

KARMIC
AND
ABRAHAMIC
FAITHS

*Comparative Themes
for Interreligious Dialogue*

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Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths: Comparative Themes for Interreligious Dialogue

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ABBREVIATIONS

KR - Karmic religions

AR - Abrahamic religions

SB - Satapatha Brahmana

INTRODUCTION

Religion is one of the most conspicuous and widespread phenomenon in the world. According to Pew Research Centre, 8 out of 10 people in the world are affiliated to some religious system. Contrary to the views of rationalists such as Voltaire who predicted the annihilation of religion, especially the Bible before the 19th century, religion has become progressively more prominent today. In fact, sociologists of religion such as Peter Berger have noted that the two major religious growth phenomena that defeat the theory of increasing secularization are Pentecostal Christianity and Islam.¹ About 40 years ago, sociologists believed that people will gradually lose interest in religion. Secularization of society refers to the phenomenon of society becoming eventually irreligious. Sociologists then were certain that religion will not be able to hold for long in history. However, what we see today is absolutely its opposite. People have become more and more openly religious. In fact, we can observe at least three lines of growth in religious interest: Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity that emphasize healing, prophecy, and deliverance; Islam; and Eastern religious philosophies of healing and health. It is, therefore, very advantageous to have an idea of comparative religious themes if we are to understand people in modern society.

The Meaning of Religion

The English word religion comes from the Latin *religio*. Ancient writers such as Lactantius and St. Augustine believed that *religio* was derived from *religare* which means "to bind" or "to reconnect" as in monastic vows. Thus, religion is a

bonding between the adherent and his deity, faith-community, or ideal.

Cicero, on the other hand, held that the term was derived from *relegere* and meant "to go over again", "to read again", as in performance of cultic rites and rituals. So, religion to him was much more about rites and ritualistic practices.

As we may see, both interpretations of religion do have truths in them. Religion does provide a sense of belonging, spiritual identity and bonding. On the other hand, this identity cannot be separated from the system of regular practices that are specific to a particular religion.

A more common definition might be: religion is a belief-system of practice that includes the supernatural. There are many ideologies such as capitalism, socialism, democracy and so on; but, these cannot be called religion because they do not involve a concept of faith in the supernatural. Religion, on the other hand, has a strong emphasis on faith. Therefore, it is also referred to as faith, e.g. the Christian faith, the Islamic faith and so on. This faith is made obvious by acts of confession, rituals, and other visible symbols. Therefore, it is right to call religion a belief-system of practice that includes the supernatural.

Culture and Religion

Traditional definitions of culture include religion as a part of culture. In fact, theologians such as Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) maintained that culture is the soil of religion and Paul Tillich (1896-1965) believed that religion is the soul of culture. To Troeltsch, transplanting a religion from its cultural soil to any other culture would mean fatal to it. However, for sure, the soil theory doesn't stand the test of

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anthropological studies. For instance, Buddhism took root in India, but is more at home now in China, Sri Lanka, Korea, and Japan than in India. Similarly, Christianity took root in Palestine, but “is” (?) more at home now in the West.² As far as the soul theory is concerned, identifying a religion with a culture can pose problems in modern pluralistic experiences; for instance, it is possible that people sharing the same Western culture may be having a variety of different religious beliefs.

Michael Molloy lists the following key elements of religion: ³

- Belief system
- Community
- Central myths
- Ritual
- Ethics
- Characteristic emotional experiences like dread, guilt, awe, mystery, liberation, etc
- Material expression that includes statues, paintings, musical instruments, flowers, incense, clothing
- Sacredness - distinction between the sacred and the common

Significance of Religion

Religion has a strong significance in the world today. It affects every area of human life. It has a social, economic, political, criminological, educational importance. If a food business wants to make an entry into Indian market, for instance, it will have to consider the local religious sentiments and beliefs of the people.

Religion means different things to different people. It may mean faith in the supernatural; that which provides one with

the meaning of life, of origin, purpose, destiny; that which provides guidance for action, or an understanding of the problem of evil. It does bind one to a community, to a belief, to a way of action.

Classification of Religions

There are many ways of classifying religions:

1. *Religions may be classified geographically* or based on their geographical concentrations or place of origin. For instance, Western religion (Christianity), Middle Eastern religions (Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism), African religions, Eastern religions (Indian, Chinese).

2. *Religions may be classified chronologically*. For instance, Ancient religions (Vedic Hinduism, Greek polytheism), Religions of the philosophical protest era (Buddhism, Confucianism, Jainism), Religions in the Christian era (Christianity, Islam), Modern religions (Sikhism).

3. *Religions may also be classified as living or dead*. While the phenomena of religion doesn't die, religious systems are not necessarily permanent. Religions such as Babylonian, Phoenician, Egyptian, Roman are no longer living.

4. *Religions may also be classified as proselytizing or non-proselytizing*. Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism are the more prominent proselytizing religions. Hinduism has also emerged as proselytizing religion through the growing guru movements.

5. *Religions may be classified thematically*. For instance, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism have one central connecting theme, the concept of karma, so these may be called karmic religions. Similarly, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are connected through the story of Abraham. So, they

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may be called abrahamic religions. Then there are religions that focus on ancestor spirits which may be called ancestral religions.

This book will look at a few comparative themes in some of the karmic and abrahamic faiths.

THE CONCEPT OF GOD, SELF, AND THE WORLD IN KARMIC RELIGIONS

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism are the four major *karmic* religions. They are referred to as *karmic* since the concept of *karma* (work, action) is central to them. Of these, Hinduism is the oldest and the rest have only sprung up under its shadow.

Jainism and Buddhism arose in the sixth century BC as protest movements against the corrupt practices of Hindu priestcraft, the overabundance of animal sacrifices, and the seeming inability of dominant Brahmanism (Caste Hinduism) to answer metaphysical problems of life. Both of these religions teach the principle of *ahimsa* or nonviolence that requires compassion to all creatures. They also do not regard belief in God as being important to spirituality and liberation.

