors is one sun."¹¹⁷⁶ D. J. May express the commonality between them as "faith in God, awakening of human potential and acquisition of spiritual attributes or virtues."¹¹⁷⁷ May adds that the variety

¹¹⁶⁷Martin, p. 273; <http://www.bahai.ru>.

¹¹⁶⁸<http://www.bahai.ru>; Stockman, p. 106; Braswell G. W. *Understanding world religions*. – Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. – P. 149.

¹¹⁶⁹Garlington, p. 41; Momen, p. 141-144.

¹¹⁷⁰<http://www.bahai.ru>; Stockman, p. 106; Braswell, p. 149; Nigosian, p. 486; Garlington, p. 41; Momen, p. 141-144.

¹¹⁷¹Sometimes others are included in the list: Adam, Noah, the founders of the Sabaeen religion (according to Effendi), Salih and Hud (see Stockman, p. 107; Garlington, p. 27).

¹¹⁷²Garlington, p. 31; Corduan, p. 65; Tucker, p. 292-293; Martin, p. 273-275; <http://www.bahai.ru>; Momen, p. 4; Stockman, p. 107.

¹¹⁷³Momen, p. 4.

¹¹⁷⁴Garlington, p. 24-25.

¹¹⁷⁵Nigosian, p. 465.

¹¹⁷⁶'Abdu'l-Baha. *Some answered questions*, 39; <http://bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/saq/39.html>.

¹¹⁷⁷May D. J. *The Baha'i principle of religious unity: A dynamic perspectivism* // McLean J. *Studies in the Babi and Baha'i religions: Revisioning the Sacred*. – Los Angeles, CA: Kalimat Press, 1997. – V. 8. – P. 11.

observed between religions is explained by cultural and historical factors. In fact, God may specifically adapt his revelation to various historical periods or cultures.¹¹⁷⁸

Baha'is believe that without the guidance of Manifestations of God, progress in society is unattainable. Yet, society, in general, rejects them. Nonetheless, their influence remains and has its effect on subsequent generations.¹¹⁷⁹

It is thought that these prophets were especially appointed to bring God's light to a certain people at a certain time for the improvement of human society. God's word for our time, though, came through Baha'u'llah, who fulfilled the expected "Second Coming" of the previous prophets. There will be yet another new Manifestation of God, but only in the year 2866.¹¹⁸⁰

Baha'is claim, "The Baha'i scriptures confirm that Baha'u'llah is omnipotent and infallible and ought to be praised as God."¹¹⁸¹ His knowledge, power are expressed in the following passage from Baha'i scripture:

If He declares water to be wine, or heaven to be earth, or light to be fire, it is true and there is no doubt therein; and no one has the right to oppose Him, or to say "why" or "wherefore"... Verily no account shall be demanded of Him for what He shall do... Verily if He declares the right to be left, or the south to be north, it is true and there is no doubt therein. Verily He is to be praised in His deeds and to be obeyed in His command. He hath no associate in His behest and no helper in His power; He doeth whatsoever He willith, and commandeth whatever He desireth.¹¹⁸²

Consequently, a follower of Baha'u'llah is "one who accepts Baha'u'llah as his Lord, knows his teachings, and obeys his precepts."¹¹⁸³ Two members of the Baha'i Faith, the Momens, further describe a follower of Baha'u'llah: "Being a Baha'i means aligning one's life with the principles of Baha'u'llah and living in accordance with the Baha'i teachings." He/she recognizes Baha'u'llah as the "great teacher, or Manifestation of God, for this time and is willing to follow his teachings."¹¹⁸⁴

Followers of Baha'u'llah believe that his teaching will lead to a worldwide spiritual renewal: "The Baha'i vision is that the world should be a God-centered, united, peaceful, globally functioning organism."¹¹⁸⁵ Baha'u'llah, in fact, viewed himself as the teacher of all humanity.

Shoghi Effendi describes the vision of the Baha'i Faith as follows:

A mechanism of world inter-communication will be developed... A world metropolis will act as the nerve center of the world.... A world language will either be invented or chosen.... A world script, a world literature, a uniform and universal system of currency, weights and measures.... National rivalries, hatreds, and intrigues will cease.¹¹⁸⁶

The Momens describe how this vision can be accomplished: "The Bahai's see their role at this stage to be laying the groundwork for peace by promoting the principles of their religion and creating its institutions."¹¹⁸⁷ Accordingly, the Baha'i Faith participates in the United Nations, promotes education, speaks out in favor of financial equality and freedom of religion, and opposes discrimination.¹¹⁸⁸

¹¹⁷⁸Ibid, p. 9. 22

¹¹⁷⁹Garlington, p. 26.

¹¹⁸⁰Martin, p. 273-275; <http://www.bahai.ru>; Garlington, p. 25; Momen, p. 4.

¹¹⁸¹Tucker R. A. Another Gospel. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. – P. 289.

¹¹⁸²Holley H., ed. Baha'i scriptures. – New York: Brentano's, 1923. – P. 241, 243; taken from Tucker, p. 289.

¹¹⁸³Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – P. 459.

¹¹⁸⁴Momen, p. 33.

¹¹⁸⁵Ibid, p. 4.

¹¹⁸⁶Shoghi Effendi. The World Order of Baha'u'llah. – Wilmette, IL: 1991. – P. 203; taken from Momen, p. 98-99.

¹¹⁸⁷Momen, p. 100.

¹¹⁸⁸Garlington, p. 30-37.

A major step in this renewal process (called the “Lesser Peace”) is the unification of East and West. The “Greater Peace” is when the world attains utopia, toward which it is progressively evolving. There will be a united world government, in which nations will participate voluntarily, and the Baha’i Faith will be the state religion of the entire world.¹¹⁸⁹

Concerning the doctrine of God, Baha’is believe that his essence cannot be known. Baha’u’llah writes, “The unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute... Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery.”¹¹⁹⁰ However, one can know his attributes through revelation given by the prophets. One can also learn about God through observation of creation. God is one – there is no Trinity.¹¹⁹¹

Furthermore, God is creator, yet he differs from his creation (that is, Baha’is reject pantheism). God is personal and possess personal qualities, like mercy, compassion, strength and justice. He is almighty and does not change.¹¹⁹²

Concerning humanity, people consist of a material and a spiritual component. They possess free will. Humanity’s goal is to know God and worship him. People have the potential to develop all the divine attributes which God has instilled in them. These attributes develop through observing the teachings of God’s prophets.¹¹⁹³ ‘Abdu’l-Baha speaks of two tendencies in humans:

Then if the divine power in man, which is his essential perfection, overcomes the satanic power, which is absolute imperfection, he becomes the most excellent among the creatures; but if the satanic power overcomes the divine power, he becomes the lowest of the creatures.¹¹⁹⁴

People do not inherit a sinful nature from Adam, but only require education to free themselves from bad habits and develop good character.¹¹⁹⁵ After death, the soul continues to exist, develop, and draw closer to God. “Heaven” means closeness to God, and “hell” is separation from him. There is no devil.¹¹⁹⁶

4. Leadership

During their lifetimes, Baha’u’llah, ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi led the movement. They also appointed some of their most faithful followers as assistants, entitling them “Hands of the Cause of God.” The “Hands” occupied their position for life. A total of 50 individuals were so appointed, but their number gradually decreased. The last one died in 1957, and no new ones were appointed. The Institution of the Counsellors now carry out their function of protecting and propagating the faith.¹¹⁹⁷

Before his departure, ‘Abdu’l-Baha established an administrative system for the Baha’i Faith. Leading each congregation is a panel of nine individuals. Each congregation submits to its corresponding National Spiritual Assembly, also led by a panel of nine. There also exists a legislative body, the Universal House of Justice, again led by a team of nine. Effendi established an even higher administrative body – the International Baha’i Council, whose members are chosen from National Spiritual Assemblies.¹¹⁹⁸

¹¹⁸⁹Momen, p. 86-101.

¹¹⁹⁰Baha’u’llah. Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude, 104; https://bahai-library.com/bahauallah_kitab_iqan#p104

¹¹⁹¹Braswell, p. 150; Nigosian, p. 463-464; Tucker, p. 292; Momen, p. 2; Stockman, p. 107.

¹¹⁹²Garlington, p. 23-24.

¹¹⁹³Momen, p. 1-3; Garlington p. 29.

¹¹⁹⁴‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Some answered questions, 64; <http://bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/saq/saqall.html#235>.

¹¹⁹⁵Tucker, p. 293.

¹¹⁹⁶Nigosian, p. 465-466.

¹¹⁹⁷https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hands_of_the_Cause; Stockman, p. 109-110; Garlington, p. 66;

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institution_of_the_Counsellors.

¹¹⁹⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_House_of_Justice; Stockman, p. 102-105.

Effendi died without leaving a will. As a result, the Universal House of Justice became the main ruling body of the Baha'i Faith, whose decrees are considered infallible.¹¹⁹⁹ 'Abdu'l-Baha declared it "the Guardian of the Cause of God... Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God."¹²⁰⁰ The Momens add, "Once the UHOJ has decided a matter, then the doctrine of the covenant requires all Bahias to submit to this decision,"¹²⁰¹ and "Challenging the authority of the centre of the Baha'i Faith is the most serious spiritual offense that a Baha'i can commit. It is considered to be a spiritual disease and is punished by expulsion from the community."¹²⁰²

The Universal House of Justice decides all questions not addressed by the Baha'i scriptures. It also determines the authoritative interpretation of those scriptures. Individual members may hold to their own interpretations, but they may not declare them authoritative. Members of the Universal House of Justice serve for five years. They are chosen by the National Spiritual Committees.¹²⁰³ At present, only men can serve. 'Abdu'l-Baha declared:

In the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men.... The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.¹²⁰⁴

Baha'is also sponsor National Teaching Committees, appointed by the National Spiritual Assemblies, which coordinate instruction in their regions. The *World Order* serves as the quarterly journal for the movement.¹²⁰⁵

Local congregations settle questions by majority vote after discussion. The Momens, comment on local leadership: "Unity is the hallmark of the teachings of Baha'u'llah. He calls for the unity of humanity, for recognition of the unity of God and of his manifestations, for the unity of sexes and for unity of action after a decision has been made in consultation."¹²⁰⁶

At the same time, each congregation selects a body of leaders, nine in number, who serve for one year. All congregational members 21 years and older can vote, not only for local leaders, but also for representatives to the National Spiritual Committee.¹²⁰⁷

Local congregations lack ordained clergy. They recall that it was the clergy of other faiths that formerly persecuted the Manifestations of God. Worship services are conducted in homes and consist of prayer, reading of sacred texts and discussion. Rituals and ceremonies are absent. Local members consider themselves in covenant with one another.¹²⁰⁸

Lay persons can teach and occupy that position full time, receiving financial support for their work. Teachers may move to new locations to open new congregations. Some teachers conduct a travelling ministry and labor free of charge for the spread of the Baha'i Faith.¹²⁰⁹

5. Worship and Congregational Life

The Baha'i Faith boasts eight main temples (*Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*), designated as "continental temples." The complexes serve not only for worship, but also as centers for healthcare, education and retirement living.

¹¹⁹⁹Garlington, p. 18; Momen, p. 111.

¹²⁰⁰Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Bahá, 18; https://bahai-library.com/abdu-l-baha_will_testament#1par1

¹²⁰¹Momen, p. 112.

¹²⁰²Ibid, p. 106.

¹²⁰³Momen, p. 105; Stockman, p. 109; Braswell, p. 150.

¹²⁰⁴Selections from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, 38; <http://bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/swab/038.html>

¹²⁰⁵Garlington, p. 62-70.

¹²⁰⁶Momen, p. 105.

¹²⁰⁷Momen, p. 105; Stockman, p. 109; Braswell, p. 150.

¹²⁰⁸Momen, p. 14-15, 33; Stockman, p. 109.

¹²⁰⁹Momen, p. 137; Nigosian, p. 486; Tucker, p. 290; Braswell, p. 151.

Since the sacred number of the Baha'i Faith is nine, every temple has nine sides and nine gardens. A member of any religion can worship there. The temples also house scriptures of various religious faiths that are used in worship services.¹²¹⁰

As mentioned above, the weekly Baha'i worship service is conducted in home groups and consist of prayer, scripture reading and discussion. No rituals are performed or sermons preached. Special meeting are held for those interested in learning more about the Baha'i Faith.¹²¹¹

Members of the Baha'i Faith donate 19% of their income to the Universal House of Justice for administrative and humanitarian expenses. They call their donations *Huquq*, or "the Right of God."¹²¹²

Adherents perform a required daily prayer, made at any time between noon and sunset. Sometimes prayer is made facing Acre in Israel. Prepared prayers are preferred in general to spontaneous ones, though the latter are not forbidden.¹²¹³ The required prayer comes in three forms, the briefest being the following:

I bear witness, O my God, that thou has created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.¹²¹⁴

Besides daily prayer, twice daily reading and reflection on scripture is encouraged. Adherents are also encouraged to repeat often the phrase "O Glory of the All-Glorious." At least once in a lifetime, followers of the Baha'i Faith complete a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Baha'u'llah in Acre, where their prophet died. Pilgrims also visit the Shrine of the Bab on Mount Carmel, where his remains lie.¹²¹⁵

Besides the number 9, 19 is also a sacred number in the Baha'i Faith. The Baha'i year is divided into 19 months of 19 days. During one month, a 19-day fast is observed. Like Ramadan, devotees abstain from food from sunrise to sunset. The fast is a time to devote special attention to prayer.¹²¹⁶

Religious festivals, eleven in number, commemorate special events in the lives of the Bab, Baha'u'llah, and 'Abdu'l-Baha. The first day of the 19th month is also a festival day. The most celebrated holiday is *Riḍwan*, the day Baha'u'llah declared himself the "Promised One," predicted by the Bab.¹²¹⁷

Baha'is especially esteem the ethical norms of humanitarianism, honesty and modesty. They also value development of the individual. They are especially adverse to evil speaking, racism, nationalism and patriotism. Men and women are deemed equal. Baha'is should seek employment and work with diligence. Care for one's family in paramount. One should be involved in social reform, but avoid politics. Yet, one may vote.¹²¹⁸

Baha'is emphasize education. Baha'i centers for education are worldwide. Upon completing compulsory public education, Baha'is are encouraged to spend a year in public service. Physical conditioning and hygiene are encouraged practices. Vegetarianism is preferred, but not required. Narcotics and alcohol are taboos, but not medicinal treatments.

Beauty is also esteemed, as is poetry, music and the like. Hospitality is practiced. Baha'is promote unity, ecology and the spread of religion in the world. They are pacifists, but may serve in the armed forces in non-combat roles.¹²¹⁹

¹²¹⁰Garlington, p. 49-50; Braswell, p. 151; Momen, p. 133-134; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá'í_House_of_Worship

¹²¹¹Momen, p. 134-136; Stockman, p. 110.

¹²¹²Momen, p. 25, 135.

¹²¹³Garlington, p. 42-44; Momen, p. 42.

¹²¹⁴Tucker, p. 291.

¹²¹⁵Garlington, p. 48-51; Momen, p. 6, 37-38, 142; Stockman, p. 111; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shrine_of_Bahá'u'lláh; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shrine_of_the_Báb

¹²¹⁶Garlington, p. 52; Nigosian, p. 468.

¹²¹⁷Momen, p. 126, 142; Nigosian, p. 469; Stockman, p. 110.

¹²¹⁸Stockman, p. 111; Momen, p. 18-137; Tucker, p. 294-296.

¹²¹⁹Garlington, p. 52-53.

Faithfulness in marriage is mandatory. Marriage to non-members is allowed. Baha'u'llah allowed marriage to two wives, but 'Abdu'l-Baha revoked that practice. The family of the bride and groom must agree to the marriage. Divorce is allowed only in extreme situations, yet the couple must remain together an additional 12 months before it takes effect.¹²²⁰

6. Evaluation

On first glance, the Baha'i Faith may appear to have much to offer. It embraces the goal to unite religions, unify nations, promote world peace, eliminate discrimination, and encourage personal development. The Baha'i vision is very optimistic.

On the other hand, this optimism may prove to be the Baha'i Faith's greatest weakness. In spite of the presence and influence of the so-called "Manifestations of God" in human history, we do not observe a progressive movement of society to a utopian state. The record of history does not confirm the Baha'i Faith's optimism. Equally optimistic, even unrealistic, is the Baha'is' expectation of a future, voluntary unification of all peoples of the world.

Similarly, their optimistic view of humanity's condition also appears quite exaggerated. For ages, people have pursued personal development, victory over vices, and godliness through education and observing religious laws. Yet, an honest person will admit his/her inability to meet such goals, even with the best instruction from the finest teachers. It seems that humans are enslaved to character flaws and vices and need some kind of supernatural intervention and inner renewal.

Furthermore, Baha'i theology does not give proper consideration to God's punishment for sin that all people deserve and that nearly all religions acknowledge. In addition, we may safely assume that world religions are so diverse in their basic beliefs and values that it is impossible to unite them. Unification can occur only on a very superficial level and would require rejection of cardinal elements of each faith. Pluralism possessed the same weakness (see chapter 10).

On the other hand, there are many common features between the Baha'i Faith and Islam, from whence it arose. These include: obligatory prayer (sometimes facing East), a special month of fasting, emphasis on law-keeping, a pilgrimage, and recognition of other "prophets." It seems that the Baha'i Faith is not so much the unification of all religions, as much as an adaptation of Islam.

Moreover, the Baha'i Faith does not offer any divine confirmation of its teaching. Baha'u'llah was simply a man, who claimed to see a vision, proclaimed himself a Manifestation of God, and advanced his own teaching. Here we are dealing with either a subjective experience of Baha'u'llah that cannot be confirmed objectively, or an intentional deception by him. We need to see some objective, supernatural confirmation that he was truly from God.

B. Sikhism

1. History

The term "Sikhism" means "to learn." Its founder was Nanak (1469-1539), who was reared a Hindu, but sought to unite Hinduism with Islam. Many feel that he was not so much an original religious thinker, as much as one who simply adapted already existing religious schools of thought. Nanak, in fact, was a disciple of

¹²²⁰Garlington, p. 52-53; Momen, p. 20, 37-38.

Punjab Kabir, who also preached the reconciliation of Islam and Hinduism. Nanak echoed Kabir's views, specifically that being Muslim or Hindu was not important, but rather the sincere worship of God.¹²²¹

Nevertheless, Nanak claimed that at age 30, while he was washing in a river, he received a divine revelation that became the basis for his religious teaching.¹²²² He announced after receiving the revelation that "there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim."¹²²³ He subsequently gave away all his possessions and became a travelling guru, gathering a group of followers around him.¹²²⁴

Before his death, Nanak appointed Agnad his successor, and after him another eight gurus filled that role. The fifth guru, Arjan, compiled the sacred scriptures of Sikhism, the *Adi Granth*, which contain the teachings and hymns of the first five gurus. The tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), added to the collection the hymns of the sixth guru of Sikhism, and announced that there would no longer be a human successor, but that the *Adi Granth* would be the eleventh and final guru of Sikhism.¹²²⁵ Consequently, the *Adi Granth* is also known as *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Gobind Singh also founded a special order of Sikhs – the *Khalsa*. The initiation into this order is water baptism, called *amrit* by Sikhs. After receiving the initiation, members of the order are called *Amritdhari*. Five features characterize the *Amritdhari*:¹²²⁶

- Kesh: hair left uncut
- Kangha: a comb made from wood
- Kara: a metal bracelet for the wrist
- Kirpan: a short sword
- Kachera: short pants

Although *Amritdhari* carry a sword, Sikhism is opposed to violence except in defense. They also abstain from tobacco and alcohol.¹²²⁷

In summary, Sikh Ravid Maryada defines Sikhism as:

A Sikh is any person who believes in God (Akal Purakh); in the ten Gurus; in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, other writings of the ten Gurus, and their teaching; in the Khalsa initiation ceremony instituted by the tenth Guru; and who does not believe in any other system of religious doctrine.¹²²⁸

Sikhism boasts 26 million followers, the great majority of whom live in India, particularly in the Punjab region. In 1984, the Sikhs unsuccessfully attempted to create an independent state of Punjab.¹²²⁹

2. Scripture

As already mentioned, the authoritative scripture of the Sikhs is the *Adi Granth*, or the *Guru Granth Sahib*, compiled by the fifth guru Arjan and containing the teachings and hymns of the first five gurus and the hymns

¹²²¹Nesbitt E. Sikhism: A very short introduction. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. – P. 2, 15-16; Hexham I. Understanding world religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. – P. 243-244; McLeod W. H. The Sikhs: history, religion, and society. – New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989. – P. 23-27.

¹²²²Порублёв, Н. В. Культы и мировые религии. – М.: Благовестник, 1994. – P. 75-76; McLeod, p. 2.

¹²²³Nesbitt, p. 22.

¹²²⁴Ibid, p. 21-22.

¹²²⁵Hexham, p. 244; McLeod, p. 4; Davis R. Religions of India in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton: Princeton Press, 1999. – P. 47; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guru_Granth_Sahib.

¹²²⁶McLeod, p. 4; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khalsa>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amrit_Sanskar.

¹²²⁷McLeod, p. 6-7; Nesbitt, p. 58.

¹²²⁸Noted in McLeod, p. 60. Also see Nesbitt, p. 2.

¹²²⁹Nesbitt, p. 3; McLeod, p. 6-11; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism>.

of the sixth guru, added by Gobind Singh. The collection also includes some saying from *sants*, another class of Sikh holy men that is still active today. Another collection, less authoritative than *Adi Granth*, is the *Dasam Granth*, authored by Gobind Singh.¹²³⁰

In addition, as mentioned earlier, Gobind Singh declared the *Adi Granth* the eleventh guru of Sikhism. McLeod comments that “it is believed to embody, in a strictly literal sense, the eternal Guru.”¹²³¹ Sikhs show great reverence for the *Adi Granth* – it rests beneath a canopy and devotees bow before it.¹²³² Corduan claims, “The basic function of the *Adi Granth* is as an object of veneration, not as a record of revelation.”¹²³³ After compiling the *Adi Granth* in the 17th century, Arjan placed it in the *Harmandir Sahib*, or “Golden Temple,” constructed in the city of Amritsar in the Punjab region of India. It remains there to this day.¹²³⁴

Another respected work among Sikhs is the *Janam-sakhis*, or narrative of the life of Nanak: his travels, ministry and alleged miracles. Yet, the historicity of this work is challenged, and it does not enjoy canonical status among the Sikhs.¹²³⁵

3. Teaching

Unlike Hinduism, Sikhs believe in one God. He is known by different names, especially as Akal Purakh or Vahiguru. He is a personal God, characterized as merciful, eternal and creator of the world. Nanak was his mediator and proclaimed his truth. From Akal emanates a certain “Eternal Guru,” who became incarnate in the ten gurus of Sikhism and aided them in fulfilling their calling.¹²³⁶

Like Hinduism, Sikhs believe Akal has two aspects. As *Nirguna*, he exceeds all mental conception or verbal description. As *Saguna*, he has attributes that can be described. However, in distinction from Hindu thought, Akal has no *avatars*.¹²³⁷

A key feature in Sikh thought is their understanding of revelation. On the one hand, Akal reveals himself through creation. The cosmos reflects his glory. On the other hand, Akal makes himself known in mystical experience to each of his devotees. He sends his *sabad*, or “word,” which those open to him are able to receive.

Sabad comes to people not only through inner perception, but also through the teaching of the gurus, contained in the *Adi Granth*. Yet, the teaching of the gurus impacts only those who are already predisposed to receiving divine revelation on a personal level. So then, in the Sikh’s search for knowledge, personal mystical experience is primary, and study is secondary. As McLeod explains, “Only those who comprehend Akal Purakh in their own mystical experience can truly grasp the meaning the human word endeavors to communicate.”¹²³⁸

The total self-revelation of Akal, whether through creation, or by *sabad*, is called *nam*, which is equated with the Name of Akal. Nesbitt describes *nam* as the “compression or encapsulation of divine reality,”¹²³⁹

McLeod summarizes the Sikh understanding of divine revelation:

Akal Purakh, however, looks graciously upon the suffering of mankind and through the guru utters the *sabad* which communicates a sufficient understanding of the *nam* to those who are able to “hear” it.

The Guru is thus the “voice” of Akal Purakh, mystically uttered within the man (heart-mind-spirit) of the

¹²³⁰Nesbitt, p. 100; McLeod, p. 56; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dasam_Granth; Nesbitt, p. 45.

¹²³¹McLeod, p. 83.

¹²³²Ibid, p. 89.

¹²³³Corduan W. A tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – P. 65.

¹²³⁴http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harmandir_Sahib; Nesbitt, p. 34.

¹²³⁵McLeod, p. 21, 97-99; Nesbitt, p. 19.

¹²³⁶McLeod, p. 2-6, 49; Braswell G. W. Understanding world religions. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. – P. 139.

¹²³⁷Nesbitt, p. 24-25.

¹²³⁸McLeod, p. 49.

¹²³⁹Nesbitt, p. 25. Also see McLeod, p. 3, 29.

devotee. The *sabad* or “Word” is the actual “utterance” and in “hearing” it a person awakens to the reality of the divine Name, immanent in all that lies around and within him.¹²⁴⁰

The problem of humanity, then, is its lack of receptivity to *sabad*, i.e. the voice of Akal. Humanity lies in the grip of self-concern (*haumai*), which results in poor behavior and bad *karma*. Here we encounter other common features with Hinduism – belief in *karma*, *samsara* and incarnation.¹²⁴¹ People have a natural predisposition to *haumai* called “*man*.” Due to this corrupt orientation, people incorrectly perceive the meaning of life and its true values. This is the Sikh understanding of *maya* – an incorrect view of the meaning of life.¹²⁴²

The only hope for liberation from *man* is meditation and repetition of the name *nam*. McLeod describes the Sikh view: “A sufficient understanding of the divine Name provides the essential means to deliverance.”¹²⁴³ Along with this, a devotee can increase his/her receptivity to *sabad* by consciously rejecting *haumai*. One must change one’s life orientation from *man* to *nam*.¹²⁴⁴

Nam reveals the existence of a harmony inherent in creation, which reflects the divine order instilled in it. McLeod elaborates this view:

Look around you and look within. Both around and within you will perceive the divine Order (*hukam*), a harmony expressed in the physical creation, which reflects the divine harmony of Akal Purakh himself. In order to secure liberation, one must attune one’s whole life to that harmony expressed as the divine Name.¹²⁴⁵

Humanity’s goal is to enter into this harmony: “The purpose is to bring the entire being of the devotee into harmony with the divine rhythm.”¹²⁴⁶ In addition, “The end is mystical union in the eternal bliss of total serenity.”¹²⁴⁷

Unlike Hinduism, the Sikh path to *moksha* does not involve separation from the world, performance of rituals, or worship in a temple.¹²⁴⁸ Additionally, Sikhs do not spend all their time in meditation. Together with their spiritual disciplines, they engage in normal life activities and strive to do good deeds, which is also a necessary aspect of attaining *moksha*.¹²⁴⁹

4. Worship and Community Life

Sikhs gather for worship in a facility called the *gurdwara*, which houses a copy of the *Adi Granth*.¹²⁵⁰ The weekly worship service consists of singing and reading with exposition of the *Adi Granth* or the lives of the gurus. The leader of the *gurdwara*, the *granthi*, does the exposition. During worship, men and women sit separately. A dinner follows the service. On occasion, special services are held that last two days, during which the entire *Adi Granth* is read. Worshippers donate a tithe of their income.¹²⁵¹

¹²⁴⁰McLeod, p. 50.