Some have considered Hinduism to be one of the oldest living religions in the world. Its most venerable scriptures, viz., the Vedas were orally transmitted over many years through memorization and meticulous chanting techniques until they began to be finally written down likely around 1000 BC. Vedic chanting employs tonal techniques and various methods of recitation such as continuous recitation, word by word recitation, and ordered recitation (e.g. ab bc cd...). UNESCO has declared the vedic chanting tradition as a cultural heritage of humanity.⁴

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Hindu scriptures are divided into two classes: *Shruti* and *Smriti* (that which is remembered). *Shruti* (meaning, that which is heard) consists of the four Vedas: *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*. Each of these vedas is divided into four parts, viz., the *Mantras* (hymns, chants), the *Brahmanas* (explanations of *Mantras*), the *Aranyakas* (forest meditations), and the *Upanishads* (mystic teachings).

Smriti consists of other sacred books of law, religious history, and manuals. Of these the two great epics (*Maha Puranas*) *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are the most popular.

Hindu concept of God, self, and the world chiefly derives from the Upanishads and the Puranas. The Vedic deities like Indra (god of heaven), Agni (fire god), Soma (drink god), and the Maruts are not so popular anymore. However, the worship of Surya (the sun god) is practiced. Also, Hanuman, the son of Vayu or Pawan (wind god) is adored for his devotion to Rama and for his strength. The four most popular concepts are: pantheistic nature worship, tri-theism, monism (or non-dualism), and gurus.

Pantheistic Nature Worship. Hindus worship a number of sacred objects like trees, rivers, and mountains. The worship of the Neem and Peepal trees as well as the household Tulsi (basil) is an example of tree and plant worship. They also worship a number of rivers among which the river Ganges (*Ganga*) is a prominent one. Animals like cobras, monkeys, and cows are also very sacred to Hindus. The pantheistic view of God in all and all in God helps Hindus to easily deify humans and worship them. The veneration of cow is one of the most significant aspects of modern day Hinduism.

Tri-theism or Trimurti (tri-form) is the view that God has three forms of manifestation: Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer. Three gods are identified with these three forms: Brahma as Creator, Vishnu as Preserver, and Shiva as Destroyer. The worship of Brahma is not very popular with only very few temples dedicated to the deity. The two most popular sects are Vaishnavism (which worships Vishnu as supreme deity) and Shaivism (which worships Shiva as supreme deity). Also popular is Shaktism (that worships Shakti (power) the consort of Shiva). Often, the worship of Shiva and Shakti (Parvati/Durga) is combined. One central doctrine in tri-theism is that the supreme deity, at various times in human history, incarnates as a human being in order to save devotees and punish the wicked. The doctrine of incarnation (*avatara*, meaning descent of God on earth) is mainly associated with *vaishnavism*.

Vaishnavism is the sect that worships Vishnu and his many incarnations (*avatar*). The total incarnations of Vishnu are considered to be 10 out of which 9 have already taken place. The *Kalki avatar* is the final anticipated one. Vishnu in his non-avatic image is depicted as reclining on the great serpent bed with his sudarshana chakra (disc of auspicious vision) spinning on his index finger. The ten Vishnu avatars are:

1. Matsya (fish),
2. Kurma (tortoise),
3. Varaha (boar),
4. Narasimha (man-lion),
5. Vamana (dwarf),
6. Parashurama (warrior with axe),
7. Rama (the ideal man, *Ramayana*),
8. Krishna (the hero of *Mahabharata*),

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9. Buddha (preacher of nonviolence, deluder of demons)
[Some omit Buddha and include Balarama, brother of Krishna instead]
10. Kalki (the warrior on white horse, ends the *kali yuga* (dark age) and restarts *satya yuga* (truth age))

The two chief incarnations that are widely revered and worshipped are the avatars of Rama and Krishna. Their stories are recounted in the great epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* respectively. The *Bhagavad Gita* (Song of God) is a portion of the *Mahabharata* that is most popular for its syncretistic and inclusivist doctrine of God, self, and the world.

The *Bhagavad Gita* (4.7-8) states:

Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bharata,
And there is exaltation of unrighteousness, then I
Myself come forth ;
For the protection of the good, for the destruction of
evil-doers,
For the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I
am born from age to age.

The *Bhagavad Gita* combines the doctrine of philosophic non-dualism with the doctrine of *avatara* and the practice of the various yogas to approach God. It also depicts all other religious attempts as actually directed to the one God.

By whatever way men worship Me, even so do I
accept them; for, in all ways, O Partha, men walk in
My path (IV. 11).
Whatever form a particular devotee wishes to
worship with faith – concerning that alone I make his
faith unflinching. (VII. 21).

Ramanavami is the Hindu festival that celebrates the birth of Rama. Krishna Janmashtami celebrates the birth of Krishna.

Shaivism. *Shaivism* is the sect that regards Shiva as the supreme deity and Lord of the universe. Shiva is considered to be an ascetic who lives with his consort Parvati on the himalayan mountains of Kailash. Shiva is regarded as the destroyer in the tri-theistic godhead. However, *saivites* (followers of *Shiva*) regard Shiva as both the creator and destroyer of all things. Shiva is usually depicted as an ascetic with long bound up hair, clothed with animal skin on his waist, a serpent coiled around his neck, and the trident weapon in his hand seated in meditation. He is also often depicted along with his consort Parvati (also known as Durga and Shakti) and son Ganesha. The worship of the phallic lingam is the most conspicuous feature of shaivism and is associated with well-being, fertility, and prosperity.

Chief Goddesses of Tritheism. The chief three goddesses (tridevi) are:

1. *Saraswati* (goddess of wisdom and learning) depicted as seated on the lotus flower with musical instrument and book in hand. She is the consort of Brahma, the Creator God
2. *Lakshmi* (goddess of wealth and good fortune) often depicted as luxuriously dressed and wealth showering, riding on an owl. She is the consort of Vishnu, the Preserver God.
3. *Parvati* (goddess of fertility, love and devotion) also known as *Durga*, *Kali*, and *Shakti* is considered the mother goddess and often referred to as Ma (mother) as in *Ma Durga*, *Ma Kali*. She is the consort of Shiva,

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the Destroyer God. Her ferocious *Kali* image depicts a black goddess with a garland of beheaded heads on her neck, weapons in hands, fiery eyes, and tongue lolling out. Her worship is central to **Shaktism**.

Important God-sons. The three chief god-sons worshipped are **Ganesha** (son of Parvati, Shiva's consort), **Ayyappa** (son of Shiva and Mohini, the female avatar of Vishnu), and **Hanuman** (son of Vayu the wind god). All three of them are celibates. Ganesha (or Ganapati) though a celibate presides over weddings. Females in the menstruating age, between 10 and 50, were not allowed to visit the inside of the famous Ayyappa temple in Sabarimala of Kerala. This tradition, upheld also by the Kerala High Court order of 1991, was quashed by the Supreme Court on September 28, 2018, stating that "Any rule based on discrimination or segregation of women pertaining to biological characteristics is not only unfounded, indefensible and implausible but can also never pass the muster of constitutionality."⁵ The ruling sparked protests across the nation even as temple authorities took precautions to protect the ages old tradition. On being interviewed on this matter, Sadhguru of the Isha Foundation explained that the tradition existed owing to the nature of the deity (who is a brahmachari, celibate) and not out of any gender discrimination.⁶

Monism (non-dualism). Non-dualism (*advaita*) is the reigning philosophy of Hinduism. Its roots may be seen in the later Vedas but are more prominent in the Upanishads. The 5th century philosopher Shankaracharya was the greatest champion of non-dualism winning debates against other rival views of God of his time. Today, the philosophical aspect of Hinduism is mainly represented by non-dualism. There

seems to be a pointer to the oneness of God in the Vedas. For instance, Rig Veda 1.164.46 states:

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, and he is
heavenly nobly-winged Garutmān.
To what is One, sages give many a title they call it
Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan.

In the later Vedas, this oneness becomes more identified with monism. The White Yajur Veda Book 40:5-7 recites:

It moveth; it is motionless. It is far distant; it is near.
It is within This All; and it surrounds This All
externally.
The man who in his Self beholds all creatures and all
things that be,
And in all beings sees his Self, thence doubts no
longer, ponders not.
When, in the man who clearly knows, Self hath
become all things that are,

Non-dualism (*advaita*) literally means not-two. It maintains that the only reality is the self (*aham*) or spirit (*atman*) and there is no other. Every *other* that the self (I) experiences is not ultimately real. Everything that we see, hear, and know (including our own selves) is ultimately an illusion (*maya*). There is no subject and object distinction. There is no difference, for example, between the reader, the book, and the activity of reading. God (*Brahman*) is the ultimate reality and identical with the pure self or spirit. The chief scriptural sayings that embody the non-dualistic doctrine are called the

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Mahavakyas or Great Statements:

Pragyanam Brahma: Consciousness is Brahman
(Aitareya 5:3)

Aham Brahmasmi: I am Brahman (Brihadaranyaka
1.4.10)

Tat Tvam Asi: That Thou Art (Chandogya 6.8.7)

Ayam Atma Brahma: This Spirit is Brahman
(Mandukya 1.2)

The non-dualist doctrine does not say that the world as it appears to us is unreal or non-existent; it only says that the appearance is not reality as it is. A popular analogy used to explain this is that of the rope and snake.

As a rope lying in darkness, about whose nature one remains uncertain, is imagined to be a snake or a line of water, so Atman is imagined in various ways. When the real nature of the rope is ascertained, all misconceptions about it disappear and there arises the conviction that it is nothing but a rope. Even so is the true nature of Atman determined. (Gaudapada Karika 2.17,18. Trs. Swami Nikhilananda)

It is the self—luminous Atman who, through the power of Its own maya, imagines in Itself by Itself all the objects that the subject experiences within and without. It alone is the cognizer of objects. This is the decision of Vedanta. (2.12, *ibid*)

According to non-dualism, the only reality that cannot be denied is the subjective Self, who alone is the substratum of all ideas. As the Western philosopher Descartes' famous saying goes "I think, therefore I am", it is possible to doubt the reality of everything else except the self that is doing the doubting. Consequently, non-dualism regards the absolute reality of the Self as the highest truth and regards everything else as doubt-worthy (similar to objects of dream or magical illusion). However, Buddhism, objected to the doctrine of the self, rejecting it, since for it even the notion of the self is subject to change as nothing lasts for more than a moment and everything is incessantly changing; accordingly, Buddhism concludes that the notion of self is false (the doctrine of *anatta*) and conforms to a view similar to "I think, therefore thinking exists".

Gurus or Spiritual Masters. Hinduism has a very important place for spiritual gurus. Sometimes these gurus are revered as divine. Gurus are very popular nowadays in India. Charismatic personalities like Shirdi Sai Baba, Sathya Sai Baba, Osho Rajneesh, Anandamayi Ma, Mata Amritanandamayi are some examples of gurus that are worshipped by many Hindus.

Hindu Scriptures on Creation of the World

Rig Veda 10:72 describes the springing up of existence out of non-existence when Brahmanaspati produced the world "with blast and smelting, like a Smith."⁷

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. 1.4 gives an account of how duality and then plurality sprang out of the Self in the beginning.

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In the beginning this was Self alone, in the shape of a person (purusha). He looking round saw nothing but his Self. He first said, 'This is I;' therefore he became I by name. Therefore even now, if a man is asked, he first says, 'This is I,' and then pronounces the other name which he may have. And because before (pûrva) all this, he (the Self) burnt down (ush) all evils, therefore he was a person (pur-usha). Verily he who knows this, burns down every one who tries to be before him.

He feared, and therefore anyone who is lonely fears. He thought, 'As there is nothing but myself, why should I fear?' Thence his fear passed away. For what should he have feared? Verily fear arises from a second only.

But he felt no delight. Therefore a man who is lonely feels no delight. He wished for a second. He was so large as man and wife together. He then made this his Self to fall in two (pat), and thence arose husband (pati) and wife (patnî). Therefore Yâgñavalkya said: 'We two are thus (each of us) like half a shell.' Therefore the void which was there, is filled by the wife. He embraced her, and men were born.

She thought, 'How can he embrace me, after having produced me from himself? I shall hide myself.' She then became a cow, the other became a bull and embraced her, and hence cows were born. The one became a mare, the other a stallion; the one a male ass, the other a female ass.... And thus he created everything that exists in pairs, down to the ants.

He knew, 'I indeed am this creation, for I created all this.' Hence he became the creation, and he who knows this lives in this his creation....

And when they say, 'Sacrifice to this or sacrifice to that god,' each god is but his manifestation, for he is all gods....