¹²⁴¹Hexham, p. 244.

¹²⁴²Nesbitt, p. 26.

¹²⁴³McLeod, p. 30.

¹²⁴⁴Nesbitt, p. 26.

¹²⁴⁵McLeod, p. 30.

¹²⁴⁶*Ibid*, p. 3.

¹²⁴⁷*Ibid*, p. 31.

¹²⁴⁸*Ibid*, p. 3, 26-28.

¹²⁴⁹Nesbitt, p. 28; Braswell, p. 139.

¹²⁵⁰Some Sikhs have an abbreviated version of the *Adi Granth* at home for personal reading (Nesbitt, p. 34, 43).

¹²⁵¹Nesbitt, p. 30, 48; Hexham, p. 247; McLeod, p. 57-58.

The Sikh scriptures devote little attention to rules for ethical behavior. Therefore, another publication, the *Rahit*, fulfills that function. The latest edition was released in 1950. Not infrequently, however, the *Rahit* does not adequately address certain issues. Therefore, Sikhs often appeal to respected members of their faith community for advice, or they may open the *Adi Granth* to a random passage to settle the question. Disputed questions include discussions about eating meat, drinking alcohol, and cutting hair.¹²⁵²

A final feature of Sikhism: men and women are, at least theoretically, equal in status in the faith community. Marriage is preferred over celibacy. Officially, Sikhism rejects the caste system, yet traces of it can nonetheless be found among Sikhs.¹²⁵³

5. Evaluation

First, we note that Nanak made an advance in embracing monotheism in spite of his Hindu background. Nonetheless, besides this positive feature, little else commends this faith to the seeker of truth.

The main weakness in this system is confirming the “revelation” allegedly received by Nanak and the other gurus of Sikhism. Nanak claimed to receive a divine revelation while washing in a river. On this claim alone, Sikhs base their faith. How can his claim be proven? What are the confirming signs that his “spiritual insight” and that of the other gurus came from God? Are there supernatural confirmations of their divine origin?

One may also critique the spiritual quality and value of the *Adi Granth*. The Sikhs themselves admit that it inadequately addresses moral issues and therefore they appeal to a supplemental source, the *Rahit*. This is a major defect for the founding document of a major world religion.

Furthermore, in connection with the *Adi Granth* we note another difficulty. Sikhs seem to focus more on the physical object, the book, than on its contents, and practically worship it. If Sikhism claims to be an advance over other religions, how can it justify this digression to idolatry? Similarly, the establishment of the order *Khalsa* appears to be a regression as well. How can wearing special clothing and weaponry lead to greater spirituality and godliness?

Moreover, Sikhism has borrowed extensively from Hinduism in its teaching on *Nirguna*, *Saguna*, *karma*, *samsara*, *moksha*, and reincarnation. Consequently, Sikhism is subject to the many of the same criticisms leveled against Hinduism (see chapter 6). Another undesirable quality is the exaggerated mystical element of Sikhism.

Resources Used:

‘Abdu’l-Baha. Selections from the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha. – <http://bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/swab>

‘Abdu’l-Baha. Some answered questions. – <http://bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/saq/saqall.html>.

Baha’u’llah. Kitab-i-Iqan: The Book of Certitude – https://bahai-library.com/bahauallah_kitab_iqan#

Braswell G. W. Understanding world religions. – Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. – 189 p.

Corduan W. A tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – 239 p.

¹²⁵²Nesbitt, p. 129-130; McLeod, p. 69-78.

¹²⁵³Nesbitt, p. 105-119.

Davis R. Religions of India in practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton: Princeton Press, 1999. – 174 p.

Effendi, Shoghi. The World Order of Baha'u'llah. – <http://bahai-library.com/writings/shoghieffendi/wob/woball.html>

Garlington W. The Baha'i faith in America. – Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008. – 192 c.

Hexham I. Understanding world religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Martin W. Kingdom of the cults. – Rev. ed. – Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1985.

May D. J. The Baha'i principle of religious unity: A dynamic perspectivism // McLean J. Studies in the Babi and Baha'i religions: Revisioning the Sacred. – Los Angeles, CA: Kalimat Press, 1997. – V. 8. – P. 1-36.

McLeod W. H. The Sikhs: history, religion, and society. – New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989. – 146 p.

Momen W., Momen M. Understanding the Baha'i faith. – Edinburg, Scotland, Dunedin Academic Press, 2006. – 146 p.

Nesbitt E. Sikhism: A very short introduction. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. – 144 p.

Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – 480 p.

Payne R. The history of Islam. – New York: Dorset Press, 1959. – 312 p.

Stockman R. Bahia Faith // Melton J. G., Baumann M. Religions of the world. – Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2002.

Tucker R. A. Another Gospel. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. – 406 p.

Will and testament of Abdu'l-Baha – https://bahai-library.com/abdul-baha_will_testament#1

~~~~~

Порублёв Н. В. Культы и мировые религии. – М.: Благовестник, 1994. – 336 с.

*Porublyev N. V. Cults and world religions. – Moscow, Herald of Good News, 1994. – 336 p.*

~~~~~

bahai-library.com

www.bahai.ru

wikipedia.org

Chapter 13: God's Chosen People

The next major world faith for our consideration is Judaism, which claims that the Hebrew prophets, especially Moses, were God's special messengers to humanity.

A. Definition of Judaism

What exactly is a Jew? We must distinguish the ethnic and religious usages of the term. From an ethnic point of view, a Jew is defined as the child of a Jewish woman. However, 20% of ethnic Jews do not embrace the Jewish faith. The *religion* of Judaism consists of a worldview and lifestyle based on the *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible) and the teachings of the rabbis. Religious Jews view Israel as God's chosen people, with whom God has made an eternal covenant.¹²⁵⁴ Judaism is thus distinguished from Jewish ethnicity in that most Jews also embrace Judaism, but not all. On the other hand, some adherents of Judaism are not ethnic Jews, but Gentiles converted to Judaism.

Where do most ethnic Jews live? The nation of Israel hosts over 6 million, as does North America. Europe hosts 1-2 million, and the remaining countries – about 1 million. The total world population of Jews numbers about 15 million. Interestingly, the adherents of Judaism number about the same, even though they are not all ethnic Jews.¹²⁵⁵ This means that the number of unbelieving Jews about equals the number of believing Gentiles.

Ethnic Jews exist in two major groups: the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi.¹²⁵⁶ Sephardi Jews trace their European origins to Spain and Portugal, while Ashkenazi Jews come from Germany. Ashkenazi make up 80% of all ethnic Jews, and Sephardi – about 16%. It is thought that the term Ashkenazi derives from the name Ashkenaz, son of Gomer (Gen 10:3), who reportedly settled in Central Europe. The term Sephardi is related to the place name Sepharad (Obad 20), which is associated with Spain. The two groups differ in several ways: their pronunciation of the Hebrew language, how they conduct their liturgy, and various customs. Both have a leading rabbi, elected every 10 years, who bases his headquarters in Israel.¹²⁵⁷

For the sake of convenience, in the following sections we will use the term "Jew" in its religious sense, for adherents of Judaism.

B. Branches of Judaism

Various branches of Judaism differ from one another in both faith and practice. The main branches are Orthodox Judaism, Reform Judaism, and Conservative Judaism. There exists also smaller movements: Karaite Judaism and the mystical groups: Hasidic Judaism and Kabbalah.¹²⁵⁸

1. Orthodox Judaism

¹²⁵⁴Neusner J. Definition of Judaism // The encyclopedia of Judaism / Ed. J. Neusner, A. J. Avery-Peck, W. S. Green. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 2. – P. 579-80; Robinson R. Judaism and the Jewish people / Halverson D. C. The compact guide to world religions. – Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1996. – C. 121-122; Werblowsky R. J., Wigoder G., eds. The Oxford dictionary of the Jewish religion. – Oxford: Oxford Press, 1997. – P. 369.

¹²⁵⁵http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_population; http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html

¹²⁵⁶Werblowsky, p. 72, 620; Harley D. The chosen people: Judaism. – Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 294; Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – P. 360; Wilson M. Branches of Judaism // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 294; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sephardi_Jews.

¹²⁵⁷https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Rabbinat_of_Israel#List_of_Chief_Rabbis.

¹²⁵⁸Kaplan D. E. Judaism, the second half of the twentieth century // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. The encyclopedia of Judaism – Leiden: Brill, 2000. – V. 4. – P. 1795-1806.

Orthodox Judaism is the classical, historical form of Judaism, but commands only 14% of all Jewry. Orthodox Jews strictly observe *halakha* (Jewish Law) and the Old Testament feasts. *Halakha* consist of the teaching of the *Tanakh* (Torah, Prophets and Writings), the Mishna, and the Talmud. As a rule, they also honor the 13 Principles of Maimonides, which, together with the *halakha*, is described more in detail later.

An important feature of Orthodox Judaism is the observance of *halakha* and feast days as “ritual,” which means that their observance positively affects one’s relationship with God and merits His blessing. They are considered acts of worship that please Him. Accordingly, the *halakha* and feast days are observed to the letter.¹²⁵⁹

For the Orthodox Jews, Jewish Law (*halakha*) defines his/her lifestyle in every respect, as Wilson writes, “Every aspect of the orthodox Jew’s life is to be governed by the commandments.”¹²⁶⁰ This includes diet. Hence, Orthodox Jews eat only kosher foods. Previously, Jews of this persuasion separated themselves from society, but in recent years, they exercise more freedom to engage in secular affairs. Yet, their attitude toward the other branches of Judaism remains critical.¹²⁶¹

The prominent figure in the life of an orthodox Jew (and, most likely, in all Jewry) is the rabbi, who teaches Jewish Law and interprets it for the local synagogue. Previously, the rabbis also performed a civil function in Jewish society, but in modern times, they are limited to pastoral care.¹²⁶² In theory, all rabbis exercise equal authority, but, in practice, each country has its own chief rabbi. There is also a chief rabbinate in Israel. All rabbis must complete an educational program in a rabbinical seminary. Orthodox Judaism ordains only men to the rabbinical post.¹²⁶³

For all Jews, including the Orthodox, the center of religious life is the synagogue. It is the primary place of study, prayer, gathering and fellowship.¹²⁶⁴

In conclusion, we may make mention of those Orthodox Jews belonging to Haredi Judaism.¹²⁶⁵ They follow a very strict regime, which includes wearing modest black attire, separating from society (and often from other Jews as well), and abstaining from mass media and secular education.

2. Reform Judaism

The Reform branch of Judaism arose in Germany in the 19th century, and Abraham Geiger was its founder. It is especially popular in the United States. Reform Jews seek to adapt their ancient religion to modern times in line with modern societal norms and practices. Their primary aim is to preserve the ethnic and cultural aspects of Judaism. Correspondingly, Jewish feasts receive much attention. If desired, one may also observe the religious aspects of Judaism, such as kosher laws, but it is not required.¹²⁶⁶

Reform Judaism arose at a time in European culture when Jews were enjoying more freedom and acceptance in secular society. This came about as a result of the Enlightenment, when European society placed a higher value on the power of reason, than on religious affiliation. Consequently, some Jews of that period took advantage of the opportunity to intermix Jewish faith with the standards of modernity.¹²⁶⁷

Unlike Orthodox Judaism, Reformed Jews observe Jewish traditions not as “ritual,” but as “ceremony.” In other words, they do not believe that observing Jewish traditions affects one’s relationship with God. They are

¹²⁵⁹Kaplan, v. 4, p. 1798-1799.

¹²⁶⁰Wilson, p. 294

¹²⁶¹Esposito J.L., Fasching D. J., Lewis T. World religions today. – New York, NY: Oxford, 2002. – P. 158-159; Werblowsky, P. 516-517; Wilson, p. 295.

¹²⁶²Werblowsky, p. 567-568.

¹²⁶³Ibid, p. 155-156, 513-514, 567-568.

¹²⁶⁴Ibid, p. 622-623.

¹²⁶⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haredi_Judaism

¹²⁶⁶Wilson, p. 295; Esposito, p. 157.

¹²⁶⁷Esposito, p. 156-157.

observed not for God's sake, but for the sake of the Jewish community, in order to preserve ethnicity.¹²⁶⁸ Therefore, observance of Jewish Law is less strict, and greater freedom of lifestyle is enjoyed. To determine appropriate behavior, adherents of this branch of Judaism appeal more to reason and common sense, than to *halakha*. Additionally, they pursue not only personal moral development, but the improvement of society as well.¹²⁶⁹

Reform Jews give preference to the writings of the Prophets over studying the Torah. One may also note syncretistic tendencies – convictions are not always based on biblical revelation, but may include aspects of other religions as well.¹²⁷⁰ According to the Reform faith, humans are basically good. They do not need salvation from sin, but only personal moral development along with improvements in society. The “Messiah” is not a great future king and deliverer, but a symbol of a future Golden Age. The *Tanakh* is not inerrant Scripture, but a human creation that needs contemporary application.¹²⁷¹

In Reform worship services, men and women sit together. Women exercise greater freedom in religious life in general.¹²⁷² Prayer is offered in the congregation's native language, not in Hebrew as the Orthodox do.¹²⁷³

3. Conservative Judaism (*Masortim*)

Along with the Reform branch, Conservative Judaism also arose in 19th century Germany. It, too, enjoys great popularity in the United States. Outside the USA, it goes by the designation *Masortim*. Conservative Judaism traces its roots to the European Enlightenment as well, when Jews began to enjoy a more privileged position in European society. However, in distinction from Reform Judaism, the Conservative branch proposes less radical changes to traditional Jewish faith.¹²⁷⁴ One might consider Conservative Judaism a moderate form of Judaism.

As in Orthodox Judaism, the *Tanakh* is accepted as God's Word. On the other hand, unlike Orthodoxy, the interpretation of the Scriptures relies more on rationalistic methodology, than on rabbinic tradition.¹²⁷⁵ Conservative Jews observe the Sabbath, but the rules for its observance are more lenient. For example, they may drive to a Sabbath worship service. The worship service is conducted in the local language. Men and women may sit together, and women more actively participate in the religious life of the community. The kosher diet is more flexible as well. As in Reform Judaism, Messiah is not a person, but a symbol of a future Golden Age of peace and righteousness.¹²⁷⁶

4. Karaite Judaism

The Karaite movement occupies a unique place among the branches of Judaism. It began about the ninth century in the Middle East.¹²⁷⁷ The meaning of “Karaite” is “readers (of Scripture),” which well characterizes this movement. Unlike Orthodox Judaism, Karaites reject the authority of the Talmud. Only the *Tanakh* is authoritative. In addition, in interpreting the Tanakh, Karaites seek the literal sense of the text, the one intended by the original author, instead of employing rabbinic methods of *midrash* or rabbinic tradition.

¹²⁶⁸Kaplan, v. 4, p. 1798-1799; Robinson, p. 122-126.

¹²⁶⁹Werblowsky, p. 577-578; Harley, p. 296.

¹²⁷⁰Kaplan, v. 4, p. 1795-1806; Robinson, p. 122-126; Wilson, p. 296.

¹²⁷¹Kaplan, v. 4, p. 1795-1806; Robinson, p. 122-126; Corduan W. A tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – P. 183.

¹²⁷²Werblowsky, p. 577.

¹²⁷³Wilson, p. 295-296.

¹²⁷⁴Ibid, p. 172-173.

¹²⁷⁵Robinson, p. 122-126; Nigosian, p. 356.

¹²⁷⁶Robinson, p. 122-126; Wilson, p. 297; Werblowsky, p. 172-173, 438-439.

¹²⁷⁷http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karaite_Judaism; Nigosian, p. 304-306.

5. Kabbalah

Kabbalah is the primary mystical branch of Judaism. It shares many common features with mystical movements in other religions and traces its roots to Eastern mysticism, in particular, to the ancient philosophy of Neoplatonism.¹²⁷⁸

Kabbalah arose in Spain in the 12th-13th centuries,¹²⁷⁹ yet mysticism in Judaism originated in antiquity. It is claimed that the famous Rabbi Akiva (first-second century AD) possessed a mystical frame of mind, as did his disciple Shimon bar Yochai.¹²⁸⁰ The term “Kabbalah,” meaning “tradition,” was coined by the 11th century by the Spanish mystic Solomon ibn Gabirol.¹²⁸¹

Besides the Torah, Kabbalists revere other literary works, particularly the Zohar, which supposedly reveals the hidden meaning of the Torah.¹²⁸² It is claimed that the above-mentioned disciple of Akiva, Shimon bar Yochai, wrote the Zohar. Others feel it was written by an unknown Spanish author in the 13th century.¹²⁸³ Although these written sources exist, one must remember that Kabbalist teaching is mystical and is passed down by oral tradition from generation to generation.¹²⁸⁴

According to the Kabbalah worldview (in common with Neoplatonism), God exists separately from the world, but communicates with it by means of mediators called “emanations.” They constitute an “ontological bridge” between God and the world.

In Kabbalah, God is known as Ein Sof. His “emanations” form the “cosmic tree of life,” made up of ten *sefirot*, or aspects of God’s character: sovereignty, foundation, endurance, majesty, beauty, lovingkindness, judgment, wisdom, understanding, and crown. The mystic’s goal is to ascend the cosmic tree of life toward mystical union with Ein Sof, as Werblowsky writes, “Meditation on the sefirot also serves as a mystical ‘ladder of ascent.’”¹²⁸⁵ It is claimed that the *sefirot* contain divine light, but the final six could not contain it, and it was dispersed. By meditating on the *sefirot*, the mystic can regather this dispersed light and restore it to Ein Sof.¹²⁸⁶

As the mystic seeks unification with Ein Sof, he accomplishes not only that, but also the unification of the universe with Him. In his mystical contemplation, the mystic takes “all the worlds with him.”¹²⁸⁷ He “brings the godly influence into the imperfect world of men.”¹²⁸⁸

For the practice of Kabbalah, the Kabbalist uses imagination to achieve mystical experience with God. The initial mystical experience consists of meditating on the *sefirot*. Next, the mystic advances to imagining God in a bodily form, sitting on his throne. In addition, the Hebrew letters for God’s name, YHWH, are used as objects for meditation, as are the letters in “Torah.” The highest level of mystical experience is *develkuth*, or “cleaving to God.”¹²⁸⁹

Having attained the highest level of mystical experience, it is claimed that the mystic can possess supernatural abilities, for example, control over natural phenomena. It is thought that in this way, Moses was

¹²⁷⁸Cowling G. *Developments in Judaism* // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 302; Harley, p. 303.

¹²⁷⁹Werblowsky, p. 387.

¹²⁸⁰Epstein, p. 35-36.

¹²⁸¹Ibid, p. vii.

¹²⁸²Cowling, G. *Developments in Judaism* // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 302.

¹²⁸³Cowling, p. 302.

¹²⁸⁴Epstein, p. xvi.

¹²⁸⁵Werblowsky, p. 387; Also see Epstein, p. 55.

¹²⁸⁶Werblowsky, p. 302.

¹²⁸⁷Epstein, p. 16.

¹²⁸⁸Ibid, p. xvi.

¹²⁸⁹Corduan, p. 130; Epstein, p. xvii, 2, 4; Wolfson E. R. *Judaism and mysticism* // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – *The encyclopedia of Judaism*. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 2. – P. 926-938.

able to part the Red Sea, and Joshua stopped the “movement” of the sun. It is also claimed that celestial messengers, *maggidim*, can speak through the Kabbalist.¹²⁹⁰

These mystical experiences require special preparation. They require rejection of all worldly thinking, so that one may reflect on spiritual things. Some recommend asceticism, specifically: “eat bread with salt, drink water moderately, sleep on the ground, lead a close life, and study hard.”¹²⁹¹ Prayer with fasting allegedly aids in meditation as well. A special bodily position for meditation and control of breathing are part of the technique, as in all mystical movements. A mystic must also lead a moral life. Meditation takes place under the tutelage of a *rebbe*, or *tsaddik*, who fulfills the function of a guru in Kabbalah.¹²⁹²

6. Hasidic Judaism

In comparison with Kabbalah, Hasidic Judaism presents itself as a more moderate mystical movement in Judaism. Its founder was Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1698-1760), usually known as Baal Shem Tov, or more simply by the abbreviation “Besht.” He was born in the Ternopil region of Ukraine, where his followers to this day travel on pilgrimage. Many consider his movement a revival of Kabbalah after it waned in the 17th century. There are, indeed, common features between the mystical systems. Tov’s history is remarkable for his demonstration of superb leadership abilities, his deep humility, his God-consciousness, and for supernatural manifestations attributed to his ministry, like healing the sick and predicting the future.¹²⁹³

The main thrust of Hasidic Judaism is the conviction that God is known not only through studying the Torah, but also by experiencing him in everyday life. Since God’s immanence and omnipresence is emphasized, that is, his presence in the world, it follows that people can experience God in everyday events and activities. Epstein writes that Hasidim seek him “through joyful celebration of the Divine in everyday life.”¹²⁹⁴ The Hasid’s joy can find expression during public worship, when worshippers dance before the Lord.¹²⁹⁵ Yet, it is said that in more recent times, emphasis is placed more on traditional meditative techniques, than on “joyful celebration.”¹²⁹⁶

In order to develop one’s awareness of God’s presence, one needs to develop the art of concentration. Epstein describes this meditation as “man’s delighted awareness of himself in the midst of living,” or “concentrated awareness directed toward selflessness.”¹²⁹⁷ Hasidim practice more Kabbalah-like methods of meditation as well, such as reflection on God’s name and on Hebrew letters. The end result of this striving for God is attaining *develkuth*, or “cleaving to God,” that is, close fellowship with Him.¹²⁹⁸

On a more philosophical level, Tov taught, along with the Kabbalists, that “sparks of light” are scattered throughout creation, which the mystic “gathers” by exercising concentrated awareness of God’s presence in creation.¹²⁹⁹ In this way, the devotee restores these sparks to their source and draws “the animal, mineral, and vegetable kingdoms back to God.”¹³⁰⁰

Hasidic Judaism not only shares with Kabbalah mystical experience, but also has much in common with Orthodox Judaism. Hasidim strictly observe the Jewish Law and, like the followers of Haredi Judaism (see

¹²⁹⁰Epstein, p. 45, 145.

¹²⁹¹Epstein, p. xvii; Also see Wolfson, v. 2, p. 926-938.

¹²⁹²Epstein, p. xvi, 27, 37, 60, 71; Harley, p. 303.

¹²⁹³Nigosian, p. 354; Epstein, p. 111; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baal_Shem_Tov.

¹²⁹⁴Epstein, p. 108.

¹²⁹⁵Harley, p. 297.

¹²⁹⁶Epstein, p. 123.

¹²⁹⁷Ibid, p. 108-109.

¹²⁹⁸Ibid, p. 115-118, 144.

¹²⁹⁹Werblowsky, p. 304-306

¹³⁰⁰Epstein, p. 121.

above), wear black clothing and separate themselves from others, practicing communal living.¹³⁰¹ In addition, in Hasidic Judaism, women play an insignificant public role. As Cowling states, “Hasidism is a man’s world.”¹³⁰²

Hasidism lacks a centralizing structure. Each congregation manages its own affairs under the leadership of a *rebbe* or *tsaddik*, who functions more as a guru, than a rabbi. He enjoys great respect in his community and functions as its administrative chief, teacher and mystic.¹³⁰³

C. Scriptures of Judaism

The sacred writings of Judaism include: the *Tanakh*, i.e. the Hebrew Bible (with preference given to the Torah), the Mishna, which contains the oral traditions of Judaism, and the Talmud, which is the Mishna with commentary (the Gemara).¹³⁰⁴

After the canon of the *Tanakh* was fixed, commentators began their work. The earliest group of commentators were the *Tanna*, who labored from the first to the third centuries AD. Their work was codified in 250 AD by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi from the rabbinic school of Hillel, and became the “Mishna.”¹³⁰⁵

The Mishna supposedly contains the oral traditions of the Jews, which date back to the beginning of Jewish history, and which transversed history in parallel with the written scriptures.¹³⁰⁶ Thus, it is felt that God’s revelation came in two parallel streams. Moses and the prophets recorded some aspects of God’s truth, while others were verbally transmitted from Moses to subsequent generations. This oral tradition is allegedly preserved in the Mishna.

A latter group of scholars, the *Amora* (third-fourth centuries), created a commentary to the Mishna, the Gemara, and joined it to the Mishna to form the Talmud. The Talmud comes in two major editions: Babylonian and Palestinian, the first of which is considered more authoritative.¹³⁰⁷

Although the Torah forbids adding to its contents (Deut 4:2; 12:32), rabbis respond that in composing the Talmud they were not adding to the Torah, but simply defending it. They appeal to the following scriptures in support of their actions:¹³⁰⁸

You shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the LORD chooses; and you shall be careful to observe according to all that they teach you. According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left (Deut. 17:10-11).

Remember the days of old, Consider the years of all generations. Ask your father, and he will inform you, your elders, and they will tell you (Deut 32:7).

Among those speaking out in favor of observing the Talmud, we may cite the following. Tannaitic master Simeon b. Yohai writes, “Our Rabbis taught: They who occupy themselves with the Bible [alone] are but of

¹³⁰¹Wilson, p. 297.

¹³⁰²Cowling, p. 303.

¹³⁰³Epstein, p. 111; Cowling, p. 303.

¹³⁰⁴Robinson, p. 125.

¹³⁰⁵Banks R. Torah and Mishnah // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 290; Werblowsky, p. 470; Harley, p. 290

¹³⁰⁶Rackman E., Broyde M., Fishkin A. L. Halakhah, law in Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 1. – P. 340-341.

¹³⁰⁷Rackman, v. 1, p. 341.

¹³⁰⁸Werblowsky, p. 293.

indifferent merit; with Mishnah, are indeed meritorious, and are rewarded for it; with Gemara – there can be nothing more meritorious” (*b. Baba Metziah*, 33a).¹³⁰⁹ Maimonides echoes this thought:

All Israel is obligated to follow the matters stated in the Babylonian Talmud. Every city and every province are to be coerced to follow all the customs that the sages of the Talmud followed and to obey their decisions and follow their enactments since all the matters in the Talmud have been accepted by all Israel.¹³¹⁰

There are six parts to the Mishna. The first addresses laws related to use of land and paying tithes. The second is devoted to laws concerning conducting feasts. The third – to laws about marriage and sexual conduct. The fourth contain laws relating to economic and legal matters. The fifth concerns laws relating to sacrifices and similar religious practices. Finally, the sixth part deals with laws regarding purification.¹³¹¹

The material in the Mishna and Talmud that concern Jewish Law is called *halakha*. Material that better fits into other genres (history, poetry, legends, or prayers) is termed *aggadah*. Jewish literature also includes scripture commentaries, sometime written by the allegorical method (*midrash*), and sometime by the historico-grammatical method (*peshat*). The most well accepted commentaries belong to the pen of Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105), or “Rashi.”¹³¹²

Besides the Mishna, the Tosefta claims to contain Jewish oral tradition as well.¹³¹³ In many ways, its contents overlap with the Mishna, but differences exists. The origins of the Tosefta are unclear, and it is less authoritative than the Mishna. Nonetheless, the Talmudic writers sometimes cite material from the Tosefta.¹³¹⁴

The compilation of the Talmud did not result in the final formation of Jewish Law. In the Middle Ages, scholars attempted to codify all the laws of the *halakha* by topic. Maimonides made one of the first attempts in the 12th century with his publication of *Mishneh Torah*.