He cannot be seen, for, in part only, when breathing, he is breath by name; when speaking, speech by name; when seeing, eye by name; when hearing, ear by name; when thinking, mind by name. All these are but the names of his acts. And he who worships (regards) him as the one or the other, does not know him, for he is apart from this (when qualified) by the one or the other (predicate). Let men worship him as Self, for in the Self all these are one. This Self is the footstep of everything, for through it one knows everything. And as one can find again by footsteps what was lost, thus he who knows this finds glory and praise.⁸

Gaudapada Karika on the Mandukya Upanishad 3.15, declares: "The scriptural statements regarding the creation, using the examples of earth, iron and sparks, are for the purpose of clarifying the mind. Multiplicity does not really exist in any manner."⁹ The Upanishads teach absolute non-dualism as the ultimate reality; all appearances of plurality (including individual selves) is due to *Maya* (the self-delusion of the Absolute). Regarding the relation of individual selves with the Absolute Self, the *Karika* gives the following analogy:

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The Analogy of Jars and Space (III. 3-8)¹⁰

1. Just as space confined within the jars etc. merge completely on the disintegration of the jars etc., so do the individual souls merge here in the Self (III. 4).
2. Just as all the spaces confined within the various jars are not darkened when one of the spaces thus confined becomes contaminated by dust, smoke, etc., so also is the case with all the individuals in the matter of being affected by happiness etc. (III. 6).
3. As the space within a jar is neither a transformation nor a part of space (as such), so an individual being is never a transformation nor a part of the supreme Self (III. 7).
4. Just as the sky becomes blackened by dust etc. to the ignorant, so also the Self becomes tarnished by impurities to the unwise (III. 8).
5. The aggregates (of bodies and senses) are all projected like dream by the Maya of the Self (atma-maya-visarjitah, i.e., Self's deluded-projection). Be it a question of superiority or equality of all, there is no logical ground to prove their existence (III. 10).

Some Comparative Notions

Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism

Concept	Hinduism	Jainism	Buddhism
<i>Dharma</i>	Righteousness	Principle of motion (one of 6 substances*)	Cosmic law of order
<i>Karma</i>	Action	Soul-polluting matter	Action driven by intention
<i>Deva</i>	God	Higher being	Higher being
<i>Samsara</i>	Cycle of rebirth	Cycle of rebirth	Cycle of rebirth
<i>Svarga/ Naraka</i>	Heaven/Hell	Heaven/Hell	Heaven/Hell
<i>Indra</i>	God of heaven	God of heaven	God of heaven
<i>Yama</i>	God of hell/Lord of death	God of hell	God of hell/Lord of death
<i>Hanuman</i>	Son of Surya/Monkey king	Kamdev (cp. Adonis) Renounced kingdom and attained <i>moksha</i>	Monkey king
<i>Universe</i>	Lesser real, Mayaloka (world of illusion)	Real, made up of 6 substances (dravyas)	Impermanence
<i>Soul</i>	Spirit-Self (Atman)	Pure being (Jiva)	No-Self (Anatta)

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*The 6 substances (dravyas) of Jainism are Jiva (soul), Pudgala (matter), Dharma (principle of motion), Adharma (principle of rest), Akasa (space), Kala (time).

Hinduism and Zoroastrianism

Hinduism	Zoroastrianism
Devas (gods)	Daevas (devils)
Asuras (demons)	Ahuras (gods)
Mantra (word, formula)	Matra (word, formula)
Yajna (worship, sacrifice)	Yasna (worship, sacrifice)
Mitra (god of light)	Mitra (god of light)
Vayu (wind god)	Vaiiu (wind god)
Soma (ritual drink)	Haoma (ritual drink)
Aryaman (deity of hospitality)	Airiaman (deity of hospitality)
Usha (goddess of dawn)	Usah (goddess of dawn)
Yama (god of hell) Is son of Vivasvat (sun god)	Yima (god of hell) Is son of Vivaŋhat (sun god)

THE CONCEPT OF GOD, SELF, AND WORLD IN ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are known as abrahamic religions. To all three of these, the patriarch Abraham is an important figure. To the Jews, Abraham is the father of nation. God called him out of Ur of Chaldeans and made a covenant of blessing with him and his descendants to whom the land of Israel was promised.

He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." (Genesis 15:7)

Muslims believe that Abraham and his son Ishmael were the ones who rebuilt the house of God at Kaaba.

And [mention] when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this a secure city and provide its people with fruits - whoever of them believes in Allah and the Last Day." [Allah] said. "And whoever disbelieves - I will grant him enjoyment for a little; then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire, and wretched is the destination." And [mention] when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and [with him] Ishmael, [saying], "Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed You are the Hearing, the Knowing. (Quran 2:126-127)¹¹

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The Bible records that Abraham was commanded by God to sacrifice his son Isaac, but was stopped before he did it. On the other hand, though the Quran doesn't mention the name of the son, Muslims believe that the sacrifice was ordered regarding Ishmael, not Isaac.

All the three, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are distinct for their monotheistic belief. While, a belief in a supreme God is common to many religions, there are key differences between many of them and the abrahamic religions.

We do have references to the supreme God, for instance in Hinduism as *Para Brahman* or Parmeshwara, in Zoroastrianism as Ahura Mazda, in Taoism as *Shang Di* and *Tian*, and in Santhal tribal religion as *Thakur Jiu*. In Hinduism, the *Para Brahman* is also the material cause of the universe, and therefore ultimately non-distinctive from it. In Zoroastrianism, the concept of *Ahura Mazda* as the uncreated eternal spirit seems closer to the Biblical view; however, unlike the abrahamic religions, Zoroastrianism also includes veneration of other *yazatas*.

Similar to the Hindu concept of the one arising from the non-dual and then splitting into two and so on, the *Tao Te Ching* (42) states:

*The Dao produced One; One produced Two;
Two produced Three; Three produced All things*

Wuji (unlimited, boundless) seems similar to the *Brahman* of Hinduism and the *Taiji* similar to the *Atman* while the split into *Yin* and *Yang* is comparable to the primordial split into male and female. *Chi* (life force, energy flow) is similar to the Hindu concept of *Adi Shakti* (primal force). Similarly, the plethora of deities of sky, earth, wind, fire, water, death and

so on are also found with varying accounts in Hinduism. In a way, both Chinese polytheism and Hindu polytheism feature an hierarchy of monistic polytheism, pluralistic monotheism, and dualist naturalistic pantheism. Monistic polytheism looks to a monist ground of reality, whereas pluralistic monotheism interprets the various deities as varied manifestations of the one supreme deity. At the same time, the subject-object dualism of the world is deified in the inherent pantheism of such religions. However, there are important theological differences between Hinduism and Chinese religions. For instance, the tri-manifestations of Hindu godhead is not the same as the five-manifestations of *Shang Di*. Also, instead of gods descending as avatars, Chinese religions emphasize on ancestors ascending to divinification. Yet, they do share resemblance in their concept of nature and divinity as not wholly separate of each other.

In contrast to such interpretations, abrahamic concepts of God and the world declare an ontological difference between God as Creator and the world as creation.

Some notions distinctive to the abrahamic religions may be summed up as follows:

1. **Exclusive Monotheism.** Both the Bible and Quran categorically affirm the oneness of God and the falsity of any other deity beside the one true God. This exclusivity differs from the inclusivist, pluralist, and syncretistic monotheistic tendencies of religions that affirm the oneness of God as also manifest in a plurality of deities, and often inclusive of any path of worship. For instance, the Hindu belief in a Supreme God might appear as monotheistic, but Hinduism also says that all the other deities are also manifestation

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of that same God. The same is also the case of the Supreme God *Shang Di* of Chinese religion. In contrast, the concept of God in abrahamic religions is non-accomodating and uncompromising.

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4) - Also known as *Shema Yisrael*

"To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him." (Deuteronomy 4:35)

"See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand." (Deuteronomy 32:39)

"Do not make [as equal] with Allah another deity and [thereby] become censured and forsaken." (Quran. 17:22)

"That is Allah, your Lord; there is no deity except Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him. And He is Disposer of all things." (Quran 6:102)

The exclusive oneness of God in Islam is known as *Tawhid*.

- 2. Absolute Otherness.** The God of abrahamic religions is also separate and distinct from His creation. He is not the same as it. Nothing in the natural world or the spirit world can compare with the absolute and perfect God. He as Creator is above, different, and other than the world He created. He is not *Brahman*, the impersonal noumenal substratum of the

phenomenal universe. He is personal, distinct, and over the world.

You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You. (2 Samuel 7:22)

For who in the skies is comparable to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the LORD. (Psalm 89:6)

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. (Romans 1: 25)

Islam considers associating anything or anyone with God as *shirk*, the antithesis of *Tawhid*.

- 3. Anti-Idolatry.** Abrahamic religions are also anti-idolatrous. They oppose the worship of idols.

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (Exodus 20:3-6)

...what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s

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invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.
(Romans 1:19-25)

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else...we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill..” (Acts 17:24,25,29)

Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills. And he who

associates others with Allah has certainly fabricated a tremendous sin. (Quran 4:48)

"O my son, do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice." (Quran 31:13)

4. ***Creatio Ex Nihilo***. There is also a strong emphasis in abrahamic theology on the creation of the world out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

"Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, for I created you before, while you were nothing.'" (Quran 19:9)

In contrast to this, the Gaudapada Karika on Mandukya Upanishad argues:

"An existing entity cannot again come into existence (birth); nor can a non—existing entity come into existence. Thus disputing among themselves, they really establish the non—dualistic view of ajati (non—creation)." (4:4)

5. **Divine Immanence**. God is considered not only transcendent to the world but also immanent in it. This transcendence and immanence, however, is wholly different from that conceived in Hinduism. In Hinduism, divine transcendence means that ultimate reality is beyond sense-perception and therefore

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transcendental meditation and techniques may be employed to attain transcendental or super consciousness. Also, divine immanence is identified with a pantheistic belief. In contrast, the God of abrahamic faith is wholly different from the world. He is eternal, while the world is ephemeral; He is uncreated, the world is created. However, this doesn't mean that God is separated from the universe. Immanence in abrahamic religions has to do mainly with God's presence in the world.

“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’” (Acts 17:26-28)

It is He who created the heavens and earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne. He knows what penetrates into the earth and what emerges from it and what descends from the heaven and what ascends therein; and He is with you wherever you are. And Allah, of what you do, is Seeing. His is the dominion of the heavens and earth. And to Allah are returned [all] matters. (Quran 57:4,5)

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you (Psalm 139:7-12)

And to Allah belongs the east and the west. So wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face of Allah . Indeed, Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing. (Quran 2:115)

6. **Divine Interventions.** God is the governor of the universe. He is not indifferent to the world He has created but is actively engaged in it. In the Bible, God is seen as intervening in the world through various means that include personal visitations (theophanies), angels, prophets, acts in nature. In Islam, the Quran is considered the greatest theophany while God does work in the world also through angels and prophets, of whom Mohammed is the final. The messenger angel Gabriel is mentioned in both the Bible and the Quran.
7. **Demonic Interferences.** The arch-enemy of God in abrahamic theologies is Satan, Shaytan, or Iblis. Satan's angels are demons who trouble, harass, mislead, and deceive humans away from the true God.

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Both the Bible and the Quran regard idolatry as a form of demon worship.

...the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. (1 Corinthians 10:20)

They call upon instead of Him none but female [deities], and they [actually] call upon none but a rebellious Satan. (Quran 4:117)

Christians believe that Satan was once an heavenly angel (a music angel) called Lucifer who rebelled against God along with a number of angels. In the present world, demons can possess, torment, and input vicious and even suicidal thoughts in humans in order to destroy them. Christians believe that all such demons are submissive to the name of Jesus and can be expelled (exorcised) by believers of Christ.

Muslims believe that *Iblis* or *Shaytan* tempts humans to evil and the *jinn*s can haunt people and torment them. Amulets, recitation of verses or formulas, and other methods are employed in exorcising demons.

Christianity mainly differs from Judaism in asserting the finality of revelation in Jesus Christ and its concept of Jewish ceremonial law as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Islam mainly differs from Judaism and Christianity in asserting the finality of revelation in Mohammed and its rejection of the Christian doctrine of Trinity. Islam regards Jesus as one of the prophets.

Islam regards Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem as holy places while Judaism regards Jerusalem as the City of God. Christianity regards the true Jerusalem as different from the earthly one. In Catholicism, however, there is emphasis on pilgrimage to holy places as well as veneration of relics and icons of saints. Angels are also venerated by Catholics.