Joseph Caro, however, composed the most authoritative codex of *halakha* in the 16th century – the *Shulchan Aruch*. It contains sections devoted to laws for rituals and feasts, family laws, financial laws, food laws, and miscellaneous laws. However, even the publication of the *Shulchan Aruch* did not put an end to the debates. Subsequent scholars have written commentaries on the *Shulchan Aruch* and its application. In addition, the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi have their own rabbinical schools of thought for its interpretation.¹³¹⁵

Without doubt, the rabbis played the major role in forming the Jewish understanding of scripture. They not only passed down the oral tradition, but gave the accepted reading and interpretation of the sacred text. The original *Tanakh*, for example, contained only consonants. Rabbis knew by memory which vowels corresponded to the consonantal text, what the proper intonation was, and which corrections were needed in the text.

In addition, interpretation of individual passages depended not so much on a thorough exegetical examination of the text, as much as on the general understanding of God’s plan the rabbis proposed to have.

¹³⁰⁹The Soncino Babylonian Talmud / Trans. M. Simon. Ed. I. Epstein. – <http://www.halakhah.com>. Also see Green W. S. Scripture in classical Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 3. – P. 1302.

¹³¹⁰Taken from Werblowsky, p. 293.

¹³¹¹Robinson, p. 130.

¹³¹²Werblowsky, p. 23, 463; Cowling G. Story of a nation // Eerdmans’ handbook to the world’s religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 286; Shulman Moshe. Rabbinic commentators after Rashi on Isaiah 53 – <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/rabbinic-commentators-rashi-isaiah-53/>

¹³¹³Werblowsky, p. 699-700.

¹³¹⁴<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tosefta>.

¹³¹⁵Werblowsky, p. 294; Green, Scripture, v. 3, c. 1302-1309.

Moreover, the rabbis based their theology not only on Holy Scripture, but also on their own theological creativity.¹³¹⁶

How did rabbis ever achieve such a privileged position? In the early years of Israel's history, the priesthood directed the nation's religious affairs. However, after the temple's destruction by Babylon, the scribes (specialists in the Law) began to occupy a more influential position, since the priests, who conducted the temple rituals, no longer had a place to serve.

Nevertheless, after the temple's reconstruction, the priesthood's status and occupation was restored. The scribes, though, continued to fill an important role along with the priests. After the destruction of the temple by Rome in 70 AD, the priests' role again declined, and the scribes became the primary authorities in the religious life of Israel. Eventually, the scribes were called "rabbis."

Jews show deep reverence not only for the text of scripture, but also for the scroll it is written on. Certain rules apply to its handling. In the presence of the scroll, all must stand. It is improper to touch the scroll with bare hands. One may not set another scroll on top of the scripture scroll. The scrolls are stored in a special "ark." Rabbis must tear their clothes if they see a damaged scroll.¹³¹⁷

D. Beliefs of Judaism

As mentioned earlier, the famous mediaeval Jewish scholar Maimonides proposed 13 principles to summarize the faith of Judaism. These will serve as a helpful introduction to the beliefs of Judaism. One must keep in mind, though, that although these principles are generally accepted in Judaism, they have never been officially ratified by the rabbis.¹³¹⁸

1. God is the author and guide of everything that has been and will be created.
2. God is Unity, there is none like unto His Unity and He alone is our God.
3. God is not body and He has no form whatsoever.
4. God is the first and the last.
5. We must pray to God alone and to no one else.
6. All the words of the prophets are true.
7. Moses is the chief of all prophets whose prophecy is true.
8. The Torah which we possess is the same that was given to Moses.
9. The Torah will never be changed and there will never be any other law of God.
10. God discerns the hearts of all men, knows all their thoughts and deeds.
11. God rewards those who keep His commandments and punishes those who transgress them.
12. Messiah, though he tarry, will come.
13. There will be resurrection of the dead.

1. God

The distinguishing mark of Judaism, in contrast with other religions of antiquity, is its emphasis on God's oneness. Jewish monotheism finds its classic expression in the *Shma*, taken from Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" Jacob Neusner summarizes, "God is one and unique, transcendent."¹³¹⁹ Thanks to the influence of Judaism, the majority of the world's adherents to religious faith today embrace monotheism.

¹³¹⁶Green, Scripture, v. 3, c. 1302-1309.

¹³¹⁷Ibid.

¹³¹⁸Taken from Braswell G. W Jr. Understanding world religions. – Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. – p. 87-88. Also see Werblowsky, p. 691-692.

¹³¹⁹Neusner, v. 2, p. 579.

2. Sin and Salvation

In Judaism, sin is violating one's covenant with God. The preferred word to describe sin is *'averot*, which means "to transgress." Sin, therefore, is a transgression of God's Law. The most serious sins are shedding innocent blood, adultery and idolatry. Three categories of sin are delimited: sins of ignorance, intentional sins, and sins of rebellion. Judaism does not recognize an "unforgivable sin."¹³²⁰

According to the teachings of the rabbis, all people sin. A person's sin affects not only the sinner personally, but has repercussions for the community of faith as well. Any violation of the covenant carries with it negative consequences for all who are in the covenant.¹³²¹

People sin because of a natural predisposition to sin, inherent to all humans. Judaism teaches that when God created humans, he instilled in them an impulse for good, and an impulse for evil. The evil impulse is called *yetser-ha-ra*. In support of this theory, rabbis cite Genesis 8:21: "The intent (*yetser*) of man's heart is evil (*ra*) from his youth." Concerning the evil impulse, Rabbi R. Hana bar Aha wrote, "It was said at the schoolhouse, there are four things of which the Holy One, blessed be He, repents that He had created them, and they are the following: Exile, the Chaldeans, the Ishmaelites and Evil Inclination" (*b. Succah*, 52b).¹³²² God, who understands the human condition, is condescending toward people, and does not require more than they are able to do.¹³²³

Does Adam's sin have an effect on humanity? Rabbis concede that people receive their mortality from Adam, and that Adam's sin brought a curse on the natural world. The sinful impulse, however, came not from Adam, but from God.¹³²⁴ Yet, people bear the responsibility for overcoming the *yetser-ha-ra*. They must strive to do good and suppress sinful desires. It is felt that the struggle against the *yetser-ha-ra* is actually beneficial. According to the Midrashic commentary Genesis Rabbah, "Were it not for the *yetser ha-ra*, people would not be motivated to engage in business, marry, raise a family, or construct a house."¹³²⁵

One may gain the victory over the *yetser ha-ra* by studying the Torah. In the Babylonian Talmud, we encounter the claim, "My children! I created the Evil Desire, but I [also] created the Torah, as its antidote; if you occupy yourselves with the Torah, you will not be delivered into his hand" (*b. Kid. 30b*).¹³²⁶ Rackman states, "For many Jews, even in modern times, this is the ideal, to spend one's life studying Torah."¹³²⁷

God grants forgiveness on the basis of repentance. He requires confession of sin, a promise not to continue in it, and reconciliation with the one against the sin was committed. Since there is no temple to bring a sin-offering to, the repentant sinner must perform some act of mercy.¹³²⁸

So then, in general, salvation is a reward granted for obedience, i.e. for keeping God's commandments.¹³²⁹ Concerning God's provision of forgiveness, Werblowsky comments, "Generally speaking, the doctrine of vicarious atonement plays very little role in Judaism, although suggestions of it are not entirely absent."¹³³⁰

3. Evil and Suffering

¹³²⁰Werblowsky, p. 646.

¹³²¹Avery-Peck A. J. Sin in Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 3. – P. 1324.

¹³²²The Soncino Babylonian Talmud.

¹³²³Avery-Peck, v. 3, p. 1320-1332.

¹³²⁴Ibid, v. 3, p. 1324-1325; Corduan, p. 110.

¹³²⁵Avery-Peck, v. 3, p. 1326.

¹³²⁶The Soncino Babylonian Talmud.

¹³²⁷Rackman, v. 1, p. 348.

¹³²⁸Avery-Peck, v. 3, p. 1329; Werblowsky, p. 78.

¹³²⁹Corduan, p. 110.

¹³³⁰Werblowsky, p. 78.

Judaism relegates the doctrine of demons and Satan to secondary status. Since God is in absolute control, this is little reason to be concerned about them. Demons are thought to be descendants of fallen angels, who, according to Judaism's interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4, went into the "daughters of men." Satan stands at the head of the demons. Demons possess certain physical characteristics, like the ability to eat, reproduce, and die. Most demons are evil; some are not.¹³³¹

What about the meaning of suffering? In general, people suffer due to personal sin, yet there are some exceptions. For example, suffering may come from neglecting study of the Torah. In addition, through suffering a righteous person may redeem not only his/her sins, but also the sins of others.¹³³²

4. The Messiah

The idea of "Messiah" stems from God's promise to David about the continuation of his dynasty (2 Sam 7:12-16). After David's dynasty fell, many continued to expect the appearance of a future political deliverer, while others interpreted Messiah's "coming" symbolically as moral reform in Israel.¹³³³

Among those who expected a literal fulfillment of the messianic expectation, a belief in two Messiahs developed. The first, Messiah ben (son of) Joseph, precedes Messiah ben David, and prepares the way for the latter's appearance. It is thought that Messiah ben Joseph will perish before the second Messiah's coming. Some think that Messiah will be a descendent of Levi and a priest.¹³³⁴

The restoration of nation of Israel in the 20th century caused no little stir among rabbis. The usual approach to the messianic expectation had been to passively await God's supernatural intervention through the literal coming of Messiah. However, in light of these positive political developments, the Zionist movement arose. According to its doctrine, Messiah ben Joseph is a metaphorical representation of the Zionist movement, which intends by means of political activism to usher in the coming of the messianic kingdom.¹³³⁵

Zionists advance the ideas of a "messianic goal" and a "messianic process." The first relates to the actual coming of Messiah and is, by its nature, a supernatural phenomenon. The "messianic process," though, prepares Israel for Messiah's coming through political activism and military intervention in defense of Israel's interests.¹³³⁶

Although Judaism accepts Messiah's function as a political deliverer and ruler, they deny him the status of a spiritual redeemer. God alone is the redeemer of Israel, and salvation comes not through some redemptive work of Messiah, but through studying and observing the *halakha*. Green writes concerning the religious role of Messiah in Judaism, "Judaism's scripture, the Hebrew Bible, contains no doctrine of an eschatological redeemer and does not use the term 'messiah' to refer to one."¹³³⁷

Even though the earliest kings of Israel filled both political and religious roles, during the Second Temple Period, the priests alone directed the religious life of the nation. Jews who kept the Law and brought the required sacrifices attained salvation. Green comments, "In this religion, living according to God's design – ethically and ritually – maintains Israel's relationship with God, including the forgiveness of sin. 'Levitical religion,' as we might call it, offers no religious function for a messiah that is not already covered in some other way."¹³³⁸

¹³³¹Ibid, p. 196-197.

¹³³²Ibid, p. 658.

¹³³³Green W. S., Silverstein J. Messiah // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 2. – P. 874-888.

¹³³⁴Ibid, v. 2, p. 882.

¹³³⁵Ibid, v. 2, p. 883-887.

¹³³⁶Ibid.

¹³³⁷Ibid, v. 2, p. 874.

¹³³⁸Ibid, v. 2, p. 875.

Even after the destruction of the second temple, Messiah received no role in the spiritual redemption of Israel. Instead of bringing sacrifices to the temple, redemption required doing good deeds and acts of mercy. Green again comments, “Rabbinic Judaism substituted piety, good deeds, and study of Torah for the altar, and it replaced the Holy of Holies with the sacred Torah scroll.... Hence, in Rabbinic Judaism and the forms of Judaism that follow it, the messiah will play an ancillary role and have little impact on religious practice.”¹³³⁹

5. Jesus of Nazareth¹³⁴⁰

Concerning the person of Jesus, Jews usually accept one of two views: either he was a rabbi and teacher in Israel, or he was a revolutionary.

Jesus’ ministry in many ways corresponded to the usual ministry of a rabbi. He taught the Word of God, gathered disciples, and engaged in theological debate. His teachings somewhat overlapped with rabbinic teaching, specifically, concerning the fatherhood of God, love for God and neighbor, and the imminent Kingdom of God. Although he differed from the usual rabbi in his miracle ministry, we see similar phenomena in the career of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa (first century AD), who prayed for two individuals, who miraculously recovered (see *b. Ber. 34b*).

Jesus’ relationship with his disciples had several unique features. Unlike other rabbis, Jesus not only called disciples to himself, but also sent them out to preach. He initially appointed 12 disciples, corresponding to the 12 tribes of Israel, and then 70 others, corresponding to the total number of nations of the world (an idea commonly accepted by the Jews). When a town rejected them, the disciples were to “shake off the dust of their feet” (Matt 10:14) as a symbol of eschatological judgment on their opponents.

Also significant is Jesus’ cleansing of the temple. It is thought that Jesus was not objecting to people paying the temple tax, which was prescribed by the Law, but to doing business in the temple. The Pharisees also opposed this practice, since it defiled the temple and interfered with their teaching ministry there. Jesus’ temple cleansing provoked a violent reaction from the priests, since they gained income from the temple trade.

Jews explain the arrest and execution of Jesus as follows. They believe that the combination of Jesus cleansing the temple and performing the Last Supper alarmed some of his disciples about the direction his reforms were taking, and they subsequently decided to betray him. Specifically, Jesus’ opposition to the temple order and his promise of cleansing from sin through his body and blood disturbed them. It seemed to them that Jesus had exceeded the allowed limits of rabbinic theological creativity.

Finally, Jews feel that the Early Church furnished Jesus with the exalted status he now enjoys in Christianity. Chilton comments on that score, “A generation after Jesus’ death, by the time of the Gospels ... there were still large numbers of Jews who were also followers of Jesus, but non-Jews came to predominate in the primitive Church. They had control over how the Gospels were written after 70 C.E. and how the texts were interpreted.”¹³⁴¹

6. End Times

Judaism offers several views on eschatology, both for the individual, and for the nation of Israel. It is commonly thought that after death, people experience a brief sentence in hell, not exceeding one year, and then enter Paradise until resurrection day. The existence of an afterlife is generally accepted, but not all believe in a future physical resurrection (for example, Reform Jews).¹³⁴²

¹³³⁹Ibid, v. 2, p. 878.

¹³⁴⁰Taken from Chilton B. Jesus and Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 2. – P. 534-546.

¹³⁴¹Chilton, v. 2, p. 541.

¹³⁴²Werblowsky, p. 21-22, 655; Harley, p. 310.

As mentioned above, a variety of opinions exist about the nature of Messiah's coming. Is he a future deliverer, or just a symbol of a coming Golden Age? All agree that the messianic age will be a time of exaltation for Israel. The messianic age will be utopic, without death or any curse. At the same time, many expect that a difficult time of calamities, suffering and ungodliness worldwide will precede it.¹³⁴³

E. Worship in Judaism

1. Personal Devotion

The devoted Jew diligently studies the sacred texts of Judaism, especially the Torah and Talmud. Only men are required to study. Werblowsky relates the view that "the divine presence dwells among those who study the Torah."¹³⁴⁴ Maimonides advised studying scripture for nine hours a day, and for working only three. Studying the Law will lead to observing it. Before bed, one must recite the *Shma* (Deut 6:4-9). In a more expanded form (Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41), it is read in the synagogue morning and evening.¹³⁴⁵

The *Shma*, along with other scriptural passages, are kept in a small box, called the *tefillin*, which Jewish men wear on their forehead and left arm during prayer in observance of Exodus 13:9: "It shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead". Scriptural passages are also kept in the *mezuzah*, which is attached to the doorpost in observance of Deuteronomy 11:20: "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."¹³⁴⁶

In the synagogue, a special prayer is recited three times a day – the *Amidah*. It consists of twelve blessings and serves as a substitute for bringing the daily sacrifices in the temple, as the Law required.¹³⁴⁷

The most widely celebrated act of devotion in Judaism is observing the Sabbath, although different Jews practice it differently. Orthodox Jews will follow the Mishna, which prohibits 39 different types of work on that day. The Sabbath lasts from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Commonly, the family has their Sabbath meal on Friday evening, with the father blessing the meal. The synagogues also hold special Sabbath services.¹³⁴⁸

Finally, a special event awaits every Jewish boy and girl – the *bar mitzvah* and *bat mitzvah*, respectively. The terms mean "son or daughter of the commandment," and commemorate the passing of the youth into the age of personal accountability. The ritual is performed at age 13 for boys, and age 12 for girls (except for Reform Jews, who celebrate *bat mitzvah* at age 13 as well).¹³⁴⁹

2. Observing Feast Days¹³⁵⁰

Judaism honors most of all two main feasts: *Rosh Hashanah*, i.e. "New Year," and *Yom Kippur*, i.e. "Day of Atonement." *Rosh Hashanah* lands on the first day of the seventh month of the Hebrew Calendar, *Tishrei*, and is celebrated for two days. According to rabbinic tradition, on this day God created the world. In addition, on *Rosh Hashanah* they blow the *shofar* in remembrance of God giving the Law at Sinai.

The first day to the tenth day of the seventh month (which is *Yom Kippur*) are the "Days of Awe," during which time devotees reflect on their lives and behavior before God and walk in a spirit of humility and

¹³⁴³Werblowsky, p. 233-234, 438-439.

¹³⁴⁴*Ibid*, p. 657.

¹³⁴⁵*Ibid*, p. 630-631, 657.

¹³⁴⁶<https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Мезуза>; Harley, p. 307; Nigosian, p. 351-352.

¹³⁴⁷[https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Амида_\(молитва\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Амида_(молитва)); Werblowsky, p. 42-43; Harley, p. 307.

¹³⁴⁸Werblowsky, p. 595-596.

¹³⁴⁹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar_and_Bat_Mitzvah; Harley, p. 308.

¹³⁵⁰Taken from Zuesse E. Calendar of Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 1. – P. 32-50.

repentance before him. It is thought that on *Rosh Hashanah* God evaluates people's lives. The Mishna warns, "At the New Year all who enter the world pass before Him like troops" (*m. R. Hash.*, 1.2).¹³⁵¹ So then, *Rosh Hashanah* is a type or symbol of the Final Judgment.

Rosh Hashanah includes the following elements. The Jews abstain from work, wear modest attire, attend a synagogue service, fervently pray, blow the shofar, read about the "sacrifice" of Isaac, perform *Tashlikh* (symbolically casting their sins into a river or lake), and wish each other a "good and sweet year."

The "Days of Awe" consummate at the feast of *Yom Kippur*, the "Day of Atonement," on the tenth day of the month *Tishrei*. Although God's "judgment" supposedly occurs on *Rosh Hashanah*, there is still time to mend one's ways before *Yom Kippur*. Forgiveness is granted to the repentant. Those who treat the Days of Awe lightly receive a confirming "stamp" on the verdict given at *Rosh Hashanah*. This verdict will determine whether or not the individual will live through the upcoming year.

The feast of *Yom Kippur* has special features. Devotees abstain from work, attend a synagogue service, fervently pray, observe a 24-hour fast, confess their sins and wear modest clothing, particularly without leather or jewelry. At the synagogue, the leader repeats the actions the high priest formerly did before the Ark of the Covenant when the temple still stood.

The so-called "pilgrim feasts" fill an important place in the Hebrew calendar as well: *Pesach* (Passover), *Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost), and *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles). The celebration of *Pesach* occurs from the fourteenth to the twentieth day of the month of Nisan. The feast serves to remind the Israeli people of their miraculous exodus from Egypt.

The order of *Pesach* is well known. The family gathers for the festive meal, which includes lamb. Before the feast, they remove all yeast from the home and use unleavened bread (*matzo*) instead. The father retells from scripture the story of the Exodus. A special cup is set apart for Elijah, who is to be the predecessor of Messiah. Another tradition involves hiding the *afikoman*, a piece of *matzo* consumed at the end of the meal. The children seek it out.

Shavuot, a harvest feast, is commemorated fifty days after *Pesach*. During *Shavuot*, Israel thanks God for their material blessings. In antiquity, between *Pesach* and *Shavuot* a measure of wheat was brought daily to the temple. During this time, certain restrictions applied to personal behavior concerning wearing new clothes, cutting hair, getting married or leaving on a journey. The thirty-third day was an exception to these restrictions. *Shavuot* is also a day of remembrance, honoring the giving of the Law at Sinai. The evening before *Shavuot*, the Torah is read late into the night.

Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles, occurs in the seventh month (*Tishrei*), from the fifteenth to the twenty-first day, that is, four days after *Yom Kippur*. The twenty-second day is also special – *Shemini Atzeret*, or the "gathering of the eighth day." *Sukkot* is a feast of joy and celebration, during which Jews build small dwellings, participate in various marches, and pray for rain. On *Shemini Atzeret*, which is also called *Simchat Torah* ("Rejoicing in the Torah").¹³⁵² a special procession with the Torah is held. It is believed that the battle of Armageddon will occur during *Sukkot*, when God will avenge the enemies of Israel.

The Hebrew calendar also marks other secondary feasts, such as *Hanukkah*, *Purim* and the month of *Elul*. *Hanukkah* is celebrated from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (*Kislev*) through the first day of the next month (*Tevet*). Its purpose is to recall the restoration and dedication of the Jerusalem temple by the Maccabees after their triumph over the Seleucid Empire, which was persecuting the Jews. Like *Sukkot*, *Hanukkah* is a joyful celebration. The Jews light candles, give presents to children, and read the Torah, especially the seventh chapter of Numbers.

Purim occurs on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month (*Adar*). On that day, God saved Israel from the extermination intended by Haman, an official to the king of ancient Persia, as recorded in the book of Esther. On the evening before *Purim*, the fast of Esther is held. On the day of the feast, the book of Esther is read, gifts

¹³⁵¹Neusner J. The Mishnah: A new translation. – New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988. – P. 300.

¹³⁵²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simchat_Torah

are sent to the poor, to relatives, and to children, and a large feast is held, during which it is lawful to drink to excess. Children often dress as adults and put on plays.

The month of *Elul* is a time of preparation for *Rosh Hashanah* and the “Days of Awe.” During this time, the Jews reflect more on the coming judgment of God at *Rosh Hashanah*. Every morning at the synagogue, they blow the *shofar*. People send each other gifts and send wishes that God will write their names into the Book of Life.

The following days are marked as special days of fasting: the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, the ninth of *Av*, and the tenth of *Tevet*. According to tradition, on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, Moses discovered the people worshipping the golden calf at Sinai. The fast on the ninth of *Av* is in remembrance of various tragedies: the destruction of both temples, the deportation of Jews from England in the 13th century and from Spain in the 15th century, World War I, and others. On the tenth of *Tevet*, Jews commemorate the beginning of Babylon’s siege of Jerusalem.

We may add two feast days established in modern times: *Yom HaShoah* honors the victims of the Holocaust, while *Yom Ha’atzmaut* is Israeli Independence Day.

F. Evaluation of Judaism

1. Have We Finally Found It?

It appears that the Jewish faith, in many respects, meets expectations for truly having a divine origin. First, the founders of the Jewish faith, such as Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets, are individuals who arguably actually existed and whose histories are known and demonstrate a spiritual dynamic and moral excellence (although none are perfectly sinless) that one would expect from people who have encountered God and/or have been sent by him. The historical integrity of these Old Testament narratives is defended in Edward Young’s *An Introduction to the Old Testament*.

Second, the history of Israel as a nation is most remarkable. What other nation has existed, persisted and even thrived for millennia, in spite of numerous attempts to exterminate the race? Could this not be an indication of divine favor and preservation?

Third, the *Tanakh* promotes a very high moral standard. The inability of Israel (and of humanity in general) to consistently live up to this standard may well testify of its “superhuman” origin. It is not by chance that the great religions of the world advance a similar moral standard, yet none of them predates the Jewish faith. The excellence of this standard is such that the ethics of traditional societies in history have closely reflected it as well.

Fourth, the Jewish faith boasts sensational supernatural demonstrates in confirmation of its divine origin, which are recorded in the Hebrew Bible in serious narrative style, unlike the fables of Krishna or similar legends. One may recall the nature miracles of Moses and Joshua, the supernatural strength of Sampson, the healings of Elijah and Elisha, and many others miracles that fill the pages of the *Tanakh*.

Fifth, the *Tanakh* records numerous prophetic predictions that have been fulfilled in history. A small sample of fulfilled prophecies is provided a bit later, and an exhaustive list is found in J. F. Walvoord’s *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*. Only a divinely inspired faith can boast such a record, as God himself spoke through Isaiah: “I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done” (Isa 46:9-10).

Finally, all the major monotheistic faiths in many respects cite as their starting point the Jewish *Tanakh*, thereby testifying of its veracity in their estimation. Even though teachers like Muhammad and Baha’u’llah claimed to have improved on Judaistic faith, our evaluation of these leaders and their teachings sheds doubt on that claim. We could better characterize their “contributions” not as improvements, but as distortions of and deviations from the truth.

At the same time, one must wonder whether Rabbinic Judaism is the true heir of this divine revelation. Although we can conclude that the original revelation contained in the *Tanakh* is truly the Word of God, could it not be true that Rabbinic Judaism, like Islam and the Baha'i Faith, has also departed from this trajectory?

2. Remaining Difficulties

a. Reliability of the Tradition

First, how can Rabbinic Judaism convincingly demonstrate that the traditions contained in the Mishna and Talmud truly date back to Moses, the man of God? During his earthly ministry, Jesus of Nazareth, whom Judaism respects as a rabbi, warned of reliance on human tradition instead of the written Word: "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.... You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.... invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that" (Mark 7:7-13). Could we be dealing here in the Mishna and the subsequent Talmud not with divine revelation, but merely faulty human opinion?

b. Lack of Substitutionary Sacrifices

Second, Rabbinic Judaism no longer practices substitutionary sacrifices, which, according to the *Torah*, are required for obtaining forgiveness. In defense of Rabbinic Judaism, Gerald Sigal explains,

No dilemma is posed by the inability to offer animal sacrifices for atonement of sin. Emphasis is now placed on the repentant prayer component of the sacrificial ceremony. Biblically, confessionary repentant prayer can and does satisfy all the criteria necessary for attaining God's forgiveness even without the presence of a blood atonement sacrifice.¹³⁵³

However, we have no divine sanction for such a substantial alteration in God's requirement for forgiveness. Could not Isaiah have been predicting a change in the nature of that sacrifice, having prophesied the following concerning the coming Servant of the Lord: "Because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors." (Isa 53:12)?

c. Fulfillment of Messianic Prophecies

Judaism insists on the view that Messiah, whether he is a person, or a symbol of a future Golden Age for Israel, is a future phenomenon. However, a number of factors support the conviction that Messiah has already come to Israel in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

The *Tanakh* declared that Messiah would be descended of Abraham (Gen 12:3), Judah (Gen 49:10) and David (2 Sam 7), which corresponds with Jesus' genealogy (Matt 1; Luke 1). The prophet Micah predicted Messiah's birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), where Jesus was born (Matt 2:1). Isaiah predicted that Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14), which Matthew claims occurred with Jesus (Matt 1).

Furthermore, the descent of the Holy Spirit on Messiah, predicted in Isaiah 11:2, was fulfilled during Jesus' water baptism (Matt 3:16). According to prophecy, Elijah was to precede Messiah's coming, which was typologically fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt 3:1-2). The *Tanakh* speaks of miracles in Messiah's ministry (Isa 35:5-6), which abounded in Jesus' ministry (Matt 9:35). Psalm 77:2, which predicts

¹³⁵³Sigal G. Did Rabbinic Judaism substitute a non-biblical atonement, <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/did-rabbinic-judaism-substitute-a-non-biblical-atonement/>

Messiah's teaching in parables, finds fulfillment in Jesus' ministry as well (Matt 13:34). Malachi prophesied that the Messiah would cleanse the temple (Mal 3:1), which Jesus did (Matt 21:12).