The Divine Attributes

The biblical revelation of divine attributes can be classified into three groups: unrelated attributes, active attributes, and moral attributes.

God's Inner Nature (Unrelated Attributes)

1. Spirit
2. Infinite
3. One

God in Relation to the Universe (Active Attributes)

1. Omnipotent
2. Omnipresent
3. Omniscient
4. Wise
5. Sovereign

God in Relation to Moral Creatures (Moral Attributes)

1. Holy
2. Righteous
3. Faithful
4. Merciful

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5. Love
6. Good

In Islam, the divine attributes are similar to the biblical ones. According to the Quran,

1. Allah is eternal. He is beyond time.
2. Allah is omniscient. Nothing, past, present, and future is hidden from Him.
3. Allah is omnipotent.
4. Allah's will is supreme. Nothing can happen without His will.
5. Allah hears all sounds; yet, He doesn't have an ear like men.
6. Allah sees all things; yet, He doesn't have an eye like men.
7. Allah communicates with men.¹²

The Christian Doctrine of Trinity

The central belief that differentiates Christianity from both Judaism and Islam is its teaching that Jesus Christ is God the Son, the Second Person of the Divine Trinity. Muslims regard this teaching as *shirk*.

O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. And do not say, "Three"; desist - it is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is

on the earth. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs. (Quran 4:171)

They have certainly disbelieved who say, "Allah is the third of three." And there is no god except one God. And if they do not desist from what they are saying, there will surely afflict the disbelievers among them a painful punishment. (Quran 5:73)

And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?'" He will say, "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen. (Quran 5:116)

However, Christianity regards the doctrine of Trinity as clearly visible in the Bible where Christ and the Holy Spirit are referred to as God. In fact, the divinity of Jesus Christ is expressly declared in the Gospel of John and is crucial for an appreciation of the mediatorial role of Jesus in atoning for the sins of humanity and for reconciling man to God. Christians respond to the Muslim objection by explaining that Jesus is not to be regarded as a biological son of God (which is also blasphemous to Christian doctrine); the Bible declares Jesus as the image of God and the brightness of His glory. Some Christians has illustrated this as similar to the relation of the sun to its light. They say that the Father is like the sun, invisible to human eyes, who is revealed to us through the brightness of His glory, Jesus who is like the light of the sun that reaches us on earth.

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The following things need to be understood about the doctrine of Trinity:

1. **Not Tri-theism.** It does not teach the existence of three gods. Christian faith affirms the absolute oneness of God.
2. **Not Tripartism.** It does not teach that God is composed of three parts. God is indivisible.
3. **Not Trimodalism.** It does not teach that God appears at different times in different modes of being.

Essential Elements of Trinity¹³

1. God is One.
2. Each of the persons within the Godhead is Deity.
3. The oneness of God and the threeness of God are not contradictions.
4. The Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is eternal.
5. Each of the persons of God is of the same essence and is not inferior or superior to the others in essence.
6. The Trinity is a mystery which we will never be able to understand fully.

THE CONCEPT OF REBIRTH IN KARMIC RELIGIONS

Rebirth (also known as reincarnation) is the view that a living being undergoes another birth (is reborn) after death. The word “re-birth” means to be born again. The word re-incarnation means to take a body again. A classic description of this view is given in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

As a person sheds worn-out garments and wears new ones, likewise, at the time of death, the soul casts off its worn-out body and enters a new one. (2:22)

The idea of rebirth is a central tenet of karmic religions. Though Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism (the four prominent *karmic* religions) have variant understanding of it, they all agree on the view that one’s *karma* is not extinguished at death but is carried on to the next birth, in fact determining it. The sanskrit word *punarjanma* is better translated as “rebirth” rather than “reincarnation”, though the idea of taking on a new body is included in it. Phrases like *agla janma* (next birth), *janma janma* (many births), *saatjanma* (seven births) are part and parcel of *karmic* jargon.

Among Greeks, Pythagoras (6th c. B.C.) is regarded as the first Greek philosopher who taught rebirth. Plato narrates a story of reincarnation in his *Republic*:

Most curious, he said, was the spectacle—sad and laughable and strange; for the choice of the souls was in most cases based on their experience of a previous

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life. There he saw the soul which had once been Orpheus choosing the life of a swan out of enmity to the race of women, hating to be born of a woman because they had been his murderers; he beheld also the soul of Thamyras choosing the life of a nightingale; birds, on the other hand, like the swan and other musicians, wanting to be men. The soul which obtained the twentieth lot chose the life of a lion, and this was the soul of Ajax the son of Telamon, who would not be a man, remembering the injustice which was done him in the judgment about the arms. The next was Agamemnon, who took the life of an eagle, because, like Ajax, he hated human nature by reason of his sufferings.¹⁴

In Plato's narrative, however, reincarnation is not determined by the law of *karma*, rather the souls individually choose what they wish to be born as.

Today, in the West, the idea of rebirth (reincarnation, transmigration, metempsychosis) is very popular among the followers of New Age religions. This makes *karmic* themes very attractive to them.

The Concept of Time and Rebirth in Hinduism

Time, in *karmic* concept, is cyclical. It has no starting point or an endpoint. The cycle of time moves like a wheel (*chakra*). As the wheel of time moves forward, there is an upward motion and also a downward motion. The upward motion begins with the start of each cycle in creation and the rise of virtues. The downward motion is characterised by the fall of virtues, the rise of vice, and the end of the cycle, in

dissolution and quietude. But, after the downward motion comes the upward motion again, and time goes on.

Much of the Hindu concept of time is derived from the *Srimad Bhagavatam* (or *Bhagavata Purana*, referred hence as SB) which is a Vaishnavite text (6th-10th century A.D.) and *Vishnu Purana* (10th c. A.D.).

According to Hinduism, each cycle of creation and dissolution consists of four aeons or *yugas*.

The 4 aeons or *yugas* are: *Satya, Treta, Dwapara, and Kali*.

- a. *Satya or Krta Yuga*. It equals 4800 years of the demigods (SB.3.11.19). One day of the demigod equals one year of a human (SB.3.11.12). So, the *Satya Yuga* was 1,728,000 years long. It is described as the age of truth and righteousness when *dharma* was highly exalted.
- b. *Treta Yuga*. It stood for around 3600 demigod years, i.e. 1,296,000 years in the lunar calendar. *Dharma* diminished a little in this age and people pursued more after wealth and pleasure.
- c. *Dwapara Yuga*. It was 2400 demigod years long, i.e. around 864,000 years. This age ended with the *Mahabharata* war and the death of *Krishna*, the avatar of Vishnu.
- d. *Kali Yuga*. It is 1200 demigod years long, i.e. 432,000 years long. It is regarded to have begun in 3102 B.C. At the end of this age, the Kalki avatar of Vishnu will descend on earth and bring an end to the present cycle of time. That should be 426,000 years later.

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Each cycle of the four *yugas* makes one *Mahayuga* (Great Aeon). 1000 *Mahayugas* make one *kalpa* or day of Brahma. During the day *kalpa*, the world exists; at night *kalpa*, when he sleeps, the world is destroyed and remains at rest for the next 4.3 billion years (one *kalpa*). One full day of Brahma is equal to 2 *kalpas* (night and day). The next day, when Brahma awakes, he recreates the world again. Since Brahma is regarded as perfect and not in need of a creation, his act of creating and destroying worlds is also known as *Brahma leela* (divine passtime or play). The age of Brahma is 100 years, which equals to 72,000 *kalpas* or 72 million *Mahayugas* (equal to about 311 trillion human years). The time between the origin and death of Brahma constitutes one *Mahakalpa*. After 100 years (*Mahakalpa*), Brahma dies and there is a cosmic dissolution of all things. Following this, there is the rise of another Brahma who creates all things. Thus, the cycle of creation and dissolution goes on. The Supreme Lord from whom all things originate and into whom all things dissolve is *Para Brahma* (Supreme Brahma). Vaishnavites regard Vishnu as the Supreme Lord, while Shaivites regard Shiva as the Supreme Lord. Shaktas regard Shakti (the female goddess) as the Supreme Mother Lord.

Manvantara (Manu Interval). A *Mahayuga* (Great Aeon) can be divided into 71 *Divyayugas* (Divine ages). 1 Manu (progenitor of humanity) is created during each *Divyayuga*. Thus, in total 14 Manus are created in one *Mahayuga* or day *kalpa* of Brahma. Also, deities like Indra (god of heaven) are created and perish at each *Manvantara*.

Rebirth

According to Hinduism, a man is always either reborn into one of the castes or is an out-caste. The caste-system is a hierarchical system according to biological birth and is known as the *varnashrama dharma*

Varnashrama dharma, meaning “caste-duty” refers to the four main castes, according to birth, among the Hindus. The higher castes are the Brahmins (priest-class, usually vegetarian), the Kshatriyas (warrior-class, soldiers, princes), and the Vaishyas (merchants, businessmen, traders). The lower caste Shudras had only one caste-duty, to serve the higher castes. Contrary to the Platonic class division into Guardians, Auxiliaries, and Merchants, the caste-system today is based on privilege of birth and not achievements or talents. Caste-system worsened into practice of untouchability and several evils until challenged by Hindu reformers and dalit leaders during the late Colonial era. In modern India, the practice of caste-discrimination is regarded as a criminal offence.

The *Manusmriti* provides the law code for the functioning of caste-system. During the dalit rebellion against caste-domination of them, B.R. Ambedkar and his followers publicly burnt the *Manusmriti* on December 25, 1927 to display their rejection of this ancient law code that was used throughout history to dominate them. Later, Ambedkar and his followers converted to Buddhism (but into a form that rejected *karmic* concepts) since they saw that there was no social liberation for them as long as they remained identified with Hinduism.

Hinduism also teaches a doctrine of three *gunas* (qualities/natures). *The three gunas*, or three natures/qualities are

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Sattva (lighter, brighter), *Rajas* (red, passionate, hot), *tamas* (dark, stuporous). There is a correspondence between the gunas and the castes, as Brahmins (priests/philosophers) may be regarded as more *sattvik* and Kshatriyas as more *rajasik*. Also, foods like ghee, honey, cow milk, vegetables and beans are regarded as *sattvik*, while spicy, dry, hot, sour and bitter food are regarded as *rajasik*. *Tamasik* food like alcohol, onions, garlic, deep fried food are thought to create lethargy and invoke bad feelings. In the Supreme Lord, all the gunas are considered to be in equilibrium. During the *Kali Yuga*, the gunas are in total chaos.

Samsara, meaning “world” or “wandering”, is the sanskrit word for the cycle of birth and rebirth. The ultimate goal of all *karmic* religions is emancipation from this wheel of births.

Moksha or liberation from the cycle of rebirth is a crucial goal of Hinduism. Hinduism teaches that the **four goals of life** are *dharma* (right duty), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (pleasure), and *moksha* (liberation). Dharma is essential to all of these pursuits, for wealth needs to be rightly earned and pleasure must be enjoyed within the limits of it. Hinduism teaches that there are three ways to liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

1. *Karma Marga (Way of Action)*. Fulfilling one’s caste dharma in accordance to the vedas, performing rites and rituals properly, observing austerity, and offering gifts accumulates good *karma* (*punya*) and secures one a better life in the next birth. Action is superior to inaction. The Bhagavad Gita states that true *karma* or action must be selfless and free from attachment and desire for the fruit of the works. It calls one to right action but also to a renunciation of the fruits of such actions. One needs to only act according to his *dharma* (in the Gita, mainly referring to Arjuna’s

caste-dharma as a Kshatriya, or warrior) without being concerned about the results (good or bad) of such action.

However, good works can only promise a better rebirth and not a degraded one. In fact, it might take innumerable rebirths for the soul to achieve purification. Rebirth into the noble higher castes is essential for *karmic* liberation. Also, since all things ultimately dissolve, seeking after a heavenly abode or better life is not regarded as ultimate salvation.

2. *Jnana Marga (Way of Knowledge)*. It is the way of knowledge, not the kind of scientific or physical knowledge that the world pursues but a metaphysical, a mystical one. It is the knowledge of reality as it is by union with it. While the plurality of the universe as it appears to us does constitute our experience of self and the world, the Gita calls for consideration of the Jnana Yoga. It calls for union with the absolute non-dual Reality – the realization of self as Self. For this the mind must be disciplined and tuned in with Reality. The individual self is the hindrance when it phenomenalises as a separate entity from other entities. Jnana or knowledge happens when this self realizes that it is Brahman – Being – Reality; and that all the other phenomena is itself in manifestation. It is held that Jnana Yoga is difficult without Karma Yoga. Study of the Vedas and other scriptures is the action followed by long periods of reflection and meditation. Also, the privilege of vedic insight was traditionally considered a privilege of only the higher castes, especially the Brahmins.