Messiah was to be rejected (Ps 118:22; Isa 53:3), which Jesus experienced (1 Pet 2:7; John 1:10-11). Specifically, Messiah was to be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver by a friend (Ps 41:9; Zech 11:12), which Judas Iscariot did to his master (Matt 10:4; 26:15). Messiah was to experience beating (Isa 50:6), mocking (Ps 22:6-7) and crucifixion (Ps 22:16), remaining silent during his trial (Isa 53:7), all of which was happened during Jesus' Passion (Matt 26:67- 27:31; Lk 23:33).

On either side of Jesus, two robbers were crucified (Matt 27:38), just as Isaiah predicted (Isa 53:12). On the cross, Jesus prayed (Lk 23:34; see Isa 53:12), was given vinegar to drink (Jn 19:28; see Ps 69:21), and was pierced (Jn 19:34; see Zech 12:10). Having been taken down from the cross, he was laid in a rich man's tomb (Matt 27:57-60) in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9. Soldiers cast dice for his clothing (Jn 19:24), as predicted in Psalm 22:18.

Maybe the most remarkable fulfillment of prophecy is that of Daniel 9:24-26. According to that passage, Messiah must "be cut off" 490 years after the command to reconstruct Jerusalem, which was given by Artaxerxes in 444 BC. Taking into consideration that the Hebrew calendar year contains not 365 days, but 360, the date for Messiah's death would correspond closely to the date of Jesus' crucifixion, as well as we can place it.

One must be impressed by the large number and accurate fulfillment of messianic prophecies by Jesus the Nazarene. The likelihood of this occurring by chance is extremely small, especially in the light of the fact that most of these prophecies concern factors over which Jesus had no control: like his genealogy, his birthplace, the circumstances of his death, his betrayal by a friend, and others. Even if all this could happen by chance, would God have allowed it to be so, since it would threaten to thwart his plan to later introduce the true Messiah into the world?

Finally, according to New Testament testimony, Jesus was an honest person, who held to high morals. It is very unlikely that he would have deliberately deceived his disciples into believing that he was Messiah, if he knew himself not to be him. Christians also claim that Jesus rose from the dead, which would conclusively confirm his messianic claims. That will be the topic of our final chapter.

Judaism strongly objects to the suggestion that Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. Appendix A at the conclusion of this volume discusses these objections in more detail.

Resources Used:

Avery-Peck A. J. Sin in Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 3. – P. 1320-1332.

Banks R. Torah and Mishnah // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 289-290.

Braswell G. W Jr. Understanding world religions. – Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994. – 190 p.

Chilton B. Jesus and Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 2. – P. 534-546.

Corduan W. A tapestry of faiths: The common threads between Christianity and world religions. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. – 239 p.

Cowling G. Developments in Judaism // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 299-303.

_____. Story of a nation // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

Epstein P. Kabbalah: The way of the Jewish mystic. – New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 1978. – 163 p.

Esposito J.L., Fasching D. J., Lewis T. World religions today. – New York, NY: Oxford, 2002. – 550 p.

Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976.

Green W. S. Scripture in classical Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 3. – P. 1302-1309.

Green W. S., Silverstein J. Messiah // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 2. – P. 874-888.

Harley D. The chosen people: Judaism // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

Hexham I. Understanding world religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011

Kaplan D. E. Judaism, the second half of the twentieth century // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. The encyclopedia of Judaism – Leiden: Brill, 2000. – V. 4. – P. 1795-1806.

Little P. Know why you believe. – 4th ed. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000. – 189 p.

Neusner J. Definition of Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 2. – P. 579-588.

_____. The Mishnah: A new translation. – New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988.

Nigosian S. A. World faiths. – 2nd ed. – New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994. – 480 p.

Rackman E., Broyde M., Fishkin A. L. Halakhah, law in Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 1. – P. 340-350.

Robinson R. Judaism and the Jewish people / Halverson D. C. The compact guide to world religions. – Bloomington, MN: Bethany, 1996. – P. 121-143.

Shulman Moshe. Rabbinic Commentators after Rashi on Isaiah 53 –
<http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/rabbinic-commentators-rashi-isaiah-53>

Sigal G. Did Rabbinic Judaism substitute a non-biblical atonement. –
<http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/did-rabbinic-judaism-substitute-a-non-biblical-atonement/>

The Soncino Babylonian Talmud / Trans. M. Simon. Ed. I. Epstein. – <http://www.halakhah.com>.

Werblowsky R. J., Wigoder G. The Oxford dictionary of the Jewish religion. – Oxford: Oxford Press, 1997.

Wilson M. Branches of Judaism // Eerdmans' handbook to the world's religions. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. – P. 294-298.

Wolfson E. R. Judaism and mysticism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 2. – P. 926-938.

Zuesse E. Calendar of Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. – The encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York: Continuum, 1999. – V. 1. – P. 32-50.

~~~~~

[wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)

[jewsforjudaism.org](http://jewsforjudaism.org)

[judaism.about.com/od/worldjewrytoday](http://judaism.about.com/od/worldjewrytoday)

[www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)





Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

## VI. The Way of the Cross

In our previous chapter, we affirmed the Jewish faith, in its essential features, as a faith that truly reflects a divine origin. Yet, in distinction from Rabbinic Judaism, we also suggested the plausibility of Jesus as Israel's Messiah. Are there other substantiations of the truth of Christianity? The task of these final chapters is to examine this claim. Our goal will be to address some key questions: Jesus really exist, does the New Testament accurately depict his life and ministry, and how about the claim of his physical resurrection from the dead?

# Chapter 14: Jesus: Myth or Messiah? The New Testament: Fact or Fantasy?

## A. The Historicity of Jesus of Nazareth

Most people accept without question the historical reality of the person Jesus of Nazareth. Nonetheless, some people, who call themselves “mythicists,” consider him a myth and try to dispute his real existence.<sup>1354</sup>

### 1. History of the Debate

Some of the first to argue against Jesus’ existence were the Constantin-Francois Volney and Charles Francois Dupuis, participants in the French Revolution of the 18th century. They felt that the “Jesus myth” arose from pagan worship of the sun. In the 19th century, the German Bruno Bauer taught that the person of Jesus was a creation of the Early Church. Van Voorst writes about Bauer:

Bauer was the first to systematically argue that Jesus did not exist.... Roman and Jewish witnesses to Jesus were late, secondary or forged.... Christianity and its Christ, Bauer argued, were born in Rome and Alexandria, where adherents of Roman Stoicism, Greek Neo-Platonism, and Judaism combined to found a new religion that needed a founder.<sup>1355</sup>

In 1900, John Robertson wrote in “Christianity and Mythology” that the myth of Jesus derived from the pagan perception of the changing seasons, that is, the cycles of “death and resurrection” in nature. A little later, in 1909, Arthur Drews published “The Myth of Christ,” which heavily influenced Karl Marx. This opinion, consequently, found wide acceptance in Soviet circles.

William Smith advanced the view that the idea of Jesus as the Lamb of God came from the myth of Agni, the Hindu god of fire. In the 20th century, the Englishman George Wells supported the theory of the mythological Jesus. Van Voorst describes his view: “Wells explains Jesus as a mythical figure arising from Paul’s mysticism, for whom the late first century Christians had to fabricate a life story.”<sup>1356</sup>

Among modern adherents to this theory, we may mention the systematic theologian Robert Price, and Frank Zindler, the former president of the American Atheists.

We must take into consideration, though, the relative novelty of this theory. Bart Ehrman appropriately comments:

Every single source that mentions Jesus up until the eighteenth century assumed that he actually existed.... Not even the Jewish and pagan antagonists who attacked Christianity and Jesus himself entertained the thought that he never existed.... One might well call it a modern myth, the myth of the mythical Jesus.<sup>1357</sup>

### 2. Theories of the Origin of the “Jesus Myth”

---

<sup>1354</sup>See Robert E. Van Voorst. *Jesus outside the New Testament*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000; Ehrman B. D. *Did Jesus exist? The historical argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. – San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2012. – Kindle ed., P. 14.

<sup>1355</sup>Van Voorst, p. 8-10.

<sup>1356</sup>Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>1357</sup>Ehrman B. D. *Did Jesus exist? The historical argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. – San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2012. – P. 96.

Mythicists attempt in various ways to explain where the “Jesus myth” came from. One of the more common theories states that in antiquity myths already existed telling the story of a god that died and rose again. It is claimed that the Jesus myth started in the same manner. Ehrman explains, “Jesus, in this view, was the Jewish version of the pagan fertility deity, invented by Jews as a dying and rising god.”<sup>1358</sup>

Several facts, though, run contrary to this position. First, as we will see later, there are numerous witnesses to the earthly life of Jesus, which are absent in regard to the existence of these pagan gods. Second, contrary to expectations, Jesus earthly life began in humble circumstances: born in a stable to poor parents, raised in a small village in Galilee, worked as a carpenter. This narrative is not what one would expect about a mythological god, who reportedly appeared in history.<sup>1359</sup>

In addition, we must consider the reason for Jesus’ death. Unlike other “mythological gods” (with rare exceptions), he died for the redemption of sins to satisfy God’s justice, as predicted in the Old Testament (see Isaiah 53). Furthermore, the idea of resurrection from the dead does not trace back to mythology, but is rooted in the Old Testament eschatological expectation of a future life for God’s people free from death (see Dan 12:2; Isa 26:19).<sup>1360</sup> So then, there is no need to resort to mythology to discover the origin of the expectation for future physical resurrection. The Old Testament teaches it.

Another view proposes that the Early Church formed the person of Jesus from narratives of Old Testament heroes. Matthew, for example, draws many parallels between Jesus and Moses, and Luke – between Jesus and Elijah. Is it possible that these Old Testament stories formed the basis for the “Jesus myth?” Here we must consider that parallels between biblical figures in no way forces the conclusion that one of them is mythological. Writers of literary works throughout history have employed this literary device. If we apply this theory to literature in general, we will have to conclude that many famous figures of history never existed.<sup>1361</sup>

George Wells advanced a similar theory that the Early Church “created” Jesus as an incarnation of the divine wisdom, described in Proverbs, chapter 8. Paul, supposedly, supported this understanding in 1 Corinthians, chapters 1-2, speaking of the mystery of God’s wisdom. However, even a brief glance at this position reveals its weakness. In 1 Corinthians 1-2, Paul is not speaking of an incarnation of divine wisdom, but of the need to receive wisdom from God. In addition, the “divine wisdom” of Proverbs 8 lacks many features key to the person of Christ: his virgin birth, redemptive death, physical resurrection, and many more.<sup>1362</sup>

Others note similarities between the story of Jesus and the first century myth of Mithraism. In both cases, we have a person who experienced a supernatural birth and endured a redemptive death. The assumption is that the Early Church borrowed the story of Jesus from Mithraism.<sup>1363</sup>

On the other hand, in comparing Christianity and Mithraism, one must note the following. First, the story of the god Mithras is clearly mythological. Nash comments, “Mithra was supposedly born when he emerged from a rock; he was carrying a knife and torch and wearing a Phrygian cap. He battled first with the sun and then with a primeval bull, thought to be the first act of creation. Mithra slew the bull, which then became the ground of life for the human race.”<sup>1364</sup> The New Testament, though, is a serious historical document, possessing all the characteristics of genuine narrative.

Second, Mithraism spread and flourished after the appearance of Christianity, and so it was an unlikely source for the formation of Christian faith. Third, significant differences exist: Mithras came from a rock, Jesus from a virgin; Jesus rose from the dead, Mithras did not, etc.<sup>1365</sup>

---

<sup>1358</sup>Ibid, p. 221.

<sup>1359</sup>Ibid, p. 214, 217.

<sup>1360</sup>Ibid, p. 220.

<sup>1361</sup>Ibid, p. 197.

<sup>1362</sup>Ibid, p. 244-246.

<sup>1363</sup>Zindler F. R. [www.atheists.org/christianity](http://www.atheists.org/christianity).

<sup>1364</sup>Nash R. Christianity and the Hellenistic world. – P. 144; taken from Geisler N. L. Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999. – P. 492.

<sup>1365</sup>Ibid, p. 147; taken from Geisler N. L. Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999. – P. 492.

Nonetheless, critics of the historicity of Jesus note certain common features between Mithraism and Early Christian practice.<sup>1366</sup> First, the birth of Mithras was celebrated during the winter equinox, about the time of Christmas. Second, Mithras was depicted with a halo, which is also a common artistic depiction of Jesus. Third, the leader of Mithraism was a “pope.”

Also remarkable is Mithraism’s depiction of a key that opens the door to heaven, which resembles the Christian “keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.” In Mithraism, the priests wore a mitre, which Christian bishops also wore in later years of Church history. Other parallels include conducting a sacred supper similar to the Catholic mass, and a weekly worship service on Sunday.

On the other hand, one might object that the majority of these examples are not common features with biblical Christianity, but are more characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church. It is more likely that the Roman Church, not early Christians, embraced these common features with Mithraism.

In defense of the “Mithraism theory,” some see a connection between Mithraism’s involvement with astrology and the account in Matthew chapter 2 about magi seeing the star of Messiah in the East. Mithraism arose, in fact, in connection with the shift in the first century AD from the astrological age of Aries to the age of Pisces. In refutation, we recall that Christianity traces its roots not to astrology, but to Old Testament messianic prophecy.<sup>1367</sup>

Finally, some connect the fact that Mithraism was one of the so-called “mystery religions” of antiquity with the New Testament use of the term “mystery.” In the New Testament, however, the term did not share this meaning with Mithraism, but was used to denote those aspects of God’s plan that were once hidden, but are now revealed in the New Testament.

### **3. Historical Testimony to Jesus’ Existence**

One can substantiate the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth both by biblical and secular sources. We will begin with the latter. Later, we will investigate the historical reliability of the New Testament, which will, of course, further confirm the real existence of its main subject – Jesus of Nazareth.

#### **a. The Testimony from Secular Sources**

The first-century Roman historian Tacitus, in the 15th chapter of his *Annals*, wrote the following in the context of Nero’s persecution of Christians: “Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus.”<sup>1368</sup>

Critics of the historicity of Jesus object that Tacitus was not an eyewitness of these events, and that he received his account from Jesus’ disciples.<sup>1369</sup> On the other hand, Tacitus was a serious historian, whose work is highly respected. Additionally, historians usually are not eyewitnesses to the events they record. If we required all historians to be eyewitnesses, we would doubt the veracity of nearly all history. The question is not whether Tacitus was an eyewitness, but whether he was a reliable historian. It is also insignificant that Tacitus called Christ “Christus,” since that is a Latin variation on his name. In addition, just prior to the citation above, Tacitus mentions Christianity as the faith the “Christus” founded.

Our next reference is from Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia in the second century. He wrote Emperor Trajan concerning Christians, “They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was

---

<sup>1366</sup>Zindler.

<sup>1367</sup>Zindler; Geisler, *Encyclopedia*, p. 381-384.

<sup>1368</sup>Cornelius Tacitus, *Annals*, XV.44. Tacitus. *The annals of Tacitus* / Trans. J. Jackson // The Loeb classical library. – Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1962. – V. 4. – P. 283.

<sup>1369</sup>Zindler.

light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god,..."<sup>1370</sup> Here we encounter a group of people from the second century, who believed in the existence of Jesus and worshipped him.

At about this same time, the Roman historian Suetonius wrote concerning Claudius' exile of Jews from Rome: "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."<sup>1371</sup> Many feel that the disturbance among the Jews concerned the messianic claims of Christians about Jesus. The Book of Acts also records this event (Acts 18:2). Thus, we add another early testimony to Jesus' existence.

Next, the second-century satirist and opponent of Christianity, Lucian of Samosata, wrote in his work *Passing of Peregrinus* that Christ was crucified in Palestine, because he introduced this new cult (i.e. Christianity) into the world, and that Christians worshipped a crucified sophist and observed his law.<sup>1372</sup> Mythicists again object that Lucian was not an eyewitness,<sup>1373</sup> but we have already responded to that objection in our discussion of Tacitus. In addition, since Lucian was an enemy of Christianity, what would motivate him to acknowledge Jesus' existence, if he knew him to be a fable?

The famous first-century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, also wrote about Jesus, that Pilate "condemned him to the cross" (*Antiquities*, 18.3.3), and that Ananus "assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James" (*Antiquities*, 20.9.1).<sup>1374</sup> Again, the fact that Josephus was not an eyewitness does not discredit his testimony.

Some feel, however, that the quote in *Antiquities*, 18.3.3 does not come from the historian himself, but is a later interpolation by Christians.<sup>1375</sup> The entire citation reads as follows:

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him."

Since Josephus was not a Christian, his acknowledgment of Jesus as the risen Christ is indeed suspect. Yet, we find a more modest assessment of Jesus in the Arabian version of this passage. It may indeed be closer to the original.

At this time there was a wise man named Jesus. His conduct was good and [he] was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who became his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.<sup>1376</sup>

Next, we read in the Babylonian Talmud of a certain Yeshu (i.e. Jesus):

---

<sup>1370</sup>The Letters of Pliny the Younger, book 10, letter 96. Pliny. Letters / Trans. Melmoth W. // Ed. Page T. E. The Loeb classical library. – Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1963. – V. 2. – P. 403.

<sup>1371</sup>The Deified Claudius, 25.4. Suetonius. The lives of the Caesars / Trans. J. P. Rolfe // Ed. Page T. E. The Loeb classical library. – Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1959. – T. 2. – P. 53.

<sup>1372</sup>Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus* 11-13. Lucian. Selected dialogues, Oxford University Press, 2006. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com>.

<sup>1373</sup>Zindler.

<sup>1374</sup>Josephus F. The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged / Ed. W. Whiston. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987. – P. 480, 538.

<sup>1375</sup>Zindler.

<sup>1376</sup>Quoted in Habermas G. The historical Jesus, p. 186; taken from Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 382.

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, “He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.” But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover (*b. Sanhedrin, 43a*).<sup>1377</sup>

Clearly, there are some inaccuracies in this account. At the same time, it remains a valuable testimony to Jesus’ existence and execution. The objection, again, that the rabbis were not eyewitnesses and likely just echoing the disciples’ story is unconvincing.<sup>1378</sup> They were enemies of Christianity and would have taken every opportunity to discredit the “Jesus myth,” had he never existed.

Some explain the Talmudic reference to be an account of Jesus confused with another similar account. A certain Yeshu ben Pandera was reputed to be a miracle worker, and was executed by stoning and hanging on Passover eve in Jerusalem. Another figure, Yeshu ben Stada suffered a similar fate.<sup>1379</sup> Although we cannot rule out this possibility, we must recall that the rabbis of that time were in opposition not to the followers of Yeshu ben Pandera or Yeshu ben Stada, but to the followers of Yeshu ben Joseph.

We find another interesting reference in a letter from a certain Mara Bar-Serapion, a first-century Stoic from Syria, who wrote to his son from prison, “What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King?”<sup>1380</sup> Additionally, Justin Martyr cites the document *The Acts of Pilate*, which speaks of Jesus’ death: “After He was crucified they cast lots upon His vesture, and they that crucified Him parted it among them. And that these things did happen, you can ascertain from the Acts of Pontius Pilate” (*First Apology*, 35).

In addition, we may appeal to the testimony of a certain Phlegon, a freed slave of Emperor Hadrian, who lived in the first and second centuries. His testimony is found in Origen’s *Against Celsus*: “Jesus, while alive, was of no assistance to himself, but that he arose after death, and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails” (*Against Celsus*, 2.59).

Finally, we must keep in mind that the historicity of the person of Jesus not only finds confirmation in the works of historians and writers of antiquity, but that no one at that time ever denied his existence. The idea that Jesus never existed arose only in modern times. Those who lived closer to the time of Christ never doubted that he was a real person.

## **b. The New Testament Testimony<sup>1381</sup>**

Mythicists defend the position that the original source for the life history of Jesus is the Gospel of Mark, and that its author (not Mark, by the way) “transformed” the mythical Jesus into a historical person. This occurred at the end of the first century, when the Gospel of Mark was supposedly written.

This position works off the well-accepted theory that the Gospel of Mark was the first to be written, and that it was employed in the composition of the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. We can concur with this general construal, but will show how this does not undermine, but rather confirms the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Moreland advances the following arguments in defense of an early date for Mark’s Gospel. First, the Book of Acts was clearly written before the death of the apostle Paul (64 AD) and the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD), since the book makes no mention of these crucial historical events. Second, the Gospel of Luke was written before the Book of Acts, the latter being the second volume of Luke’s works (see Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1).

---

<sup>1377</sup>Epstein I. The Soncino Babylonian Talmud.

<sup>1378</sup>Zindler.

<sup>1379</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1380</sup>Geisler, Encyclopedia, p. 383.

<sup>1381</sup>See Ehrman, c. 81ff.

Third, if Luke employed the Gospel of Mark in writing his own, then Mark's Gospel chronologically precedes Luke's and becomes a very early witness to the earthly life of Jesus, dating from the mid-first century.<sup>1382</sup>

It follows that if there really was no Jesus, Mark would have found it quite difficult to convince his contemporaries, living in the mid-first century, that Jesus really did exist. In order for the mythicists' theory to be plausible, Mark would have had to write his "fairytale" story of Jesus at a much later date.

Furthermore, Mark's Gospel shows signs of dependence on still earlier sources for Jesus' life history, which Mark employed. Mark quotes Aramaic expressions of Jesus, which was the native tongue in first-century Palestine, yet Mark writes the Gospel itself in Greek (see Mark 5:41; 15:34). This means that Mark had access to early Aramaic sources or oral tradition of the actual words of Jesus.

Finally, a late first-century, early second-century witness, Papias, testified that Mark received his Gospel material from the apostle Peter. In Papias' words, "And the presbyter said this. Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered... Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements (Papias, *Fragment 6*)."<sup>1383</sup>

Moreover, Ehrman appeals to many other sources of Jesus' life besides the Gospel of Mark. Scholars generally agree concerning a lost document called "Q," which contained many sayings of Jesus. Its existence is proven by word for word agreement between many quotations from Jesus found in Matthew and Luke, but absent in Mark. This means that Matthew and Luke employed not only Mark in writing their Gospels, but the Q document as well, which serves as another testimony to the reality of Jesus and his words.

In addition, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain material that is unique to each of them. It follows that Matthew and Luke had access to still other sources on Jesus. Luke admits to this in Luke 1:1-3, and Matthew undoubtedly drew on his personal experience with Jesus. The Gospel of John differs greatly from all the Synoptic Gospels, which testifies of still another source for the life of Jesus.

Additionally, Acts 20:35 is a quotation from Jesus that is absent in all four Gospels, showing the existence of still another ancient source. Also in Acts, we read the sermons of the earliest apostles, who all testify to the reality of Jesus.

The apostle Paul speaks freely and confidently of Jesus' existence, and his works are commonly believed to have preceded Mark's. Paul knows of Jesus not only by personal revelation (on the road to Damascus), but he received the Gospel tradition from those who were apostles before him (see Galatians 2). He speaks of passing on tradition, which he assumedly received from them (1 Cor 11:2; 15:3-8; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6). Before his conversion, Paul was a persecutor of the Church, and therefore personally knew early Christians who believed in the person of Jesus.

Finally, early Fathers of the Church from the late first century, namely Papias and Clement of Rome, speak of Jesus as a real person. Papias also relates having contact with those who personally knew the apostles of Jesus, from whom he received information about him.<sup>1384</sup>

Thus, we have an abundance of very early, independent testimonies to the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. Someone creating a "Jesus myth" would have done it much later. If they created it in the mid-first century, then the contemporaries of this supposed "Savior," who never really existed, would certainly have uncovered the deception. The silence of Jesus' contemporaries on this score convincingly settles the question.

#### 4. Objections to the Historicity of Jesus

We will conclude our investigation of Jesus' historicity by answering several objections raised by mythicists. First, the name "Jesus," which is *Yeshua* in Hebrew, means "Savior." Critics feel that the Early

---

<sup>1382</sup>Moreland J. P. *Scaling the secular city: A defense of Christianity*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987. – P. 151-153.

<sup>1383</sup>Roberts A., Donaldson J., Coxe A. C. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. – Electronic edition of the Edinburgh ed. – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

<sup>1384</sup>Ehrman, p. 99-104.

Church created the name along with the fictitious character in order to dramatize his supposed role as Savior in this myth.<sup>1385</sup>

We respond that Jesus name certainly coincides with his role. Yet it cannot be excluded that this correspondence was not created by the Church, but by the foreknowledge and plan of God. According to the biblical narrative, Jesus received his name from God through an angel as a sign to people of his saving mission (Matt 1:21).

Second, those rejecting Jesus' historicity appeal to the so-called "search for the historical Jesus." Some scholars challenge the reliability of some biblical accounts of his life and ministry. Mythicists feel that their doubt of New Testament reliability supports their cause.<sup>1386</sup> At the same time, these same scholars in no way deny Jesus' existence, just some of the supernatural events attributed to him. In addition, not all scholars view the New Testament in this way. This approach is characteristic of liberal scholars, while conservative biblical scholars accept the entire New Testament as historically accurate.

Another objection is voiced: if Jesus was such a great religious leader in the first century, then why is so little said of him in world history?<sup>1387</sup> The fact is that much *was* written about Jesus, not by secular historians, but by his disciples, which is what one would expect. Roman historians and Greek writers showed little interest in religious movements in Palestine. In addition, at that time, Jesus confined his ministry to the regions in and around Israel. Therefore, it is not surprising that first-century Roman historians make little note of him. McGrath writes:

Roman historians pay no attention to Christianity at all, except when it causes social or political disturbances. Even then, their chief interest concerns those disturbances, rather than the basis of the beliefs of those who were causing them.<sup>1388</sup>

They could hardly have foreseen that what seemed in the first century to be nothing more than an obscure Palestinian sect would one day come to dominate the Roman Empire!<sup>1389</sup>

Mythicists also note that in his epistles, which were written before the Gospels, Paul makes little mention of the biographical details of Jesus' life, or of his teaching. They assume that Paul did not believe in a historical Jesus, but in a mythological one, who "died and rose" in the manner of other mythological gods of antiquity.

Critics overlook, though, Paul's frequent mentions of the earthly life of Jesus, as seen in the following examples:<sup>1390</sup>

- his birth: Rom 1:3; Gal. 4:4
- his descent from David: Rom 1:3
- his brothers: 1 Cor 9:5; Gal 1:18-19
- his ministry: Rom 15:8
- his teaching: 1 Cor 7:10; 9:14
- his conducting the Lord's Supper: 1 Cor 11:22-24
- his history in total: Phil 2:6-11; 1 Tim 3:16

---

<sup>1385</sup>Zindler.

<sup>1386</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1387</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1388</sup>McGrath A. Explaining your faith. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – P. 49.

<sup>1389</sup>Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>1390</sup>Van Voorst, p. 14; Moreland, p. 140; Ehrman, p. 118ff.



One must also consider that Paul's goal in writing his epistles was not to trace the biographical details of Jesus' life, but to exercise pastoral care for his churches and teach them how to apply the redemptive work of Christ to their lives.<sup>1391</sup>

Yet, it still may seem strange that Paul cites Jesus' teaching so infrequently, especially when it confirms his own teaching. This question may go unanswered, but, as Ehrman concludes, "What we can know is that Paul certainly thought that Jesus existed."<sup>1392</sup> Van Voorst agrees, "Almost all readers of Paul assume on good evidence that Paul regards Jesus as a historical figure, not a mythical or mystical one."<sup>1393</sup>

Other objections to Jesus' historicity concern the question of the New Testament narrative of his life – how reliable it is. That is our next topic.

## **B. Historicity of the New Testament**

Does the New Testament contain real history, or is it full of myths, legends and exaggerations? Liberal and conservative scholars have heatedly debated this question for centuries. What does the evidence say?

### **1. Confirmations of Its Reliability**

In the mid-twentieth century, Chauncey Sanders proposed an approach for verifying the historical reliability of a document, which has found general acceptance.<sup>1394</sup> He utilized three criteria: the bibliographic criterion, internal testimony and external testimony. We will investigate each in turn.

#### **a. Bibliographic Criterion**

The bibliographic criterion concerns the quantity and quality of manuscripts, from which the present New Testament was compiled. The greater their number, the older their age, and the less they differ in content, the less likely that the original New Testament differs from these copies.

Fortunately, over 5000 ancient manuscripts of the New Testament exist, with minimal variation between them. The oldest complete copies of the New Testament still existing today date from the fourth and fifth centuries: Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, Codex Alexandrinus, and Codex Ephraemi. In addition, much older fragments of the New Testament still exist, containing a few books or a few chapters, that go back to the second century, that is, about 100-150 years after the original writings.<sup>1395</sup>

It is interesting to compare the quantity and quality of New Testament documents with those of other ancient works, whose historical reliability is not questioned.<sup>1396</sup> In light of the following comparison, it becomes very difficult not to ascribe to the New Testament an even higher degree of veracity, than other works of antiquity.

- Caesar – written in 1st century BC – earliest copy 900 AD – 10 copies
- Livy – written in 1st century BC – 20 copies
- Tacitus – written in 1st century AD – earliest copy 1100 AD – 20 copies
- Pliny the Younger – written in 1st century AD – earliest copy 850 AD – 7 copies
- Thucydides – written in 5th century BC – earliest copy 900 AD – 8 copies

---

<sup>1391</sup>Ehrman, p. 129; McGrath, p. 47.

<sup>1392</sup>Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>1393</sup>Van Voorst, p. 14.

<sup>1394</sup>Sanders C. An introduction to research in English literary history. – New York: MacMillan, 1952. – P. 142-161.

<sup>1395</sup>Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976. – P. 306ff; McDowell J. Evidence that demands a verdict. – Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1984, p. 31ff (page numbers from Russian edition).

<sup>1396</sup>McDowell J. Evidence that demands a verdict. – Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1984. – P. 34 (page numbers from Russian edition).

- Herodotus – written in 5th century BC – earliest copy 900 AD –8 copies
- Sophocles – written in 5th century BC – earliest copy 1000 AD –100 copies
- New Testament – written in 1st century AD – earliest copies 2nd-4th c. AD – 5 000 copies

In summary, Norman Geisler comments on the bibliographic criterion in relation to the New Testament: “There are more manuscripts, earlier manuscripts, better copied manuscripts, and manuscripts written by more people who were closer to the events than for any other piece of ancient history.”<sup>1397</sup> John Feinberg agrees,

When the NT documents are compared with other works of the ancient world... there really is no comparison. But since the authenticity of these works is not disputed, why should the authenticity of the NT be in question?<sup>1398</sup>

Furthermore, we may confirm that the dates for the original writing of the New Testament lie very close to the dates of the events they record. Many of its authors were actually eyewitnesses of these events. Donald Guthrie, in his *New Testament Introduction*, offers convincing support for these claims.

## **b. Internal Testimony**

The second criteria for affirming the historicity of a work is its internal testimony. This refers to what the document itself says in defense of its reliability. Here we operate on the principle of Aristotle, that one should take the contents of a document as reliable until evidence appears to reverse that judgment. Thomas Oden observes a violation in Aristotle’s principle in that critics of New Testament reliability often reject its historicity *a priori*, that is, without evidence, because of preconceived assumptions.

Often the procedure of historical biblical criticism has required first the removal of all claims of revelation, and then imposed upon all testimony the *a priori* claim that divine disclosure is impossible.<sup>1399</sup>

In favor of the reliability of the New Testament documents, Feinberg appeals to the variety found in the Gospel accounts. Harmonization of these accounts would hint at falsification. Feinberg comments on their historical reliability with the following words: “The Gospels and Acts seem intentionally written as documents whose purpose in part is to recount the history of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and the history of the Early Church.”<sup>1400</sup>

Furthermore, the presence in the New Testament of genealogies, dates, mentions of historical figures, etc., testifies of the historicity of text. Boyd describes many features in detail, which archeological research has confirmed. We will list a few examples.<sup>1401</sup>

- Quirinius, governor of Syria (Luke 2:2)
- Roman census (Luke 2:1)
- “Seat of Moses” in the synagogue (Matt 23:2)
- Prohibition for Gentiles in the temple (Acts 21:28-29)

<sup>1397</sup>Geisler, N. L. *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* // Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999. – P. 381.

<sup>1398</sup>Feinberg J. S. *Can you believe it’s true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era.* – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. – P. 374.

<sup>1399</sup>Oden T. P. *After modernity... What?* – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992. – P. 126

<sup>1400</sup>Ibid, p. 358.

<sup>1401</sup>Boyd R. T. *Boyd’s handbook of practical apologetics.* – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishers, 1997. – P. 185ff.

- Use of a millstone for capital punishment in Greece (Matt 18:6)
- Pontius Pilate's administration in Judea (Luke 3:1)
- Rabbinic custom of a Sabbath's day journey (Acts 1:12)
- Great famine in the Roman Empire (Acts 11:28)
- "Visitation" of Zeus and Hermes to Lystra (Acts 14:11-12)
- Gatherings on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22)
- Judgement seat in Corinth (Acts 18:12)
- Gallio as proconsul in Achaia (Acts 18:12)
- Amphitheater in Ephesus (Acts 19:29)
- Worship of Artemis in Ephesus (Acts 19:28)
- A crown of victory in sports (1 Cor 9:24-27)
- Corinth's reputation for immorality (1 Cor 6:14-19)
- Crushing enemies beneath the feet of the victors (Eph 1:20-22)
- Weaponry used by Romans (Eph 6:11-17)

### c. External Testimony

The final criterion for historical reliability of a text is the "external testimony," which involves its confirmation by outside sources written near the time of the document in question. Here we note that the Church Fathers without exception held the New Testament to be historically reliable. Especially valuable is the testimony of Papias, who lived at the end of the first and beginning of the second century AD. He had access to those who personally knew eyewitnesses of the Gospel events. Although Papias preferred oral to written testimony, he in no way discredited the latter's veracity.

I shall not hesitate also to put down for you along with my interpretations whatsoever things I have at any time learned carefully from the elders and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those that speak much, but in those that teach the truth; not in those that relate strange commandments, but in those that deliver the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and springing from the truth itself. If, then, any one came, who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders, – what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from the books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice (*Eusebius, Church History, 3.39.3-4*).

### d. Other Arguments

We may offer still more proofs in defense of New Testament narrative. One might expect that someone would have recorded and preserved a faithful rendition of the life of Jesus. Without doubt, Jesus was a great and influential person of his time in the context of Palestinian Judaism. Naturally, someone would have recorded his history, as is done for all notable historical figures.

One must also consider the unique position the first disciples occupied in church history. If the Gospel writers were really of a later date, then one must inquire why the earlier disciples wrote nothing? They certainly were more favorably positioned to write Jesus' history than later writers were. Along with this, as noted above, the New Testament contains a quotation from Jesus not found in the Gospels (Acts 20:35). This

indicates that besides the Gospel writers, others living at that time were preserving the life and teachings of Jesus.<sup>1402</sup>

In addition, if more theologically “developed” parts of the New Testament (or fulfilled Old Testament prophecies) were penned by later authors, then these later authors wrote under a pseudonym. It is claimed that in Bible times such a practice was considered acceptable as an ordinary literary device. Nonetheless, what is considered “normal” in societal practice is not always welcome in the Church.<sup>1403</sup> This is not simply a question of literary convention, but also one of honesty. To write under another’s name is an intentional deception and not acceptable for a person of faith, even less so for a writer of Holy Scripture. Additionally, to write under a pseudonym is to assume prophetic or apostolic authority that the writer, in reality, does not possess. Thus, such a writer is not only a deceiver, but also a thief.

Weeks notes that historical details in such books as 2 Peter and 2 Timothy confirm their authorship by Peter and Paul respectively, and refute the claim that others wrote these epistles. For example, how could someone living in the second century honestly write that he was an “eyewitness of His majesty” (2 Pet 1:16), or that “the time of my departure has come” (2 Tim 4:6)?<sup>1404</sup>

Finally, in the course of time, many archeological excavations have uncovered material that endorses the New Testament narratives.<sup>1405</sup> Many examples of how research confirmed the biblical account, opposed to what secular historians previously believed, are found in the second volume of this series, in chapter 7, the “Inspiration of Scripture,” in the section on “Biblical Phenomena.”

## **2. Objections to the Historicity of the New Testament**

### **a. The Nature of Historical Research**

Critics of New Testament historicity advance a number of objections that one must consider. The initial one concerns the nature of historical research. First, it is claimed that a historian cannot completely avoid his own subjective perspective on historical facts. One’s personal worldview and presuppositions always affect his/her view on a topic. Second, a historian is rarely an eyewitness of the events he/she records. Third, the historian does not possess the full story of what occurred. Fourth, from the information available to him, the historian chooses what he/she considers necessary and important. Finally, when organizing his/her material, the historian may introduce some inaccuracies. In the end, the version the historian tells may significantly differ from what really happened.

In response, one can note that the gathering and organization of historical material does not *necessarily* have to lead to its distortion. In addition, historical research is not simply a subjective exercise by historians. They are dealing with real events, to which their version of them must correspond, and there exist objective data about those events, which historians must consider in composing their narratives.<sup>1406</sup> Also, the fact that different historians emphasize different aspects of the same event in no way invalidates their narrative. There can be different versions of the same history, and they can all be accurate, reflecting different vantage points. Finally, in most cases of New Testament narrative, the history was written by an eyewitness of the events or a close associate.

---

<sup>1402</sup>Geisler, *Apologetics*, p. 531.

<sup>1403</sup>Weeks N. *The sufficiency of Scripture*. – Edinburg: Banner of Truth, 1988. – P. 204-205.

<sup>1404</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1405</sup>McDowell, p. 31-59 (page numbers from Russian edition); Johnson R. *Modern Old Testament interpretation* // Corley B., Lemke S., Lovejoy G. *Biblical hermeneutics*. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996. – P. 105.

<sup>1406</sup>Craig W. L. *Apologetics: An introduction*. – Chicago, IL: Moody, 1984. – P. 148-149.

Critics of New Testament history also insist that the Bible must pass the same critical analysis, to which all other ancient literature is subject. They appeal to so-called standard criteria established by the 19th-century German scholar, Ernst Troeltsch.<sup>1407</sup>

Troeltsch's first of three principles is called the "principle of methodological doubt." According to this maxim, a historian can never reproduce an historical event with absolute accuracy and precision. One can always subject any narrative to criticism, reinvestigate the data, and interpret the event differently. The second principle is the "principle of analogy." We evaluate what could have possibly happened in the past on the basis of what happens in the present. If something is not observed to occur today, then it could not have occurred in the past either. The third is the "principle of correlation." Every historical event has a cause that we can discover. Therefore, since God's actions cannot be proven empirically, one cannot claim that God caused a certain action.

As a result, adherents of this approach are not able to accept as true biblical accounts of miracles or fulfillment or prophecy. They consider miracles as myths or exaggerations. They also feel that fulfilled prophecy is really the recounting of an event that already happened as if it was still in the future. Correspondingly, they date the writing of prophetic material after the date the events, which are recorded in it, took place.

Although one may easily dispute these principles, unfortunately they remain the basis for the so-called historical-critical method of biblical interpretation. According to this system, God is not able to do anything independently, that is, perform miracles. He must work exclusively by natural means, through the efforts of people.

In answer to these principles, we respond that Troeltsch's principles themselves are unsubstantiated.<sup>1408</sup> On what basis must we adopt his principles of historicity? The fact is that his system is fraught with difficulties. First, one must differentiate that, which usually occurs, from that, which can occur, but happens rarely. People today do not regularly walk on the moon, but that does not mean it never occurred.<sup>1409</sup>

In this regard, William Payne insightfully notes, "A narrative of fact can only be said to be contrary to experience if we, being at the time and place in question, observe that the alleged event did not in fact take place."<sup>1410</sup> Pannenberg adds the thought that one must investigate each miracle claim individually, in order to verify its likelihood.<sup>1411</sup> Casserley reminds us, "The fact is that the improbable does occur."<sup>1412</sup>

Second, Troeltsch's system works off the assumption that supernatural events cannot occur. Yet, on what basis can he state that God cannot do miracles? Who can dictate to God what He can and cannot do?

## **b. Exaggeration of New Testament History by the Early Church**

Critics also claim that the Early Church exaggerated facts in the history of Jesus. The early Christians created the miracle stories and his claims to deity in order to glorify the founder of their faith.

We may make several comments in response.<sup>1413</sup> First, we note that those who wrote Jesus' history were none other than his closest disciples. Carson correctly states that their faith in Jesus does not necessarily mean that they introduced distortions into his story: "The faith stance of the Evangelists cannot be used to devalue their testimony."<sup>1414</sup>

Casserley compares the character of New Testament writers with writers of mystical religion of that time:

---

<sup>1407</sup>Troeltsch E. On historical and dogmatic method in theology. – 1898.

<sup>1408</sup>Geisler, Apologetics, p. 531.

<sup>1409</sup>Pinnock P. Set forth your case: Studies in Christian apologetics. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1971.

<sup>1410</sup>Noted in Craig, p. 110.

<sup>1411</sup>Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>1412</sup>Casserley J. V. L. Apologetics and evangelism. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962. – P. 132.

<sup>1413</sup>Geisler, Apologetics, p. 531.

<sup>1414</sup>Carson D. A. The gagging of God: Christianity confronts pluralism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – P. 324.

Certainly the early Christians did not believe that the speech in terms of which they communicated the gospel was mythic. In the Gentile world they were face to face with forms of religious proclamation which were quite frankly mythic, and they laid their stress precisely upon the great distinguishing characteristic of Christianity, i.e. that whereas other forms of religion were using mythic speech, they, in proclaiming the gospel, were using historic speech.<sup>1415</sup>

The genre “mythology” is characterized by certain features that enable readers to recognize it. Such features are absent in New Testament narrative. It is written in serious historical style. Additionally, elsewhere in the New Testament we encounter warnings not to diverge from the gospel. If the gospel itself was a distortion of fact, then why do the apostles so fervently insist on preserving its purity?<sup>1416</sup>

Those who acknowledge the historical reliability of the New Testament readily concur that the Gospels were written with the goal not only to record Jesus’ life, but to teach other truths as well. At the same time, the fact that the Gospel writers teach theological and Christological truths by means of the narrative in no way implies that the history is fabricated. The instructional value of the narrative does not diminish its historical value, as Moreland writes, “The fact that the Gospels are kerygmatic does not rule out their historic dimension, especially when they emphasize the inseparability of the historical and the theological in the understanding of the incarnation.”<sup>1417</sup>

Moreover, the New Testament narrative, in general, was composed by eyewitnesses. As mentioned earlier, in his book, *New Testament Introduction*, Donald Guthrie convincingly demonstrates this. So then, the New Testament authors knew well what occurred, and what did not.

For example, Papias, the first-second century church leader, testified that Peter, an eyewitness to the Gospel events, contributed to the writing of Mark’s Gospel. Papias also related that Matthew, another of the Twelve disciples, also wrote of Christ: “Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could.”<sup>1418</sup> Finally, it is directly stated that the author of the Fourth Gospel was an eyewitness to the events recorded therein (see John 21:24).

Furthermore, the apostle John, who lived until the end of the first century, was able to scrutinize alleged gospel works purported to be true history. In addition, the Gospels in many respects parallel one another, and later Gospel writers had opportunity to correct errors in earlier Gospels, but did not.<sup>1419</sup> In other words, Matthew did not correct Mark, John did not correct Matthew, etc.

We must also consider that the Early Church valued the testimony of eyewitnesses, which demonstrates its interest in genuine history. For example, when the apostles chose a replacement for Judas Iscariot, it was imperative that the candidate was a witness of the earthly life and resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:21-22). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews assured his readers that the testimony of Christ “was confirmed to us by those who heard” (Heb 2:3). Finally, John and the other apostles testified to “what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life” (1 Jn 1:1).<sup>1420</sup>

As was mentioned above, Moreland advances the following arguments in defense of an early date for Mark’s Gospel. First, the Book of Acts was clearly written before the death of the apostle Paul (64 AD) and the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD), since the book makes no mention of these crucial historical events. Second, the Gospel of Luke was written before the Book of Acts, the latter being the second volume of Luke’s works (see Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1). Third, if Luke employed the Gospel of Mark in writing his own, then Mark’s Gospel

---

<sup>1415</sup>Casserley, p. 56.

<sup>1416</sup>Geisler, *Apologetics*, p. 531.

<sup>1417</sup>Moreland, p. 140.

<sup>1418</sup>Papias, *Fragments*, 6.

<sup>1419</sup>Weeks, p. 57-58.

<sup>1420</sup>Moreland, p. 137.

chronologically precedes Luke's and becomes a very early witness to the earthly life of Jesus, dating from the mid-first century.<sup>1421</sup>

We also recall that the Gospel writers drew on materials from very early sources, which predated their writings (see discussion above). So then, there was very little time before the Gospels were written for legends or exaggerations to creep in to the narrative of Jesus' life. The Gospels themselves, in fact, were written in the mid-first century, literally a few decades after the earthly career of Christ. Moreland makes the following interesting observation:

A. N. Sherwin-White, a scholar of ancient Roman and Greek history at Oxford, has studied the rate at which legend accumulated in the ancient world, using the writings of Herodotus as a test case. He argues that even a span of two generations is not sufficient for legend to wipe out a solid core of historical facts.<sup>1422</sup>

A very helpful verse for our study is 1 Corinthians 16:22, which reads, "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha." The term "maranatha" is not Greek, but Aramaic, and means "Our Lord comes." Clearly, this expression arose and was used in Aramaic-speaking congregations, that is, in the churches of Palestine. This indicates that not only Greek, but also Jewish believers called Jesus "Lord" at a very early period of church history.

Similarly, many share the opinion that in Philippians 2:6-11, Colossians 1:15-18, and 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul borrows material from early Christian hymns proclaiming the deity of Christ, which were sung in the churches.<sup>1423</sup> If that be so, it would have great significance, since it again testifies of faith in the deity of Jesus in the Early Church. Liberal theologians claim that the first Christian believers did not believe Jesus to be God, but that this teaching appeared during the time of the apostle Paul. Yet, if Paul borrowed these hymns from the Church, then they provide a strong testimony that the Church from the beginning considered Jesus to be God.

It is also significant that the New Testament not infrequently refers to the passing on of tradition. Several times Paul mentioned that the Church's teaching was passed down from the first disciples and eyewitnesses of the Gospel events (see 1 Cor 11:2; 15:3-8; Gal 2:1-10; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6). It can be confidently assumed, then, that the apostles concerned themselves with the faithful transmission of the historical facts about Christ.<sup>1424</sup>

Additionally, in the early centuries of Christianity there existed so-called Apocryphal Gospels, written in the second century, which told a very different story about Jesus. Yet, the Early Church rejected them. This means that there was a standard used by the Early Church for judging the quality of works claiming to be true Gospels. The fact that the Church rejected the historicity of the Apocryphal Gospels indicates that it accepted the four canonical Gospels as the standard of truth. If all the Gospels, canonical as well as apocryphal, were false, then how did the Early Church distinguish one from another?<sup>1425</sup>

It is curious to note that many aspects of Jesus' teaching are absent in the epistles of the apostles, and vice versa. For example, Jesus often taught in parables, spoke of the Kingdom of God, and referred to himself as the Son of Man, yet the epistles contain little along these lines. On the other hand, in the Gospels, Jesus says little about questions that concerned the Early Church, like the questions of circumcision, spiritual gifts, water baptism, etc. If the Early Church created Jesus' history in order to address issues of their own time, then why are these topics so little discussed?<sup>1426</sup>

---

<sup>1421</sup>Ibid, p. 151-153.

<sup>1422</sup>Moreland, p. 156.

<sup>1423</sup>Ibid, p. 149.

<sup>1424</sup>Ibid, p. 144.

<sup>1425</sup>Taken from Craig, The truth about the resurrection – Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. Handbook of Christian apologetics. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – P. 194-195.

<sup>1426</sup>Moreland, p. 145-146.

Furthermore, Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:12, 25 reveal that New Testament writers distinguished their personal teaching from Jesus' teaching. It is therefore doubtful that they changed the teaching or history of Jesus to communicate their own views through them.<sup>1427</sup>

In addition, it is highly unlikely that the earliest disciples, being Jews and monotheists, deified Jesus, considering him to be God. In Israel's history, there was never an instance when a Jew attributed deity to another human. For Jews, this was blasphemy of the highest order. Even if it was Gentile believers who first "deified" Jesus, would the Jewish believers have tolerated this?

As far as Jesus' miracles, mentioned in the New Testament narrative, Longenecker correctly concludes that the life of Jesus, void of these supernatural elements, would not have left such an impression on history as it has.<sup>1428</sup> Nash applies this idea to Jesus' teachings as well:

Instead of assuming that the early church fabricated stories about Jesus to help it deal with its problems, it makes better sense to assume that practical relevance led the church to preserve some statements originally made by Jesus.<sup>1429</sup>

Sproul adds the thought that telling the true story about Jesus is a better method for inspiring the Gospel reader than creating legends about him. Myths do not reflect reality. Casserley agrees that examples have meaning for real life when they are taken from real life.<sup>1430</sup>

Moreover, one must not overlook the apostles' character. In their day, they became great teachers of morality. It is very unlikely that they would promote fabrications about Jesus. Along with this, members of the Early Church were disciples of the great Teacher of morals, Jesus Christ, whose teaching would not allow falsification of his history.<sup>1431</sup>

We must also note the absence of objections by people living in the first century about the contents of the Gospels. Moreland asks, "Christianity began, and remained for some time, in the area where Jesus ministered. If the early portrait of him was untrue, how could the apostles succeed there? Why would they have begun there in the first place?"<sup>1432</sup> If the contemporaries of Jesus and the apostles did not question the historicity of the New Testament, then what right do certain scholars have, living twenty centuries later, to challenge it?

Possibly the most convincing proofs of the historicity of the New Testament narrative of Jesus is the fact that the apostles were ready to endure torment and suffering, even giving up their lives for their testimony of him (of his life, miracles, death and resurrection). It is impossible that such a large number of people would willingly suffer in defense of accounts they knew to be untrue.<sup>1433</sup> We will discuss this more in the next chapter.

### **c. Alleged Historical and Geographical Inconsistencies in the New Testament**

Those who reject New Testament historicity point out alleged historical and geographic inconsistencies in it, which seem to undermine its veracity. We investigate this claim in the second volume of this series, chapter 7, "Inspiration of Scripture," and Appendix D, "Biblical Phenomena."

### **d. The Possibility of Miracles**

---

<sup>1427</sup>Апологетика: учебное пособие / BEE International. — Луцьк: Християнське життя, 1999. — Р. 120-125.

<sup>1428</sup>Longenecker R. N. Biblical exegesis in the apostolic period — 2nd ed. — Grand Rapids, MI; Vancouver: Eerdmans; Regent College Pub, 1999. — P. ?.

<sup>1429</sup>Nash R. H. Is Jesus the only Savior? — Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. — P. 79.

<sup>1430</sup>Casserley, p. 105-106.

<sup>1431</sup>Geisler, Apologetics, p. 531.

<sup>1432</sup>Moreland, p. 138.

<sup>1433</sup>Geisler, Apologetics, p. 531.



For the most part, those who challenge the historicity of the New Testament doubt the miraculous elements in it. Such people embrace an empirical or materialistic worldview that makes no room for the miraculous.

A discussion of the possibility of miracles is found in chapter 15 of the third volume in this series. In addition, the following chapter is devoted to the greatest of all New Testament miracles – the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

#### **e. Distortion of Material during Transmission**

The final objection we will consider is the question as to whether the New Testament contents underwent corruption during the process of copying the original New Testament texts. If so, then we do not have access to reliable eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life.

In response, we simply recall the existence of numerous manuscripts, whose dates go back to the early years of Christianity. All of them agree concerning the deity of Jesus, his miracle ministry, his death, and his resurrection. No ancient New Testament manuscript exists that denies these truths.

For a more detailed examination of the process of New Testament copying and transmission, see the second volume in this series, chapter 6, "Textual Criticism."

#### **Resources Used:**

Boyd R. T. Boyd's handbook of practical apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishers, 1997. – 234 p.

Bray G. Biblical interpretation, then and now. – Downers Grove: IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996. – 588 p.

Brooks J. A. Mark // The new American commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1991.

Carson D. A. The gagging of God: Christianity confronts Pluralism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

Casserley J. V. L. Apologetics and evangelism. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962. – 183 p.

Craig W. L. Apologetics: An introduction. – Chicago, IL: Moody, 1984. – 210 p.

Ehrman B. D. Did Jesus exist? The historical argument for Jesus of Nazareth. – San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2012. – 368 p.

Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it's true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

Geisler N. L. Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976.

Johnson R. Modern Old Testament interpretation // Corley B., Lemke S., Lovejoy G. Biblical hermeneutics. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996. – P. 99-115.

Josephus F. The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged / Ed. W. Whiston. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987.

Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. Handbook of Christian apologetics. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – 400 p.

Longenecker R. N. Biblical exegesis in the apostolic period – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI; Vancouver: Eerdmans; Regent College Pub, 1999.

Lucian. Selected Dialogues, Oxford University Press, 2006. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com>.

McDowell J. Evidence that demands a verdict. – Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1984,

McGrath A. Explaining your faith. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – 152 p.

Metzger B. A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament. – 2nd ed. – London, New York: United Bible Societies, 1994.

Moreland J. P. Scaling the secular city: A defense of Christianity. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987. – 258 p.

Mounce R. Nazareth // Bromiley G. W. The international standard Bible encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979.

Nash R. H. Is Jesus the only Savior? – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

Oden T. C. After modernity... what? – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992.

Pinnock C. Set forth your case: Studies in Christian apologetics. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1971.

Pliny. Letters / Trans. Melmoth W. // Ed. Page T. E. The Loeb Classical Library. – Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1963.

Roberts A., Donaldson J., Coxe A. C. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. – Electronic edition of the Edinburgh ed. – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

Sanders C. An introduction to research in English literary history. – New York: MacMillan, 1952.

Sproul R. C., Gerstner J., Lindsley A. Classical apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984. – 338 p.

Suetonius. The Lives of the Caesars / Trans. J. P. Rolfe // Ed. Page T. E. The Loeb Classical Library. – Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1959.

Tacitus. The annals of Tacitus / Trans. Jackson J. // Ed. Page T. E. The Loeb Classical Library. – Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1962.

The Soncino Babylonian Talmud / Trans. M. Simon. Ed. I. Epstein. – <http://www.halakhah.com>.

Van Vorst R. E. Jesus outside the New Testament. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.

Whiston W. The works of Josephus. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1987.

Weeks N. The sufficiency of Scripture. – Edinburg: Banner of Truth, 1988.

Zindler F. R., Price R. M. Bart Ehrman and the quest of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. – Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2013.

~~~~~

Апологетика: учебное пособие / BEE International. – Луцьк: Християнське життя, 1999.

Apologetics: workbook / BEE International. – Lutsk: Christian living, 1999.

~~~~~

[www.atheists.org /christianity](http://www.atheists.org/christianity)

## Chapter 15: Is He Risen?

Has Jesus risen from the dead? This is the key question for deciding about Christian faith. Christianity in its entirety rests on this truth. The apostle Paul even claimed, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain” (1 Cor 15:14). Casserley expresses it as follows, “We do not believe in the resurrection event because we have Christian faith; rather, we have Christian faith because we believe in the resurrection event.”<sup>1434</sup>

Paradoxically, one of the strongest (former) proponents of atheism, Anthony Flew, also emphasized the importance of this doctrine for establishing the truth of Christianity:

For, absent that resurrection, there remains no sufficient reason for accepting either that the man Jesus is to be incomprehensibly identified with “God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,” or that his actual teachings, whatever they may have been, are thereby revealed to be supremely authoritative.<sup>1435</sup>

Before proceeding, we must specify what Christianity means by a “resurrection.” This term does not mean Jesus’ reincarnation in another body, a spiritual revelation of Jesus to His disciples, or the resuscitation of His former body unaltered.<sup>1436</sup> “Resurrection,” in the full meaning of the term, is acquiring a glorified, immortal body, which is nonetheless derived from the body that died. This new body may possess new, even supernatural qualities.

### A. What the Bible Says about Jesus’ Resurrection

In the Old Testament, along with general references to a resurrection from the dead (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2), Isaiah’s prophecy of the Suffering Servant of the Lord hints at Messiah’s resurrection: “If He would render Himself {as} a guilt offering, He will see {His} offspring, He will prolong {His} days” (Isa 53:10). In addition, Psalm 16:10-11 speaks of the “resurrection” of David, a symbol of Messiah.

The Old Testament feast of First Fruits (Lev 23:10-11) also serves as a symbol of the resurrection of Christ, and, in fact, coincided with the actual day of His resurrection. Therefore, it is no accident that Jesus is called the “firstborn from the dead” (1 Cor 15:20; Rev 1:5). Also, the death of Jesus was not a chance occurrence – Jesus repeatedly predicted that He would die and rise again (Lk 9:22; 13:31-33; 18:31-37).

After Jesus’ crucifixion, His body was removed from the cross and given to Joseph of Arimathea, who had requested it from Pilate (Jn 19:38-41). Joseph laid the body in his own new tomb (Matt 27:59-60). Several women noted, where they laid Him (Mk 15:47). Pilate assigned a guard to the tomb and affixed a seal, so that no one would steal the body of Jesus (Matt 27:62-66).

On the third day (on Sunday) after His crucifixion (on Friday), the women visited the tomb and found it empty. Angels declared that Jesus had risen (Mark 16:1-8). Jesus then made several appearances: first to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:14), then to two disciples travelling to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-33), then to Peter (Luke 24:34), and then to the Twelve (without, of course, Judas). Later, he appeared to “more than five hundred brethren at one time” (1 Cor 15:6), to James (1 Cor 15:7), to “all the apostles” (1 Cor 15:7), and lastly to Paul (1 Cor 15:8). At the same time, unbelieving Jews spread the rumor that the disciples stole Jesus’ body (Matt 28:11-15).

Immediately after His resurrection (Lk 24:39-43) and in the following weeks (Acts 1:3), Jesus gave His disciples “many convincing proofs” of His resurrection. Finally, Jesus was taken up to heaven with a promise to

---

<sup>1434</sup>Casserley J. V. L. *Apologetics and evangelism*. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962. – P. 108-109.

<sup>1435</sup>Flew A. *Neo-Human arguments about the miraculous* // Geivett R. D., Habermas G. R. *In defense of miracles*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1997. – P. 48.

<sup>1436</sup>Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. *Handbook of Christian apologetics*. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – P. 179-180.

return (Acts 1:9-11). Subsequently, the disciples proclaimed the risen Christ, both in their preaching (Acts 2:24; 4:10; 13:30-35), and in their writings (Gal 1:1; 1 Pet 1:21; Heb 13:20; Rev 1:18).

## B. Proofs of Jesus' Resurrection

How can one verify that Jesus really arose? First, we have the testimony of the New Testament, which, in chapter 14 we saw to be a reliable historical source. We discovered that very little time expired between the resurrection event and the first written accounts of it, which supports the reliability of those accounts.

Second, the Jews were famous for their ability to accurately pass on tradition. This was shown by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls of the Old Testament, which differ little from mediaeval copies. Third, even if the resurrection narratives underwent some editorial changes over time, that does not mean that the event itself did not take place.<sup>1437</sup>

Fourth, along with Mark's account of Jesus' life, composed under the direction of the apostle Peter and aided by Aramaic sources, Matthew, Luke and John all contributed their own accounts of the resurrection. These traditions certainly include the personal experience of Matthew and John, early disciples of Jesus. Thus, there existed several independent traditions about Jesus rising from the dead.

The differences between the resurrection accounts further confirm that the Gospel writers drew from different streams of tradition that were available to them. If all the resurrection accounts were identical, this would indicate that all the Gospel writers drew from the same source. The variation we see in the four Gospels demonstrates that in the mid-first century there existed at least four separate and independent testimonies of the resurrection.

The differences between them, as Baggett comments, does not "detract from the clear consensus on the central fact of the resurrection itself."<sup>1438</sup> McGrath also considers as most reliable "accounts which vary on minor points, but are agreed upon the central point of importance – which is exactly what we find in the gospel accounts of the discovery of the empty tomb."<sup>1439</sup>

Also significant is the relatively modest description of the resurrection presented by the New Testament.<sup>1440</sup> We may compare the sober New Testament depiction of the event with the legendary version offered in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter. In comparison, the New Testament account resembles a true narrative.

And, as they declared what things they had seen, again they see three men come forth from the tomb, and two of them supporting one, and a cross following them: and of the two the head reached unto the heaven, but the head of him that was led by them overpassed the heavens. And they heard a voice from the heavens, saying, Thou hast preached to them that sleep. And a response was heard from the cross, Yea (*Gospel of Peter*, 10).

What kind of testimony do the Gospels offer of the resurrection? They claim that people actually saw Jesus alive after His resurrection. Moreover, they did not merely see Him in a vision, but had physical contact with the risen Christ. The Gospel writer Luke, who conducted a thorough investigation of Jesus' life, describes His encounter with His disciples after the resurrection. Expressions such as "see," "touch," "showed," and "ate before them" demonstrate the physical nature of His resurrection:

---

<sup>1437</sup>Craig W. L., Lüdemann G., Copan P., Tacelli R. K. Jesus' resurrection: fact or figment?: A debate between William Lane Craig & Gerd Lüdemann. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000. – P. 171, 173.

<sup>1438</sup>Baggett D. Did the resurrection happen: A conversation with Gary Habermas and Antony Flew. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009. – Kindle edition, 1151.

<sup>1439</sup>McGrath A. Explaining your faith. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – P. 74.

<sup>1440</sup>Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 71.

“See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe {it} because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate {it} before them (Luke 24:39-43).

Another interesting fact in connection with the Gospel testimony is that the first people to see the risen Christ were women. This is significant, since at that time a woman’s testimony was not accepted.<sup>1441</sup> Flavius Josephus confirms this fact: “But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 4.8.15).<sup>1442</sup> If the account of Jesus’ resurrection was a fabrication, then why did the Gospel writers, who were aware of this attitude toward women, claim that the women saw Him first? This would make their deception less convincing. They recorded it that way, because that is what actually happened.

Another key element to consider is that not a few people testified of Christ’s resurrection – more than 500, in fact. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul enumerates, “He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:6-7).<sup>1443</sup> Multiple witnesses to a physical event is strong evidence for the truth of a claim. One must also consider that at the time Paul wrote First Corinthians, most of the people who had seen Jesus after His resurrection were still alive. This means that the resurrection story, if untrue, could have been easily discredited. However, no one succeeded in doing so.<sup>1444</sup>

We also note that later in his enumeration of witnesses, Paul includes himself: “Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also” (1 Cor 15:8). The amazing thing is that Paul was a zealous defender of traditional Judaism and persecutor of the Church, yet he turned to Christ. He not only acknowledged Him as Messiah and God, but became the most prominent preacher of Christian faith. How better to explain his conversion than how he himself explained it – he saw the risen Christ (Acts 22:1-8).<sup>1445</sup>

Not only Paul, but all the apostles had to radically alter their faith and worldview. They were trained from childhood in monotheistic faith (without the concept of a Trinity), in salvation by works, and in keeping the Law and corresponding ceremonies. Now, having accepted Christ, they changed many of the basic tenets of their faith. What could have wrought such a change, except for the appearance of the living Christ? What else could have motivated them to worship Jesus and consider Him God?<sup>1446</sup>

Moreover, several details in Paul’s description in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 merit our attention: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” First, Paul states that he is preaching that, which he himself received. This means that he is passing on a tradition of the resurrection of Jesus that existed before his conversion. Paul was not the first to declare this truth.

Second, the structure of these verse reveals that the Early Church expressed this truth in poetic style. Paul did not create this structure, but the Early Church. Therefore, it existed before the writing of this epistle and thus serves as a very early witness of Christ’s resurrection

However, the most convincing evidence of the truth of disciples’ testimony is the fact that, according to Church tradition, nearly all the early disciples perished in defense of their faith. It is crucial to observe that the

---

<sup>1441</sup>Moreland feels that for this reason Paul does not mention the testimony of the women in 1 Cor 15 (Moreland J. P. *Scaling the secular city: A defense of Christianity*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987. – P. 168).

<sup>1442</sup>Whiston W. *The works of Josephus*. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1987.

<sup>1443</sup>The Gospels confirm the words of Paul, that Jesus appeared to others:: Peter (Luke 24:34), the Twelve (Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–20) (Craig, *Jesus’ resurrection*, p. 182).

<sup>1444</sup>Baggett, Kindle edition, 395; Craig, *Jesus’ resurrection*, p. 49-50.

<sup>1445</sup>Baggett, Kindle edition, 1079.

<sup>1446</sup>McGrath, p. 77.

apostles did not die simply for their *faith*, but for their *testimony*, that Jesus truly rose from the dead. If they knew that He did not rise, then it is impossible to image that they would have endured such horrific tortures and death to maintain what they knew to be a myth or an intentional deception. The death of the first Christian martyrs makes their testimony convincing, if not indisputable.

Did the witnesses of Christ's resurrection really die as martyrs? Except for James, the brother of John, the New Testament does not record these events. In order to learn of them, one must appeal to Church tradition. Appendix B of this volume presents convincing proofs that Christ's apostles indeed suffered a martyr's death.

Another approach to confirming the reality of the resurrection of Jesus is to ask the question: "Where is the body of Jesus?" We can visit the graves of other religious, cultural and political leaders of history. Other religions do not even claim that their leaders rose from the dead. Yet, the location of Jesus' body is unknown. We will now demonstrate that the most likely and logical explanation for His missing body is the one the first disciples gave – that He is risen indeed!

## **C. Denials of Jesus' Resurrection**

### **1. Supposed Origins of the Belief**

The following theories attempt to refute the physical resurrection of Jesus. The common feature between them is the denial of the empty tomb – the body of Christ allegedly remains there to this day. Yet this claim, as we shall see, is the "Achilles' heel" of these theories.

#### **a. The Hallucination Theory**

##### **1) Description**

Some advance the thesis that, out of deep regrets and feelings of guilt for abandoning Jesus at His trial, the disciples hallucinated that they saw Him alive. The "mass hallucination" reportedly began with Peter, who was in torment for having denied Christ, which led to his hallucination of seeing Him. He shared his experience with the other disciples, who then began to expect a similar visitation by their risen Lord, and imagined that they saw Him as well. It is claimed that Paul passed through a similar crisis because of his failure to keep the Law of Moses, and hallucinated as well.<sup>1447</sup>

Proponents of this theory appeal to other times, recorded in the New Testament, where Peter (Matt 17; Acts 10) and Paul (2 Cor 12) saw visions. They also feel Ezekiel had a similar visionary experience during a time of personal crisis that enabled him to continue his prophetic ministry (Ezek 1). Similarly, their hallucinations of Jesus enabled Peter and Paul to dismiss all doubts about Christ and become His wholehearted followers. Other disciples followed their example, as Goulder explains, "Once someone in a community has had such a vision, it is very common for many other people to have the same."<sup>1448</sup> It even became fashionable among believers to have "seen" Jesus.<sup>1449</sup>

Finally, similar instances of mass hallucination have occurred, namely among people who have claimed to have seen the Virgin Mary.<sup>1450</sup>

##### **2) Refutation**

---

<sup>1447</sup>Baggett, Kindle edition, 233; Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 49.

<sup>1448</sup>Goulder V. The explanatory power of conversion-visions // Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 96.

<sup>1449</sup>Ibid, p. 95-97.

<sup>1450</sup>Ibid, p. 45.

According to the New Testament narrative, the disciples not only saw Jesus, but touched Him as well (Jn 20:17, 27), and He ate before them (Lk 24:42-43). Also interesting – in three cases, the disciples initially did not know that it was Jesus (Lk 24:13-31; Jn 20:15; 21:4), which would not be so in the case of a hallucination.<sup>1451</sup>

Furthermore, the New Testament characterizes the disciples of Jesus as psychologically stable people. Additionally, they had different personalities, yet hallucinations are more characteristic of specific personality types. Also, the “chain” of hallucinations could not have started with Peter, since the first to see Jesus was Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:14).<sup>1452</sup> We must also keep in mind the unlikelihood of multiple individuals seeing the same hallucination.

It is also important to keep in mind that the disciples did not expect to see Jesus risen from the dead. When Jesus predicted His sufferings and resurrection, His disciples did not believe Him (Mark 9:31-32). In addition, in first-century Judaism, there was no conception of a dying and rising Messiah. The Jews expected a general resurrection only at the end of time (see Jn 11:24). So then, Jesus’ appearance was not simply an imagined fulfillment of the disciples’ expectation. David Strauss suggested that the disciples expected the resurrection of Messiah based on Isaiah 53. However, Jews of the first century did not interpret Isaiah 53 in this way.<sup>1453</sup>

Moreover, Paul and James certainly did not expect to see Jesus alive, since at the time of His resurrection they were still unbelievers. Paul was even a persecutor of the Church, and was attempting with all his might to oppose the claim of Jesus’ resurrection. Without doubt, he had no expectation of seeing the risen Jesus.

Along with the fact that the biblical evidence contradicts the “hallucination” theory, it also runs contrary to logic and historical data. If the disciples merely saw a hallucination, then the body of Jesus would have remained in the tomb, and the Roman or Jewish authorities, who knew the location of the tomb (see Acts 13:29), would have certainly exposed the body and promptly ended the Christian “menace.” They did not do so, or even attempt to do so, because the body was not there.<sup>1454</sup>

## **b. A Vision of Jesus**

### **1) Description**

The following theory is similar to the previous one, except for the claim that the disciples did not see a hallucination of Jesus, but saw Jesus Himself in a vision. In other words, Jesus did not rise from the dead, but God permitted Him to appear to His disciples in a visionary form. Thus, this theory works on the assumption that the grave of Jesus was not empty.

One of the main proponents of this theory, Gerd Lüdemann, offers the following arguments.<sup>1455</sup> None of the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses of the event, but rather towards the end of the first century. Therefore, their witness is unreliable. The Gospels are “not eyewitness accounts, but documents that stem from the interests of the people transmitting them.”<sup>1456</sup> Also, “They have been shaped by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to serve their theology.”<sup>1457</sup> The Gospel writers transformed the original version of a vision of Jesus into a historical event of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>1451</sup>Kreeft, p. 187-188.

<sup>1452</sup>Craig, Jesus’ resurrection, p. 49-50.

<sup>1453</sup>Craig, W. L. *Apologetics: An introduction*. Chicago, IL: Moody, 1984. – P. 184; Craig, Jesus’ resurrection, p. 34; McGrath, p. 69.

<sup>1454</sup>Little P. *Know why you believe*. – 4th ed. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000. – P. 51; *Апологетика: учебное пособие* / BEE International. – Луцьк: Християнське життя, 1999. – P. 112; Craig, Jesus’ resurrection, p. 114.

<sup>1455</sup>Craig, Jesus’ resurrection, p. 35-61, 150-156.

<sup>1456</sup>*Ibid*, p. 55.

<sup>1457</sup>*Ibid*, p. 61.



Therefore, the oldest testimony to Jesus' resurrection is by the apostle Paul, found in the 15th chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians. Yet, in this passage Paul does not appeal to an empty tomb to prove the resurrection. We read:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve (1 Cor 15:3-5).

Lüdemann notes that Paul did not say the grave was empty. Paul simply meant that Jesus "arose" in the sense that His disciples saw Him alive in the spirit after His death. Lüdemann draws a parallel between the phrases "died-buried" and "rose-appeared." On the one hand, the death of Christ is shown by the fact that He was buried. On the other hand, His "resurrection" is proven not by an empty tomb, but in that "He appeared to Cephas." In light of the fact that the appearance to Peter may have been spiritual, it follows that Jesus' "resurrection" was spiritual as well.

In support of the thesis that the resurrection was not physical, critics observe that the word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15:8 to describe his experience with the risen Christ is *ὤπαω* (*horao*), which in the passive voice means "appeared." It is claimed that on the road to Damascus Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision. In addition, this same word *ὤπαω* (*horao*) is used to describe the experience of others, listed in verses 5-7, who "saw" Jesus as well. Therefore, they all had the same visual experience that Paul had – a spiritual vision of Christ. In addition, Paul speaks of a spiritual experience with Christ in Galatians 1:15-16: "God ... was pleased to reveal His Son *in me*."

Furthermore, Lüdemann considers the narrative of Jesus' burial unreliable in light of certain inconsistencies in the story of Joseph of Arimathea. In the Gospel of Mark, Joseph is depicted as "a prominent member of the Council" (Mark 15:43). In the Gospel of Luke he is "a member of the Council, a good and righteous man" (Luke 23:50). Matthew and John claim that he was "a disciple of Jesus" (Matt 27:57; John 19:38). We may add the testimony of Acts 13:27-29, that not Joseph, but "those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers... laid Him in a tomb." Lüdemann concludes that, in the course of time, the person of Joseph, the one who buried Jesus, changes and improves, making the historicity of this account suspect. If we cannot believe the history of Joseph, then how can we believe the account of the empty tomb?

Roy Hoover draws our attention to the fact that the location of the city of Arimathea has not been established. He also is amazed by the fact that, although Joseph buried Jesus, he is not mentioned (at least in the New Testament) among the witnesses of the empty tomb. Additionally, although the account of Jesus' crucifixion are uniform, those of His burial and resurrection vary. Because of this, Hoover accepts only the account of His death as historically reliable.<sup>1458</sup>

Also in support of the "vision hypothesis," the Book of Acts records other instances of people seeing visions. For example, the first Christian martyr, Stephan, saw a vision of Christ as he was being martyred (Acts 7:56). Church history records other accounts of people seeing Jesus in visions as well.

Critics also dispute the account of Jesus' ascension to heaven. According to Luke's Gospel, Jesus ascended to heaven near Bethany, a short time after His resurrection. Yet, according to Acts chapter 1, He ascended from the Mount of Olives forty days after His resurrection. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then He did not ascend to heaven either, which would explain these discrepancies.

In answer to the claim that the authorities would have revealed the body of Jesus to disprove the resurrection, Lüdemann responds that either: (1) after a fifty day period between the crucifixion and the apostles' announcing the resurrection, the body of Jesus may have already decayed beyond recognition, or (2)

---

<sup>1458</sup>Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 133-134.

the authorities forgot the tomb's location. Possibly, the apostles started preaching even later. Another suggestion – they laid Jesus' body in a common grave, and so it was impossible to recover it.<sup>1459</sup>

## 2) Refutation

First, since early sources and eyewitness accounts were used in writing the Gospels (see chapter 14), the claim that the testimony of the Gospels is unreliable is unconvincing. In addition, not only the Gospels speak of an empty tomb, but the Book of Acts as well (Acts 2:27-31).

In 1 Corinthians 15:4, Paul implies the same.<sup>1460</sup> It logically follows that when Paul speaks of Jesus' burial and resurrection, he means that after the resurrection the tomb was empty. Pannenberg comments, "From the fact that he does not expressly mention the empty tomb, we cannot infer that he did not know about it."<sup>1461</sup> Gundry points out that the word "raised," used by Paul, implies a change in physical position from horizontal to vertical.<sup>1462</sup>

Most likely, in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 Paul does not specifically mention the empty tomb, because for the early disciples the primary proof of Jesus' resurrection was not the empty tomb, but his appearing to His disciples, many of whom were still alive at the time to testify to it.<sup>1463</sup> Thiselton is of the opinion that Paul's mention of his burial ("He was buried") relates not only to what precedes ("He died"), but also to what follows ("He was raised").<sup>1464</sup> The resurrection nullified the effect of the burial.

Thiselton also points out that the "revelation" of Jesus to His disciples, testified to in 1 Corinthians 15, was not a subjective experience, but an objective one. Every other aspect of this formulaic expression was public and objective, especially the first two: "He *died* ... and was *buried* ... was raised ... and appeared." The objective nature of the first two elements implies the objective nature of the remaining two.<sup>1465</sup> Gordon Fee concurs:

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was not a form of "spiritual" existence. Just as he was truly dead and buried, so he was truly raised from the dead bodily and seen by a large number of witnesses on a variety of occasions.<sup>1466</sup>

Gundry adds that in using the word ὁράω (*horao*), that is, "revealed," Paul is not referring to the *method* by which Jesus revealed Himself, but the *fact* that He did so. Paul does not mean to imply that Jesus appeared to Peter in the same manner in which He appeared to him (in a vision), but that Peter saw the risen Jesus, and he (Paul) saw Him too.<sup>1467</sup> In his second epistle, Paul makes the point that he is in no way inferior to the other apostles (2 Cor 11:5), and this is one example of that. Moreover, in 1 Corinthians 9:1, Paul directly states, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"<sup>1468</sup> Crossan expresses Paul's goal well:

---

<sup>1459</sup>Ibid, p. 36, 99.

<sup>1460</sup>Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>1461</sup>Noted in Thiselton A. P. The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – P. 1198.

<sup>1462</sup>Robert Gundry, in Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 116-118.

<sup>1463</sup>Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 48, 129.

<sup>1464</sup>Thiselton, p. 1192–1193.

<sup>1465</sup>Ibid, p. 1200-1201.

<sup>1466</sup>Fee G. D. The First Epistle to the Corinthians. – Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2014. – P. 808.

<sup>1467</sup>Robert Gundry, in Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 116-118.

<sup>1468</sup>Gundry R. Trimming the debate // Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 181.

Paul needs in 1 Cor. 15 to equate his own experience with that of the preceding apostles. To equate, that is, its *validity* and *legitimacy*, but not necessarily its mode or manner.... Paul's own entranced revelation should not be ... the model for all the others.<sup>1469</sup>

Craig challenges the view that Paul saw Jesus in a vision at all, but feels that he actually saw Him in His resurrected body. Craig notes that Paul's travelling companions did see a bright light (Acts 22:9). They simply did not see the One, who was in the light.<sup>1470</sup>

Moreland focuses our attention on the following detail in 1 Corinthians 15:4 – the use of the phrase “the third day.” This expression often refers to the time of Christ's resurrection (for example: Matt 16:21; 20:19; 27:64; Acts 10:40). Indicating a specific time for this event better corresponds with a specific historical occurrence, than for a series of spiritual visions.<sup>1471</sup>

In commenting on the theology of Paul, Moreland mentions the practice of water baptism. According to Romans 6:3-5, baptism is the identification of believers with the death and resurrection of Christ. When someone comes up out of the baptismal waters, he/she is no longer in them. In a similar way, when Jesus rose from the dead, He no longer remained in the tomb. We also note that the practice of water baptism goes back to the beginning of the Church. This means that the Church has always believed in the physical resurrection of Christ.<sup>1472</sup>

Gundry insightfully points out that seeing a departed person in a vision would not lead one to conclude that he/she has risen from the dead. If the apostles merely saw Jesus in a vision, then how did the notion arise that He rose from the dead? Along with this, Paul's goal in writing 1 Corinthians 15 was to prove the future physical resurrection of believers from the dead. His main argument is that Jesus has risen (1 Cor 15:12-20), which rules out the idea that Jesus merely appeared in a vision.<sup>1473</sup>

Furthermore, several times the New Testament specifically states that Jesus appeared in “a vision” (Acts 9:10; 18:9). Thus, the New Testament makes a distinction between when Jesus appears in a vision, and when He appears in His resurrected body.

Concerning the question of Jesus' burial and the identity of Joseph of Arimathea, as a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph would have been a well-known figure. If he was a fictitious figure, certainly someone would have objected to his inclusion in the story of Jesus.<sup>1474</sup> Additionally, all four Gospels testify of his existence, which supports the reliability of his history. The fact that the location of Arimathea is unknown actually works in favor of Joseph's historicity. If this was a deliberate falsification, its authors would have chosen a location of origin for Joseph that had some historical or theological significance. Finally, the statement in Acts 13:27-29 that “those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers ... laid Him in a tomb” does not exclude Joseph of Arimathea, since he was certainly a resident of Jerusalem and one of its rulers.<sup>1475</sup>

As far as Lüdemann's claim that the body of Jesus may well have decayed beyond recognition in fifty days, we would anticipate that, even if that was the case, the Jewish leaders would have attempted to produce it anyway, but they did not. Instead, they spread the rumor that the disciples of Jesus stole the body, thereby acknowledging that the tomb was empty.<sup>1476</sup> Additionally, before Jesus' burial, Nicodemus “came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds {weight.} So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices” (Jn 19:39-40), which would have slowed the process of decay. Furthermore, the tomb, where Jesus was laid, was Joseph of Arimathea's personal tomb, “where no one had ever lain” (Lk

---

<sup>1469</sup>John Dominic Crossan, in Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 51.

<sup>1470</sup>Craig, Apologetics, p. 198-199.

<sup>1471</sup>Moreland, p. 171.

<sup>1472</sup>Ibid, p. 170, 180.

<sup>1473</sup>Gundry R. Trimming the debate // Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 109, 120.

<sup>1474</sup>Moreland, p. 167; Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 33.

<sup>1475</sup>Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 47.

<sup>1476</sup>Craig, Apologetics, p. 190.

23:53; Matt 27:60). Thus, it was not necessary to identify the body of Jesus, but just to show that a body remained in Joseph's tomb. The suggestion that the location of Jesus' tomb was unknown is discussed and refuted later.

Finally, there is no real contradiction between Luke's account of Jesus' ascension in Luke 24 and Acts 1. Bethany is located on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.<sup>1477</sup> The Lucan account is an abbreviation of the full account given in Acts. In addition, it seems highly unlikely that Luke, who wrote both the third Gospel and the Book of Acts, would contradict himself.

### **c. "Dying and Rising God" Myths**

#### **1) Description**

Some hold to the opinion that the Early Church created the myth of Jesus' resurrection in the fashion of legendary pagan gods worshipped at that time, who allegedly died and rose. These pagan myths, in turn, were created to reflect the cycles of nature: fall – death, spring – resurrection. In the history of literature, examples of "dying and rising gods" exist, such as Osiris (Egypt), Baldr (Norway), Tammuz (Sumer), Dionysus (Greece) and several others.<sup>1478</sup>

In the 19th century, James Frazer was a strong proponent of this view, which he advanced in his publication *The Golden Bough*. For many years, this work served as the standard expression of the theory. In 1969, though, Jonathan Smith authored a dissertation that subjected Frazer's work to criticism and demonstrated that in many instances Frazer exaggerated his position, and that the "dying and rising god" myths were not as widespread as once thought. Researchers continue to debate this question.<sup>1479</sup>

#### **2) Refutation**

In refutation of this theory, Peter, the chief of the apostles, insisted, "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet 1:16).<sup>1480</sup> The presence of eyewitnesses of Jesus' life effectively refute the mythological view.

Alister McGrath advances the following arguments.<sup>1481</sup> Myths, by definition, are ahistorical, that is, they do not claim to be true, yet, the New Testament does so claim. Myths lack eyewitnesses to the proposed events, while the New Testament abounds with eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Finally, McGrath doubts that the apostles even knew of such myths, so as to imitate them.

Moreland advances similar proofs. In general, Jews of the first century were not interested in Gentile mythology or the so-called "mystery religions." They strictly followed the Law of Moses and the teaching of the Prophets. It is highly unlikely that they borrowed from pagan myths of dying and rising gods. Moreover, in many respects the teaching and practices of these "mystery religions" radically diverged from Christianity, making interdependence between them unlikely.<sup>1482</sup>

---

<sup>1477</sup>Earle R. Bethany // Bromiley G. W. The international standard Bible encyclopedia. – Revised ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 1. – P. 463.

<sup>1478</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dying-and-rising\\_god](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dying-and-rising_god); Ehrman B. D. Did Jesus exist? The historical argument for Jesus of Nazareth. – San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2012. – Kindle edition, 220ff; Zindler F. R., Price R. M. Bart Ehrman and the quest of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. – Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2013. – Chp. 6 (E. Douherty).

<sup>1479</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dying-and-rising\\_god](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dying-and-rising_god); Ehrman, Kindle edition, 220ff.

<sup>1480</sup>Kreeft, p. 181.

<sup>1481</sup>McGrath, p. 82-83.

<sup>1482</sup>Moreland, p. 181-182.

Furthermore, the resurrection accounts in the Gospels do not correspond to the literary style of mythology. Myths, as a rule, are verbose and embellished with unusual phenomena. The Gospels, however, speak with sound and sober language. We recall the example of how the Gospel of Peter exaggerates the resurrection account (see above). In addition, according to Kreeft and Tacelli, in the history of literature it is hard to find a myth written less than 30 years after the death of a leader. Myths tend to appear much later.<sup>1483</sup>

Kreeft and Tacelli also make an interesting point. Critics often reject the resurrection, because they consider the Bible mythological. Yet, they consider the Bible mythological, because it contains stories like the resurrection.<sup>1484</sup> This is circular reasoning.

#### **d. Resurrection of the Disciples' Faith**

We will briefly touch on a final theory, which attempts to explain how belief in resurrection arose. It is claimed that Jesus did not rise, but rather His disciples' faith "arose." The disciples had been expecting that Jesus would inaugurate the messianic kingdom, but He failed to meet their expectations. Nonetheless, the disciples decided to continue His ministry and spread His teaching anyway. Their faith "arose."

On the other hand, Kreeft and Tacelli wonder exactly how the disciples' faith was restored.<sup>1485</sup> If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then why should they believe in Him or continue to follow Him? He failed to introduce the messianic kingdom – He let His disciples down.

One must also recall that, before Jesus, other "Messiahs" gathered a following, but when their movements failed, their disciples scattered (see Acts 5:36-37). How can one assume that the disciples of Jesus would have not done the same?<sup>1486</sup> Additionally, in the New Testament text, there is no hint that the word "resurrection" refers to resurrected faith. The term always refers to a historical event and is used in the context of victory over physical death.

Finally, how can one imagine that the disciples of Jesus would endure such deprivation and torment to maintain their testimony that Jesus truly arose? Would not one expect that in the face of such terror, at least one of the disciples would have explained that they really did not mean that Jesus physically arose?

### **2. Theories Explaining the Absence of Jesus' Body**

The theories already discussed above all work off the assumption that the tomb was not empty. For this very reason, they are not difficult to refute, since none of them provide a convincing answer to the question, "Where is Jesus' body?" The following theories take this question more seriously and attempt to resolve this dilemma. Let us see if they succeed.

#### **a. The Swoon Theory**

##### **1) Description**

Some assume that Jesus did not really die, but simply lost consciousness. In the grave, he revived and fled. Anthony Flew sees support for this theory in Pilate's surprise that Jesus died so quickly (Mark 15:44).<sup>1487</sup>

The 19th century thinker, H. E. G. Paulus, developed this theory in more detail. He taught that: (1) the spear did not hit Jesus' heart, but a vein, (2) the coolness of the tomb and the fragrance of the spices revived him, (3) an earthquake removed the stone from before the tomb, (4) upon leaving the tomb, Jesus dressed in

---

<sup>1483</sup>Kreeft, p. 189-191.

<sup>1484</sup>Ibid, p. 201-202.

<sup>1485</sup>Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>1486</sup>Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 182-183.

<sup>1487</sup>Baggett, Kindle edition, 183.

the clothes of the gardener, (5) Jesus met with his disciples for 40 days, (6) he ascended a hill into a cloud, and (7) he died soon afterward from his wounds.<sup>1488</sup>

Another 19th century figure, Karl Bahrdt, advanced a different version of this theory. He feels that Jesus pretended to be dead in order to correct the Jewish misunderstanding that Messiah was a political leader. He wanted people to value spiritual things instead. Therefore, he made an agreement with the Sanhedrin that they would condemn him, drank some medicinal potion before the crucifixion, and then pretended to die. Joseph of Arimathea aroused him, and he subsequently withdrew with his disciples in isolation.<sup>1489</sup>

## 2) Refutation

In refutation of the “Swoon Theory,” we may appeal to both biblical and other forms of argumentation. From a biblical point of view, we read that the disciples discovered the linen wraps, in which Jesus’ body was wrapped, lying in the place where the body had been, and in the same position.<sup>1490</sup> This means that Jesus did not remove the wrappings, but passed right through them in a supernatural way.

Furthermore, by all accounts, Jesus was an honest person. Therefore, it is unwise to assume that he would deceive his disciples into thinking that he rose from the dead.<sup>1491</sup> In addition, the New Testament records that a Roman centurion, who was standing guard at the cross, confirmed his death. A Roman centurion would have had sufficient expertise in such affairs to make an accurate assessment and was required to verify the death of the condemned.<sup>1492</sup> He even made sure of his assessment by piercing Jesus with a spear.<sup>1493</sup>

From a logical and historical perspective, this theory lacks plausibility as well. First, execution by crucifixion was a well-known practice in the first century. A person enduring crucifixion would be in critical condition and could in no way roll away a grave stone, flee, and then convince others that he rose from the dead and possessed a new, glorified body.<sup>1494</sup>

Finally, even secular historians of that period confirm that Jesus truly died (see chapter 14). Until the 18th century, no one suggested that Jesus merely lost consciousness. If that idea was at all plausible, then someone in the long history of this debate would have suggested it long before then.

### b. A Spiritual Resurrection

#### 1) Description

The Jehovah Witnesses, who reject the full deity of Jesus Christ, maintain the position that Jesus rose not physically, but spiritually. This is similar to the “vision” view discussed above, but there are differences as well. First, the disciples did not see a *vision* of Jesus, but Jesus himself in a “materialized” spiritual body (described later). Second, the previous theory denied the empty tomb, whereas the Jehovah Witnesses affirm it.

The Jehovah Witnesses’ teaching of a spiritual resurrection derives from their conviction that the human nature of Jesus was completely destroyed. In this way, he became a “sacrifice” for sin. Similar to Old Testament sacrifices for sins, which were totally consumed, the humanity of Jesus must have experienced the same fate, or else his death could not accomplish redemption.<sup>1495</sup>

---

<sup>1488</sup>McGrath, p. 79-80.

<sup>1489</sup>Craig, Apologetics, p. 155

<sup>1490</sup>Geisler, N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1976. – P. 348.

<sup>1491</sup>Little, p. 52-53.

<sup>1492</sup>Geisler, Apologetics, p. 347.

<sup>1493</sup>Baggett, Kindle edition, 218; Geisler, Apologetics, p. 347.

<sup>1494</sup>Geisler, p. 347; Little, p. 52-53.

<sup>1495</sup>Reasoning from the Scriptures. – Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1989. – P. 217.

Therefore, Jesus resurrection was not physical, but spiritual: “Father Jehovah God raised him from the dead, not as a human Son, but as a mighty immortal spirit Son.”<sup>1496</sup> Similarly, Joseph Rutherford, the second president of the Jehovah Witnesses, taught, “(He) was raised from the dead a spirit being, divine in nature.”<sup>1497</sup> The founder of the movement, Charles Russel, explains that before Jesus became human, He was a spiritual being, but at his incarnation his spiritual nature was exchanged for a perfect human nature, so that he could truly redeem humanity. Then, at the moment of his resurrection, his spiritual nature was restored and, consequently, he was no longer human. In conclusion:

Jesus was not a combination of the two natures, human and spiritual.... When Jesus was in the flesh he was a perfect human being; prior to that he was a perfect spiritual being; and since his resurrection he is a perfect spiritual being of the highest or divine order.<sup>1498</sup>

Jehovah Witnesses cite the following verses in support:<sup>1499</sup>

For Christ also died for sins once for all, {the} just for {the} unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit (1 Pet 3:18).

It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual {body.} So also it is written, “The first man, Adam, became.” The last Adam {became} a life-giving spirit (1 Cor 15:44-45).

Jehovah Witnesses also point out that, when Jesus appeared after His resurrection, he did not always look the same, i.e. his disciples did not always recognize him (see John 20:14; 21:4; Luke 24:15-16). They explain that God allowed Jesus to “materialize” his body in various forms, including the wounds in his hands. In addition, if Jesus remained in the body, then he would have remained “lower than the angels,” which contradicts Heb 2:6-9.<sup>1500</sup>

As far as Jesus’ human body, God removed it from the tomb: “After dematerializing his fleshy body, he ascends to heaven as a spirit person.”<sup>1501</sup> God left the tomb empty to strengthen the faith of believers, that Jesus truly rose spiritually.<sup>1502</sup>

## 2) Refutation

In refutation of this view, we immediately note that it contradicts the uniform testimony of the New Testament, which the Jehovah Witnesses accept as Holy Scripture. The New Testament teaches that Jesus’ resurrection was physical. For example, in Peter’s first sermon to those assembled in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, he announced, “God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.... He was neither abandoned to hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay” (Acts 2:24, 31).

Furthermore, after his resurrection, Jesus attempted in multiple ways to convince His disciples that He possessed a physical body. He showed them His hands, invited them to touch Him, and ate food before them

---

<sup>1496</sup>Let God be true. – 2nd ed. – Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1952. – P. 40.

<sup>1497</sup>Rutherford J. F. Millions now living will never die. – Brooklyn, NY: International Bible Students Association, 1920. – P. 75.

<sup>1498</sup>Russell P. Studies in the Scriptures. – Brooklyn, NY: International Bible Students Association, 1911. – V. 1. – P. 179.

<sup>1499</sup>Make sure of all things, hold fast to what is fine. – Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, 1965. – P. 255.

<sup>1500</sup>Make sure of all things, p. 255; Let God be true, p. 41, 217.

<sup>1501</sup>The greatest man who ever lived. – Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1991. – P. 440.

<sup>1502</sup>Reasoning from the Scriptures, p. 217-218.

(Luke 24:39-43). Sheremet insightfully notes that Luke chapter 24 directly rebuts the “spiritual” resurrection view.<sup>1503</sup> We read:

But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:37-39).

In addition, in the 15th chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul defends the position that there will be a physical resurrection for believers on the basis of Jesus’ physical resurrection. If Paul did not believe in Jesus’ physical resurrection, he would never have employed such an argument:

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised.... But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep (1 Cor 15:12-13, 20).

We also note that in the end times, Jesus will come on the clouds as the “Son of Man” (Matt 26:64), that is, with human characteristics, including a human body.<sup>1504</sup>

As far as the verses employed by Jehovah Witnesses in support of their view, we respond as follows. First, 1 Peter 3:18 concerns the history of Jesus before his physical resurrection. Second, when Paul speaks of a “spiritual body” in 1 Cor 15:44-45, he is referring to a physical body with spiritual qualities. Notice, that the word “body” is a noun, which refers to the substance in question. The word “spiritual,” though, is an adjective, which describes the qualities of the accompanying noun. The resurrected body possesses certain spiritual qualities, but still remains a “body.”

Third, concerning Hebrews 2:6-9, Jesus being “lower than the angels” does not refer to his incarnation – that he received a body – but that he left his heavenly glory, which he received back again after his ascension: “crowned with glory and honor” (Heb 2:9). Finally, the argument that God left the tomb empty to strengthen the disciples’ faith is unconvincing. An empty tomb serves to confirm not a spiritual, but a physical resurrection.

### **c. Confusion about the Location of Jesus’ Tomb**

According to this theory, Jesus was not laid in the tomb, where the disciples sought his body later. He was laid in another tomb, possibly a common tomb for criminals. However, according to the biblical data, the women specifically noted where Jesus was buried, and on the day of the resurrection they went to that tomb. It is no accident that all the Synoptic Gospels mark this event (see Matt 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55).<sup>1505</sup>

Later, after the women returned from the empty grave, they told Jesus’ disciples what they saw, and Peter and John ran to the tomb and saw the same. Clearly, everyone knew where Jesus’ tomb was located. It could be easily recognized as well, since Pilate had assigned a guard to the tomb.<sup>1506</sup>

Even from a logical point of view, this theory is improbable. Why did the Roman and Jewish authorities, who were highly interested in stopping this new movement, not seek out the tomb until it was located? Even if

---

<sup>1503</sup>Шеремет Н. Лжеучение Свидетелей Иеговы в свете Библии; Студенческий реферат. – Киев: Евангельская Теологическая Семинария.

<sup>1504</sup>Duncan H. Jehovah’s Witnesses and the deity of Christ. – Lubbock, TX: Missionary Crusade. – P. 10.

<sup>1505</sup>MacDowell J. The new evidence that demands a verdict. – Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1999 – P. 228; Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it’s true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. – P. 422.

<sup>1506</sup>Ibid.



the body had undergone some decomposition, they would have at least made the attempt to show it and prove it was Jesus' body. Yet, they made no such attempt.

It is unlikely that the disciples were confused as to the location of Jesus' tomb. Usually, the faithful followers of a religious leader make his tomb a memorial or shrine. They do not forget its whereabouts. At that time, the Jews already practiced honoring famous gravesites (see Matt 23:29-30). Even if they had forgotten its location, Joseph of Arimathea, the owner of the tomb, was sure to remember.<sup>1507</sup>

According to another version of this theory, Joseph of Arimathea, who requested the body of Jesus from Pilate, laid it in an undisclosed place. Yet, this option does not agree with the biblical data, which states that Joseph laid Jesus' body in his own tomb (Matt 27:59-60), from which he later rose, and that the women marked the place (Luke 23:55).

Even from a logical or historical point of view, this option remains unconvincing. One simply has to ask, "Why would Joseph do this?" "Why would he not disclose the location to anyone?" Joseph would certainly have revealed the tomb's location to the side he was loyal to: either to the disciples, or to the Jewish authorities. This means that either the disciples, or the Jewish authorities knew where Jesus' body lie. Yet, the upcoming material rules out both these options.

#### **d. The Authorities Had the Body**

The suggestion that the Roman or Jewish authorities had Jesus' body is totally ruled out. First, this theory fails to agree with the New Testament account. Second, from a logical/historical point of view, if the authorities had the body, then when the disciples began to preach the resurrection of Christ, the authorities could have simply shown the body, and in so doing, they could have ended the Christian movement. We recall that they knew its location (Acts 13:29).<sup>1508</sup> They did not do so, because they did not have the body.

It is also significant that the disciples began to preach the resurrection in Jerusalem, the city where Jesus was buried. If they had begun their preaching far from Jerusalem, one might understand why the Roman or Jewish authorities did not produce the body. In Jerusalem, though, this would have been an easy task.

#### **e. The Disciples Stole the Body**

The most widespread version of the missing body among unbelievers has been that the disciple stole the body while the guards slept. Yet, there are serious defects in this theory.<sup>1509</sup> First, according to biblical data (and it logically follows as well), the disciples were afraid for their lives. When Jesus was arrested, they all fled. Peter, the leader of the disciples, denied Jesus three times. On resurrection day, "the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews." (Jn 20:19). It is highly improbable that such disciples would have had courage to attack and overpower the guard assigned to the tomb and steal the body of Jesus.

Second, the Bible records that the linen grave wrappings remained in the tomb. In the course of stealing the body and fleeing from the tomb, the disciples would not have stopped to unwrap the body. Third, the apostles became teachers of high moral values in the Early Church. It would have been inconsistent for them to create a deliberate lie concerning the cardinal doctrine of Christianity – that Jesus rose from the dead.

In addition, as was mentioned before, the authorities assigned a guard to the tomb. It is unlikely that they slept on duty. Roman soldiers were well trained and highly disciplined. If they abandoned their post, they could face execution. The Bible relates that the soldiers on guard were not punished. This is an implicit evidence that they did not sleep. Also, it would have been impossible for the disciples to have rolled away a two-ton grave stone and not awake the "sleeping" guards. Along with this, the disciples could have never

---

<sup>1507</sup>Feinberg, p. 424; McGrath, p. 74.

<sup>1508</sup>Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 114.

<sup>1509</sup>See Geisler, p. 349; Little, p. 50-51; MacDowell, p. 235ff.

overpowered the guards without one of them perishing in the process. Finally, how could “sleeping” guards testify that it was the *disciples* that stole the body?

L. Stephen makes an interesting observation. In Acts chapters 4-5, the apostles were arrested and stood before the Sanhedrin. If the disciples stole the body, then why did the Jewish leaders fail to accuse them of this at the trial? The fact is that the authorities knew well that they themselves created that story.<sup>1510</sup>

Even without biblical support, one can easily overturn the suggestion that the disciples stole the body. First, we know that the disciples experienced a radical life-change in connection with their claim that Jesus arose. What could have transformed these weak, frightened disciples into fearless witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, except for the fact that he truly arose?

In addition, as was argued earlier, before Christianity, other messianic movements arose, and when they failed, their followers abandoned their hope in the self-proclaimed “Messiah” and dispersed (see Acts 5:36-37). Why would the disciples of Jesus not have done the same?<sup>1511</sup>

Finally, an even stronger proof for the resurrection of Jesus is the death of the apostles. According to Church tradition, nearly all the early disciples perished in defense of their faith. Again, it is crucial to observe that the apostles did not die simply for their *faith*, but for their *testimony*, that Jesus truly rose from the dead. If they knew that He did not rise, then it is impossible to image that they would have endured such horrific tortures and death to maintain what they knew to be a myth or an intentional deception. The death of the first Christian martyrs makes their testimony convincing, if not indisputable. Appendix B of this volume presents convincing proofs that Christ's apostles indeed suffered a martyr's death.

#### **f. Thieves Stole the Body**

In conclusion, we may briefly mention the theory that the disciples did not steal the body, but some thieves did. From a biblical point of view, this option is implausible, since Pilate assigned a guard to the tomb with the express purpose of preventing someone from stealing the body. Besides this, the Bible records that the linen burial wrapping were left in place, which thieves would not have done. In addition, as a rule, grave robbers do not steal the body, but valuables in the tomb. Finally, neither the Roman, nor the Jewish authorities offered such an explanation for the missing body.<sup>1512</sup>

#### **D. The Significance of Jesus' Resurrection**

Having considered every proposed alternative explanation for the origin of the resurrection story and the missing body of Christ, we confidently conclude that not one of them is convincing. They all contradict not only New Testament data, but also historical and logical considerations. The most rational and plausible explanation is that, which the earliest disciples of Jesus offered, – that He is truly risen!

Unfortunately, not everyone finds the evidences for the historical, physical resurrection of Jesus sufficiently convincing to accept it as true.<sup>1513</sup> Yet such individuals, as a rule, embrace a naturalistic view concerning the nature of reality. They refuse to accept a supernatural solution to the question, but insist on a natural explanation. Yet, if a person *a priori* rejects the possibility of the supernatural, he/she places unfounded restrictions on his/her ability to know the truth and, consequently, will incorrectly evaluate the clear evidences in defense of Jesus's resurrection.

We concur with Davis, “What we must always do, in order to be rational, is accept the *best* explanation.”<sup>1514</sup> Craig wisely comments:

---

<sup>1510</sup>Stephen L. History of English thought in the eighteenth century. – 3rd ed. – London: John Murray, 1902. – P. 245.

<sup>1511</sup>Craig, Jesus' resurrection, P. 182-183.

<sup>1512</sup>Feinberg, p. 428ff.

<sup>1513</sup>Baggett, Kindle edition, 1353.

<sup>1514</sup>Steven Davis, in Craig, Jesus' resurrection, p. 75,

If no natural explanation is available and if there is a supernatural explanation suggested in the religious and historical context in which the event occurs, then I see no reason why you should be barred from inferring a supernatural explanation.<sup>1515</sup>

Even if a resurrection from the dead at first glance appears implausible and unprecedented, that does not provide grounds to reject it. This is how God underscored the uniqueness of His Son, as McGrath writes, “The fact that there are no other persons who have raised from the dead may well make it more difficult to accept that Jesus was raised – but it also underscores Jesus’ uniqueness.”<sup>1516</sup>

What is the significance of Jesus’ resurrection? What does it mean? It may possibly indicate the deity of Jesus Christ. Since Jesus is God, death could not hold Him in its power. If Jesus is truly God, then He is worthy of our dedication and worship.

Even if Christ’s resurrection does not prove His deity, it proves, at the minimum, that God set His approval on Jesus’ life, teaching and ministry, confirming that approval by a miracle of resurrection. The result for us is still a life committed to following Jesus Christ. Geivett writes in this regard, “If God caused the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus, this would be evidence of God’s endorsement of Jesus and his teaching.”<sup>1517</sup> Habermas adds, “God would not have raised a heretic from the dead.”<sup>1518</sup>

At the same time, if by the resurrection God endorsed Jesus’ teaching, then He endorsed Jesus’ claims to deity as well, as Habermas writes, “The God of the universe raised Jesus, approving both Jesus’ personal claims to deity and the central thrust of his mission.”<sup>1519</sup> Therefore, in one way or another, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead confirms His deity.

In this regard, the notable Christian theologian, Cornelius Van Til, is misguided in his opinion that our understanding of the significance of Christ’s resurrection depends on theological considerations, that is, what we already believe about God before we consider the meaning of the resurrection. He writes:

Granted that (the pragmatic philosopher) allows that Christ actually arose from the grave, he will say that this proves nothing more than that something very unusual took place in the case of “that man Jesus.” ... If we would really defend Christianity as an historical religion we must at the same time defend the theism upon which Christianity is based. This involves us in a philosophical discussion.<sup>1520</sup>

The fact is that, as noted above, the resurrection confirms the truth of what Jesus taught and did. The resurrection is not substantiated by certain theological presuppositions that precede its consideration, but vice versa. It is the proof itself that our theology, which is based on the resurrected Christ’s teaching, is true.

So then, in distinction from other religious and philosophical systems that we investigated in this volume, Christianity is based not on the subjective experience or opinion of certain individuals, but on an established historical event. Those who wish to refute Christianity must not only refute its doctrinal positions, but must also disprove that the resurrection of Christ took place. This effort, however, as we have just seen, cannot succeed.

## Resources Used:

---

<sup>1515</sup>Craig, Jesus’ resurrection, p. 58

<sup>1516</sup>McGrath, p. 84.

<sup>1517</sup>Geivett, p. 196.

<sup>1518</sup>Habermas G. R. The evidential method // Gundry S. N. Five views on apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. – P. 119.

<sup>1519</sup>Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>1520</sup>Van Til P. Christian apologetics. – Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 1976. – P. 2.

- Baggett D. Did the resurrection happen: A conversation with Gary Habermas and Antony Flew. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009. – Kindle edition.
- Boyd R. T. Boyd's handbook of practical apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishers, 1997.
- Casserley J. V. L. Apologetics and evangelism. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962. – 183 p.
- Ciampa R. E., Rosner, B. S. The First Letter to the Corinthians. – Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010.
- Craig W. L. Apologetics: An introduction. – Chicago, IL: Moody, 1984. – 210 p.
- Craig W. L., Lüdemann G., Copan P., Tacelli R. K. Jesus' resurrection: fact or figment?: A debate between William Lane Craig & Gerd Lüdemann. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Duncan H. Jehovah's Witnesses and the deity of Christ. – Lubbock, TX: Missionary Crusade. – 54 p.
- Earle R. Bethany // Bromiley G. W. The international standard Bible encyclopedia. – In 5 Vols. – Revised ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988.
- Ehrman B. D. Did Jesus exist? The historical argument for Jesus of Nazareth. – San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2012. – 368 p.
- Fee G. D. The First Epistle to the Corinthians. – Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2014.
- Feinberg J. S. Can you believe it's true? Christian apologetics in a modern and postmodern era. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. – 487 p.
- Flew A. Neo-Human arguments about the miraculous // Geivett R. D., Habermas G. R. In defense of miracles. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1997. – P. 45-57.
- Geisler N. L. Christian apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976
- Geivett R. D. Religious diversity and the futility of neutrality // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. – P. 181-200.
- Habermas G. R. The evidential method // Gundry S. N. Five views on apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. – P. 92-122
- Kreeft P., Tacelli R. K. Handbook of Christian apologetics. – Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1994. – 400 p.
- Let God be true. – 2nd ed. – Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1952. – 310 p.
- Little P. Know why you believe. – 4th ed. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000. – 189 p.
- MacDowell J. The new evidence that demands a verdict. – Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1999.

Make sure of all things, hold fast to what is fine. – Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, 1965. – 505 p.

McGrath A. Explaining your faith. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – 152 p.

McKinney G. D. The Theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962. – 125 p.

Moreland J. P. Scaling the secular city: A defense of Christianity. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987. – 258 p.

Reasoning from the Scriptures. – Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1989. – 438 p.

Roberts A., Donaldson J., Coxe A. C., eds. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. – Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company.

Rutherford J. F. Millions now living will never die. – Brooklyn, NY: International Bible Students Association, 1920. – 107 p.

Schaff P., Wace H., eds., Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. – New York, NY: Christian Literature Company.

Stephen L. History of English thought in the eighteenth century. – 3rd ed. – London: John Murray, 1902.

The greatest man who ever lived. – Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1991.

Thiselton A. C. The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.

Van Til C. Christian apologetics. – Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 1976. – 99 p.

Whiston W. The works of Josephus. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1987.

Zindler F. R., Price R. M. Bart Ehrman and the quest of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. – Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2013.

~~~~~

Апологетика: учебное пособие / BEE International. – Луцьк: Християнське життя, 1999.

Apologetics: workbook / BEE International. – Lutsk: Christian living, 1999.

Шеремет Н. Лжеучение Свидетелей Иеговы в свете Библии; Студенческий реферат. – Киев: Евангельская Теологическая Семинария.

Sheremet N. The false teaching of the Jehovah Witnesses in the light of the Bible. – Student research paper. – Kiev, Evangel Theological Seminary.

~~~~~

wikipedia.org



# Appendices

## Appendix A: Objections to Jesus as Messiah

Judaism strongly objects to the suggestion that Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. To the more famous proof texts of that claim, rabbis have prepared a response. Have the rabbis convincingly refuted this claim?

### A. Rabbinic Interpretation of Isaiah 53

A classic proof-text in defense of Jesus' messiahship is Isaiah 53, where it is claimed that Messiah is called the "Servant of the Lord" (v. 11), and his sacrificial death on the cross is predicted. In this passage, the revolutionary notion is introduced that Messiah is not simply a political deliverer, as Judaism traditionally comprehends him, but also a substitutionary sacrifice for sin. Verses 4-6 are key to this new understanding:

Surely our griefs he himself bore, and our sorrows he carried. Yet we ourselves esteemed him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our well-being {fell} upon him, and by his scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him.

#### 1. The Rabbinic Position

Moshe Shulman relates that the most authoritative Jewish commentaries on Isaiah 53 ascribe its contents to Israel as a nation, although some Jewish commentators see in it a righteous sufferer in a general sense.<sup>1521</sup> Blumenthal argues for the former opinion.<sup>1522</sup> He notes that before this passage (Isa 52:7-12), and after it (Isa 54), the context speaks of Israel's restoration. Therefore, Isaiah 53 must follow the same theme. He further claims that Isaiah 53:1-6 does not contain Isaiah's words, but the words of certain kings, referred to in Isaiah 52:15, which express amazement that God has restored Israel:

1. Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
2. For he grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground. He has no {stately} form or majesty that we should look upon him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.
3. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And like one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we did not esteem him.
4. Surely our griefs he himself bore, and our sorrows he carried. Yet we ourselves esteemed him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.
5. But he was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our well-being {fell} upon him, and by his scourging we are healed.
6. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way. But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him.

---

<sup>1521</sup>Shulman Moshe. Rabbinic Commentators after Rashi on Isaiah 53 –<http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/rabbinic-commentators-rashi-isaiah-53/>

<sup>1522</sup>Blumenthal Y. P. Isa. 53, verse by verse – <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/isaiah-53-verse-verse>.

According to Blumenthal's interpretation, the Gentile nations will eventually discover that Israel (the Servant of the Lord) endured the suffering of exile for their sakes, so that through Israel's suffering God might prepare His people to eventually convert the Gentile world to himself. In this sense, God's Servant Israel "was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our well-being {fell} upon him, and by his scourging we are healed" (v. 5).

Blumenthal offers the following interpretation of verses 10-12. In order for Israel to fulfill God's redemption plan, they must acknowledge their guilt before God – that they have sinned and deserve the punishment they received. Blumenthal's translation of verse 10 reads as follows: "And the Lord desired to crush and afflict him; if his soul would acknowledge guilt, he would see offspring." If Israel admits their guilt, then God's plan for them will succeed and they will become the "substitutionary" redeemer for the Gentiles, as described above, and will "bare the sin of many" (v. 12).

Rabbi Skobac shares Blumenthal's opinion that the first verses of chapter 53 echo the words of the "kings" of Isaiah 52:13. He notes that Isaiah 53:1 uses the plural and so translates, "Who has believed what we have heard," that is, that Israel has been restored?<sup>1523</sup> He sees a parallel between Isaiah 53:1 and Micah 7:15-16: "'As in the days when you came out from the land of Egypt, I will show you miracles.' Nations will see and be ashamed of all their might. They will put {their} hand on {their} mouth, their ears will be deaf."

Skobac shares still other insights. First, the figure "Servant of the Lord" is frequently encountered in Isaiah chapters 40-53 and consistently refers to the nation of Israel. Second, many characteristics of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53 correspond to national Israel:

- v. 1 – in other passages the phrase "the arm of the Lord" refers to physical deliverance for national Israel (see Isa 62:8; 63:12; Ex 3:20; Deut 34:12; Ps 89:10).
- v. 2 – in the Hebrew Bible, Israel is often compared to a plant.
- v. 2-3 – the nations of the world despise Israel (see Isa 60:14-15; 49:13).
- v. 5 – the "wounds" of the Lord's Servant are the sufferings of Israel (see Jer 30:17).
- v. 7 – when Israel suffered he "did not open his mouth... like a sheep that is silent before its shearers" (see Ps 44:11).
- v. 9 – the "land of the living" is Palestine (see Ps 116:9).
- v. 10 – God's reward for Israel's patience in suffering will be long life and many offspring (see Deut 28:11; 30, Jer 23:3; Isa 65:20).

Skobac's interpretation differs from that of Blumenthal in that the sufferings of Israel described in verses 4-9 are not for the redemption of the Gentiles. These verses relate to Israel's persecution by the Gentiles, who thought that they were accomplishing God's plan by punishing Israel. Therefore, it was written, "Yet we ourselves esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted," which justifies their persecution of the Servant of the Lord, i.e. Israel.

Nonetheless, in verses 10-12 the Servant of the Lord brings the Gentiles to the true God in accordance with what was written about Israel's mission to the Gentiles in Genesis 28:14; Exodus 19:5-6; and Zechariah 8:23. In verse 12, Israel even prays for their persecutors, as written in Jeremiah 29:7.

Skobac also notes certain special features in Isaiah 53:5: "But he was pierced through for (ן) our transgressions, he was crushed for (ן) our iniquities." The preposition ן (*min*) usually means "from." The corresponding translation would then be: "But (Israel) was pierced through *by means of* the Gentiles' transgressions, he was crushed *by means of* their iniquities," that is, by means of their persecutions. In other words, the verse does not refer to the substitutionary sufferings of the Servant of the Lord for others, but the persecutions he endured from the Gentiles.

---

<sup>1523</sup>Skobac M. Isaiah 53 - The Suffering Servant – <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/isaiah-53-the-suffering-servant/>



Furthermore, the words “The chastening for our well-being fell upon him, and by his scourging we are healed” mean that the Gentiles considered the defeat of Israel a means to their prosperity (see Jer 50:7; 30:17; 10:25; Ps 94:3-7; Ps 83; Zech 1:14-15).

It does not disturb Skobac that the expression “Servant of the Lord” stands in the singular. Other passages speak of the nation of Israel in the singular (Isa 43:10; Ex 4:22; Hos 8:3; 11:1). It also does not trouble him that it is written of Israel, “Because he had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth” (v. 9). Here he feels the prophet is not speaking of Israel in general, but only of the faithful remnant among them (see Zeph 3:13). He explains that in verse 10, “But the LORD was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief,” God was testing the faithfulness of his people.

Skobac seeks to prove that Isaiah 53 does not relate to Jesus as well. First, Jesus was not “despised” (v. 3), but very popular. Second, unlike the Servant of the Lord, who “did not open his mouth,” Jesus defended himself before the Jewish leaders and called out to God in the Garden of Eden and on the cross.

Third, unlike the Servant of the Lord, who “had done no violence” (v. 9), Jesus sometimes resorted to violence, such as the time he cleansed the temple (Jn 2:14-17) and instructed his disciples to take a sword (Lk 22:36). He also deceived the Jewish leaders saying, “I have spoken openly to the world.... I spoke nothing in secret” (Jn 18:20), but of the Lord’s Servant it says, “Nor was there any deceit in His mouth” (v. 9). Jesus did explain his teachings to his disciples in private (Matt 13:11).

Finally, the Servant of the Lord “will see *his* offspring (זָרַע) (v. 10). In the *Tanakh*, the term זָרַע (*zera*) describes physical descendants, which Jesus did not have. When “offspring” is used in a symbolic sense, we encounter not the word זָרַע (*zera*), but בֶּן (*ben*) (see Gen 15:2-3; Isa 45:11, 19).

## 2. Evaluation of the Rabbinic Position

In his interpretation of Isaiah 53, Blumenthal overlooks several key points. First, it is true that Isaiah 52:7-12 speaks of the restoration of Israel. Yet, immediately afterward, the prophet begins speaking about Messiah. We note that in Isaiah 52:7-12, Isaiah speaks to Israel (in the second person), but beginning in verse 13, he is speaking about Messiah (in the third person).

In addition, Blumenthal incorrectly translates Isaiah 52:14, ascribing the following words to Israel: “Just as many were astonished over you, [saying] his appearance is too marred to be that of man and his visage to be human.” The word “saying,” though, is not in the Hebrew text, as Blumenthal admits by placing it in parentheses. In this verse, the construction בְּאִשְׁכּוֹר בֶּן is used, which indicates a comparison of Israel’s condition with the condition of another (i.e. Messiah): “Just as (בְּאִשְׁכּוֹר) many were astonished at you (Israel), so (בֶּן) his appearance (Messiah) was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.”

Concerning the first six verses of Isaiah 53, it is very unlikely that here we have the words of the “amazed kings” of Isa 52:15. Which Gentile kings would acknowledge the “arm of the Lord,” or his “revelation”? In the expression “the arm of the Lord,” the covenant name of God with Israel is used – Yahweh. In addition, in the biblical text, it is unusual to see such a long direct quotation without some indication that not the author, but another party is speaking. These are words of the prophet, clearly addressing unbelievers in the Messiah of Israel.

Blumenthal’s interpretation encounters other difficulties as well. In verse 7, it is written about the Servant of the Lord, “He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth.” This verse is far from describing Israel’s response to its conquerors. They resisted Babylon and Rome to their last breath. Israel passively accepted defeat only when every hope of resistance was gone.

In verse ten, Blumenthal offers the following translation of the Hebrew text אִם-תִּשָּׂא אָשָׁם נִפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה זָרַע: “And the Lord desired to crush and afflict him; if his soul would acknowledge guilt, he would see offspring.” Blumenthal translates the term אָשָׁם (*asham*) “guilt,” but it can also indicate an appeasing sacrifice (see Lev 5;

6:10; 7; 14; 19:21-22; Num 6:12; 18:9).<sup>1524</sup> Also significant is that the noun אָשָׁם (*asham*) is the direct object of the verb תָּשִׁים, i.e. שִׁים (*shim*), which means “place, set,” but does not carry the meaning “admit” or “confess.”<sup>1525</sup> So then, a more proper translation would be “If he would set down his soul (as) a guilt offering, he would see offspring.”

Skobac also errors in his translation of Isaiah 53:1: “Who has believed what we have heard.” The Hebrew text here is מִי הָאֱמִין לְשִׁמְעֵנוּ, which literally translates, “Who has believed our message?” He incorrectly translates the noun with pronominal suffix שִׁמְעֵנוּ, “our message,” with a verb and pronominal suffix, “we heard.” The sense of the verse is not that the “kings” were amazed at the restoration of Israel, but that no one believes in the message from God that Isaiah proclaimed.

Skobac does make an interesting point that the use of the preposition מִן (*min*) in Isaiah 53:5 would commonly render the verse “But he was pierced through by means of (מִן) our transgressions, he was crushed by means of (מִן) our iniquities.” At the same time, the preposition מִן (*min*) can indicate cause, as in Zephaniah 3:11, Malachi 2:13, and Joshua 2:11. Using that meaning would render the translation, “But he was pierced through for (מִן) our transgressions, he was crushed for (מִן) our iniquities,” which supports the idea of a substitutionary sacrifice.

Skobac is mistaken in not ascribing Isaiah 53 to Jesus of Nazareth. Truly, Jesus did fit the description of a despised sufferer (v. 2-3) during the time of his Passion. In addition, in agreement with verse 7, he truly went through his trial and execution without objection or complaint (see Matt 26:63; 27:12-14; Mark 14:61; 15:5; Lk 23:9; Jn 19:9).

Moreover, anyone who is acquainted with Jesus’ history will unhesitatingly agree that the characteristics of honesty and non-violence (v. 9) aptly apply to him. When Jesus cleansed the temple, for example, he harmed no one. In addition, the part of verse 9 that reads “yet He was with a rich man in His death” was literally fulfilled in Jesus: “There came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph ... asked for the body of Jesus ... laid it in his own new tomb” (Matt 27:57-60).

Finally, Skobac blatantly ignores the repeated references to a substitutionary sacrifice (besides verse 5) and gives no convincing explanation for them, such as: “Surely our griefs he himself bore, and our sorrows He carried” (v. 4), “the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him” (v. 6), “For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke {was due}” (v. 8), “If he would render himself {as} a guilt offering” (v. 10), and “My Servant, will justify the many, as he will bear their iniquities” (v. 11). No explanation for such a clear indication of substitutionary atonement is more plausible or satisfying than the sacrificial sufferings of Jesus the Messiah.

## B. How Many Comings of Messiah?

Judaism believes that the *Tanakh* predicts not two, but only one coming of Messiah – when he comes to rule the earth. Since Jesus did not fulfill that expectation, he cannot be the Messiah of Israel.<sup>1526</sup> However, when one examines biblical prophecy, one must keep in mind the phenomenon of “prophetic perspective.” This means that a prophecy may come to pass progressively or in stages. For example, a prophet may speak of a coming Messiah, but only part of his prophecy may be fulfilled during his first coming, and the remainder during his second coming.

We may compare this phenomenon with someone standing before a mountain range and viewing the peaks as if they were all in close proximity to one another, while, in truth, they are quite distant from each other. In a similar way, a prophet may describe various events as if they occur in the same period of time, while between them may actually exist a long interval. This is what is meant by “prophetic perspective.”

<sup>1524</sup>Brown F., Driver S. R., Briggs P. A. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon*. – Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977. – P. 79.

<sup>1525</sup>*Ibid*, p. 962.

<sup>1526</sup>Jews for Judaism. *The Jewish Concept of Messiah and the Jewish Response to Christian Claims*. –

<http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/the-jewish-concept-of-messiah-and-the-jewish-response-to-christian-claims/>

Isaiah 42:1-4 serves as a good example. The part in italics refers to the coming of Messiah in humility, while the non-italic content describes a glorious Messiah, who comes to establish his kingdom:

*Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one {in whom} My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise {his voice,} nor make his voice heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not extinguish.* He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed until he has established justice in the earth, and the coastlands will wait expectantly for his law.

Zechariah 9:9-10 provides a similar example:

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout {in triumph,} O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you. He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the bow of war will be cut off. And he will speak peace to the nations, and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

We may also cite non-messianic examples. Isaiah 19:1-17 predicts God's judgment on Egypt, which has already occurred in history. From verse 18 on, though, the prophet predicts a coming restoration of Egypt during the coming messianic reign. Similarly, in Zechariah 8 we see another "combined" prophecy of blessing on Israel both at the time of the prophet, and in the end times.

"Prophetic perspective" can concern not only various times, but also various people. In the first part of Daniel 11, we see an exact description of the rise of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, who invaded Israel in the second century BC and oppressed the nation. From verse 36 on, though, we encounter another figure, who will do even greater abominations than Antiochus ever did in his day. This section is commonly attributed to the coming Antichrist. Yet, the prophet does not distinguish one figure from the other, but speaks as if only one person is in view.

So then, the *Tanakh* contains a sufficient number of examples of "prophetic perspective" to justify the claim that Messiah comes both initially in humility, and subsequently in glory. This conclusion also corresponds to the prediction in Isaiah 53 of Messiah's sufferings. How can Messiah be at the same time a Suffering Servant of the Lord and a glorious conqueror?

### **C. Is Jesus a True Descendant of David?**

Others object that Jesus of Nazareth could not be the Messiah, since he is not a descendant of David, as required by prophecy (2 Sam 7:12-16).<sup>1527</sup> The following arguments are advanced. First, although Joseph, Jesus' supposed father, was in the royal line, according to the teachings of Christianity, Jesus is not Joseph's biological son.

Even if Joseph adopted Jesus, there is no precedent for transferring one's membership to a clan of Israel to an adopted son. For example, a person adopted into a priestly line may not become a priest. In a similar way, if Joseph adopted Jesus, the latter could not consider himself a descendant of David or heir to his throne.

Second, although Jesus is truly a son of Mary, her descendancy from David is questionable, based on the assumption that the genealogy in Luke 3 belongs to her. Even if that is so, a son receives his clan membership not from the mother, but from the biological father (see Num 1:18; Ezra 2:59). In addition, the genealogy in Luke 3 is not of the royal line through Solomon, though whom God promised to give the Messiah (see 1 Chr 22:9-10).

---

<sup>1527</sup>Jews for Judaism. The Jewish concept of Messiah and the Jewish response to Christian claims.

Third, according to Matthew chapter 1, Joseph is in a royal line that includes the cursed Jehoiakim, of whom it is written that his descendants would never inherit the throne of David (Jer 22:30; 36:30). Fourth, the genealogy in Luke includes the names Zerubbabel and Shealtiel, descendants of the cursed Jehoiakim, which again excludes that genealogy from the line of royal heirs.

On the other hand, one must also take the following features into consideration. Since Joseph cannot be at the same time both a son of Jacob (Matt 1:16) and of Eli (Luke 3:23), it is reasonable to conclude that the genealogy of Luke 3 belongs to Mary, since in their narratives Luke focuses more attention on Mary, but Matthew – on Joseph.

According to this view, the phrase “Jesus ... being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli” (Luke 3:23) could mean the following: “Jesus ... being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, *but was really the grandson of Eli by Mary.*” Or, we could assume that Mary had no brothers and, as a result, she was the heiress of her father. Yet, so that the heir would not be a woman, Eli adopted her husband Joseph, and thus his name enters Luke’s genealogy instead of Mary’s.<sup>1528</sup>

Thus, Jesus would be a true descendant of David through Mary. In response to the objection that a son receives his clan membership from the father, Christianity would respond that this rule would not apply to Jesus, since he had no biological father.

Also notable is that since Jesus was not a descendant of Jehoiakim, he avoided the curse connected to him. Neither does the mention of Zerubbabel and Shealtiel in Luke’s genealogy disqualify him, since in Luke’s genealogy Shealtiel is the son of Neri, while in Matthew’s genealogy he is the son of Jehoiakim. This means that we are dealing with different people with the same names.

Finally, it is untrue that the Messiah must come through Solomon. He must only be a descendant of David. God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 mentions only that the future king would be born of David, would be a son to God, would build God’s house, and would inherit an eternal kingdom. This promise was typologically (symbolically) fulfilled in Solomon, but found its ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah. He is the one to build the true temple of God.

Nonetheless, we recall God’s words to David in 1 Chr 22:9-10:

Behold, a son will be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.

Here it seems that God promised Solomon an eternal kingdom. Does that mean Messiah must be born in from his line? Not necessarily. Later we read:

Of all my sons (for the LORD has given me many sons), He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. He said to me, “Your son Solomon is the one who shall build My house and My courts; for I have chosen him to be a son to Me, and I will be a father to him. I will establish his kingdom forever if he resolutely performs My commandments and My ordinances, as is done now (1 Chr 28:5-7).

The promise to Solomon of an eternal kingdom depended on whether he “resolutely performs My commandments and My ordinances.” As we learn from Solomon’s later history, he failed to do this, but turned to idolatry. Yet, the promise to Messiah of an eternal kingdom was given unconditionally. The promise of an eternal kingdom, which Solomon forfeited, remains intact for the Messiah, the son of David not by Solomon, but by Nathan (Lk 3:31).

---

<sup>1528</sup>Nolland J. Luke 1:1–9:20 // Word Biblical commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2002. – P. 169-170.

## D. The Virgin Birth of Jesus

According to Christian faith, Isaiah predicted Messiah's birth from a virgin: "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (Isa 7:14). Some note, however, that the Hebrew word עַלְמָה (*alma*), translated here "virgin," literally means a young lady, and not necessarily a virgin.<sup>1529</sup> Hebrew has a more specific term for a virgin – בְּתוּלָיָה (*bituleya*). Therefore, they conclude that Isaiah was not predicting a virgin birth, but a normal birth from a young woman.<sup>1530</sup>

On the other hand, a closer look at the use of the word עַלְמָה (*alma*) in the *Tanakh* is revealing. Including Isaiah 7:14, it occurs seven times, and in four of those instances it clearly indicates a virgin (Gen 24:43; Ex 2:8; Song of Sol. 1:3; 6:8). In the remaining passages (Ps 68:25; Pr 30:19) the word most likely refers to a virgin, especially if we compare Psalm 68:26 with Judges 21:19-21, and consider that in the context of Proverbs 30:19, the theme is romantic love before marriage. Therefore, in all cases of its use the *Tanakh*, a virgin is likely in view. Also significant is that the Septuagint translates עַלְמָה (*alma*) in Isaiah 7:14 (and in Gen 24:43) with the Greek word παρθένος (*parthenos*), which specifically refers to a virgin.

If we conclude that Isaiah indeed meant a virgin, we encounter another difficulty in regard to the prophecy's fulfillment. Was Isaiah speaking here prophetically of Mary, the mother of Jesus, or of a virgin in his own time? On the one hand, according to Christian faith, Mary did indeed bear a son while in her virginity, and so she should be the only candidate to fulfill this prophecy. On the other hand, Isaiah gave this prophecy to king Ahaz as a sign that "before the boy will know {enough} to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread (i.e. Syria and Northern Israel) will be forsaken" (Isa 7:16). If only Mary was in view, the prophecy would have had no significance for Ahaz.

Those who defend the position that only Mary was intended reply that Isaiah did not mean that the child would be born in the time of Ahaz. Rather, the period of time, during which Jesus would learn "to refuse evil and choose good," would be the same period of time, during which the enemies of Ahaz would be overturned, i.e. in the course of 5-6 years.

Others feel that Isaiah was speaking here of his wife. There are, in fact, certain common features between the child of prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 and the child of Isaiah in chapter 8 (see v. 4, 18). Yet at the time of the prophecy, Isaiah already had a son, Shear-jashub (see 7:3), presumably by his wife of chapter 8, and so she was not a virgin.

Likely the best solution is to conclude that the prophecy has two applications: one for Mary, and another for a woman at the time of Isaiah (possibly his wife). In this way, the message would have had significance both for Ahaz and for Mary. Possibly, this is why the word עַלְמָה (*alma*) was used, since it has a wide application and could describe both the virgin Mary and a young married woman of Isaiah's time. We would consider the fulfillment in Mary, then, to be a typological fulfillment, the "type" being a woman in Isaiah's time.

Finally, Gen 3:15 speaks of a future deliverer born of a woman (Eve), without mention of a man's participation, which confirms our expectation of the birth of the deliverer-Messiah by a virgin.

## Resources Used:

Blumenthal Y. C. Isa. 53, verse by verse – <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/isaiah-53-verse-verse>.

Brown F., Driver S. R., Briggs C. A. Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon. – Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

---

<sup>1529</sup>Brown, p. 761.

<sup>1530</sup>Jews for Judaism. The Jewish concept of Messiah and the Jewish response to Christian claims.

Jews for Judaism. The Jewish Concept of Messiah and the Jewish Response to Christian Claims. – <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/the-jewish-concept-of-messiah-and-the-jewish-response-to-christian-claims/>

Marshall I. H. The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek text // New international Greek Testament commentary. – Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978.

Nolland J. Luke 1:1–9:20 // Word Biblical commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2002.

Skobac M. Isaiah 53 - The Suffering Servant. <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/isaiah-53-the-suffering-servant/>

Shulman Moshe. Rabbi Moshe Al Sheich and Isaiah 53 – <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/rabbi-moshe-al-sheich-isaiah-53>

\_\_\_\_\_. Rabbinic Commentators after Rashi on Isaiah 53 – <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/rabbinic-commentators-rashi-isaiah-53>

~~~~~

jewsforjudaism.org

Appendix B: Martyrdom of the Apostles

When we look at the various accounts of the martyrdom of the apostles, we encounter some difficulties. These accounts at times contradict each other and are not infrequently embellished by legendary elements.

James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John, is a notable exception to this confusion. The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 12, details the events of his martyrdom. Herod executed him with the sword in about 44 AD. The value of this testimony lies in the fact that even if no other apostle died for his faith (which is highly unlikely), this one testimony is fixed in Scripture and confirms the thesis, that at least one of the apostles was so convinced that Jesus rose that he was willing to die for it.

Peter's martyrdom appears certain as well. Upon completing a missionary journey in Asia Minor, he arrived in Rome about the year 63. In the year 65, he was crucified upside down. This account, in various degrees of detail, finds support in the works of many early authors, including Clement of Rome (late first century),¹⁵³¹ Dionysius of Corinth (late second century),¹⁵³² Tertullian (early third century),¹⁵³³ Lactantius (early fourth century),¹⁵³⁴ Eusebius (early fourth century),¹⁵³⁵ and Pseudo-Hippolytus.¹⁵³⁶

Concerning Pseudo-Hippolytus, his work *On the Twelve Apostles*, which details the death of all the apostles, is often attributed to Hippolytus of Rome (second-third centuries). Modern scholars, though, doubt his authorship, and therefore attribute the work to "Pseudo-Hippolytus."¹⁵³⁷

The alleged martyrdoms of Phillip, Matthew, Matthias, Andrew, Thomas, Bartholomew, Thaddaeus, James, the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot are investigated in detail by David Criswell in his excellent publication: *The Apostles after Jesus: A history of the Apostles*, to which we refer our readers. There, he carefully analyzes the various traditions concerning their lives and ministries and concludes that "all the apostles, save John, died a martyr's death at the hands of those who hated the Lord."¹⁵³⁸

As mentioned above, the apostle John did not suffer martyrdom, although according to some accounts attempts were made on his life, but to no effect. According to Tertullian, they lowered him in boiling oil, and according to the *Acts of John*, he was given poison to drink.¹⁵³⁹ Nonetheless, he was not affected. Subsequently, he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he authored the Book of Revelation. After serving his sentence on Patmos, he died of natural causes in Ephesus at the end of the first Christian century.

We will conclude our investigation with the martyrdoms of two disciples, who were not of the Twelve, but nonetheless claimed to have seen the risen Christ: James and Paul. Few doubt that James, the half-brother of Jesus, was thrown down from the temple and stoned to death. Flavius Josephus recorded that event (*Jewish Antiquities*, 20.9.1), as did Pseudo-Hippolytus and the author of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, although Pseudo-Hippolytus confuses him with James, the son of Alphaeus. Regarding Paul, the common view is that he was beheaded in Rome by Nero in 65 AD.

In spite of the variations in the accounts of how the witnesses of Christ's resurrection died, and in spite of the legends sometimes attached to their stories, enough common ground exists between these narratives to confirm our thesis. At least the majority of the Twelve Apostles, along with Paul and James, died in defense of their claim that Jesus really rose from the dead.

¹⁵³¹1 Clement, 5:4.

¹⁵³²Epistle to the Romans, 3.9; noted in Criswell D. The Apostles after Jesus: A history of the Apostles. – Dallas, TX: Fortress, 2013. – P. 14.

¹⁵³³The prescription against heresies, 36.

¹⁵³⁴On the manner in which the persecutors died, 2.

¹⁵³⁵Church history, 2.25.

¹⁵³⁶On the Twelve Apostles

¹⁵³⁷See Roberts A., Donaldson J., Coxe A. P. Fathers of the third century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian. – Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886. – P. 242; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippolytus_of_Rome.

¹⁵³⁸Criswell, p. 190.

¹⁵³⁹Criswell, p. 46.

Resources Used:

Criswell D. The Apostles after Jesus: A history of the Apostles. – Dallas, TX: Fortress, 2013. – 226 c.

Roberts A., Donaldson J., Coxe A. C., eds. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. – Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company.

~~~~~

Грицаева И. «Роль мученичества апостолов в подтверждении истинности евангелия», Магистерская диссертация. – М.: Московский Теологический Институт, 2017.

*Gritsaeva I. The role of the martyrdom of the apostles for confirmation of the truth of the gospel. – Master's thesis. Moscow: Moscow Theological Institute, 2017.*

~~~~~

wikipedia.org