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3. *Bhakti Marga (Way of Devotion)*. This is the way of devotion, the way of trust and love. Devotion is interpreted as the bond of trust and love to a personal God. Unlike *Jnana Yoga*, which focuses on the Impersonal Brahman, *Bhakti Yoga* focuses on a loving attachment to God, a longing for God for its own sake. To be noted is the concept of this God as being transcendent and yet totally immanent. All icons of this God are to be considered as symbolical. Absolute meditation and undivided devotion to Ishwara is essential to Bhakti. God must become his/her sole refuge. For those who have found *Karma Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga* extremely difficult, the *Bhakti marga* comes in as solace. A *bhakt (devotee)* chooses his/her own personal god (*isht devata*) and focuses on devotion to the same.

A true devotee has three distinctive qualities: even-mindedness, undivided devotion, and skill in action. These three qualities woven together in perfect harmony within the devotee knit him/her to his/her Lord. By absolute devotion, one is united to his/her Lord in love. Stories abound of how Vishnu finds the marks of the beating inflicted on his devotee's body on his own. The Lord is so tied to his devotee that in one story he forgets to bring his sudarshana chakra (disc) along with him when he hurries to rescue his devotee from peril.

In the non-dualist concept, salvation is actually not something that must be obtained. Liberation/salvation is integral to the non-dual soul, Brahman. One only needs to realize this. The phenomenal world is more like a matrix (*maya loka*) that is imagined in the state of *avidya*

(ignorance). Therefore, true religion according to philosophical Hinduism is nothing but self-realization. In fact, it means to realize that nothing but the self exists.

The Concept of Time and Rebirth in Buddhism

Buddhism divides each time cycle of formation and dissolution into four *kalpas* - formation, continuance, decline, disintegration. Each cycle of the four *kalpas* makes one *Mahakalpa*. The *Mahakalpa* is billions of years long. The cycles can be divided into age of increase and age of decrease. During the age of increase, the lifespan of humans can increase to 84,000 years and their height increase till 84,000 feet. During the age of decrease, the lifespan decreases to 10 years and height decreases to 1 foot.¹⁵ Formation and dissolution of the universes happen without any agency of a god or creator.

Buddhism also teaches that there are six realms of desire into which a soul may be reborn:

1. *Deva Loka (realm of gods)*
2. *Asura Loka (realm of jealous or angry gods)*
3. *Manussa Loka (realm of humans)*
4. *Triyagyonī Loka (realm of animals)*
5. *Preta Loka (realm of hungry ghosts)*
6. *Naraka Loka (hell)*

In contrast to these are the higher realms, viz., *Sravaka (disciple)*, *Pratyekabuddha (lone buddha)*, *Bodhisattva (compassionate and incarnating buddha)*, and *Buddhatta (buddhahood)*. The goal of life is truth-realization.

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Buddhism looks at salvation as no-self-realization (*anatta*). For Buddhism, everything is in the state of flux and bereft of a permanent essence. Nirvana means blowing off or extinguishing. The idea is that when someone dies, consciousness is reborn in a different body in the same way as a candle is lit by the flame of another candle. However, at Nirvana the candle is blown off. It is the cessation of rebirth and the state of emptiness (*shunyata*).

The *Dhammachakka Pavattana* is the Buddhist gospel of liberation that lists out the four noble truths and the eightfold path, which is also known as the middle way. Buddhism emphasizes the middle way between strict asceticism and irreligious hedonism.

"There are these two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is devoted to sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the Tathagata — producing vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding.

"And what is the middle way realized by the Tathagata that — producing vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding? Precisely this Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the middle way realized by the Tathagata that — producing

vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding.

"Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress: Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for further becoming — accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there — i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: precisely this Noble Eightfold Path — right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.¹⁶

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A handy acronym to help remember the eightfold path is VASCLEAM,

- V - View
- A - Aspiration (resolve)
- S - Speech
- C - Conduct (action)
- L - Livelihood
- E - Effort
- A - Awareness (mindfulness)
- M - Meditation (concentration)

While the Theravada tradition of Buddhism adheres to the strict and conservative pali texts of Buddhism (dominant in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand), the Mahayana tradition encompasses belief in compassionate Bodhisattvas who assist common seekers in their quest for Nirvana. Mahayana Buddhism with its embracement of *bhakti* concepts of devotion opened up the door of optimism for laymen to get closer to ultimate release. While the goal of Theravada is to be an *arahant*, Mahayana emphasizes on the importance of Bodhisattva.

The Concept of Time and Rebirth in Jainism

Time (*kala*) is one of the six *dravyas* or substances in Jainism. The other five *dravyas* are *jiva* (soul), *pudgala* (matter), *dharma* (principle of motion), *adharm*a (principle of rest), and *akasa* (space).

Jainism divides the motion of the time-wheel (*kalachakra*) into two halves: *Utsarpini* (*age of ascending happiness*) and *Avarsarpini* (*age of descending happiness and increasing sorrow*). It takes over billions of years to complete one cycle.

At the beginning of the cycle, humans begin to experience happiness and longevity; however, when the wheel begins to fall, the height and lifespan of people begins to diminish as sorrow begins to increase.

Jainism teaches that the world is not an illusion, but is real. Also, there are an infinite number of *jivas* (*jiva* means soul) that are in bondage to *karma* like gold mixed with impure substances since infinity past. The soul is essentially pure and omniscient, but in chains to *samsara* due to the constant influx of *karma*. In Jainism, *karma* is not just action but is real substance that attaches to the soul and drags it down into the cycle of rebirth. While on death, the soul (*jiva*) leaves the physical body, it is not liberated from the *karmic* body. So, the goal of Jainism is to seek liberation from the *karmic* body so that the soul may be freed from all hindrances to the experience of omniscience (*kevala jnana*). *Kevala jnana* (supreme knowledge, omniscience) is the intrinsic property of every soul, but hindered by non-soulish substances.

Jainism believes that there is a constant influx of *karmic* material into the soul. This *karmic* material may be good or bad. Good *karmic* material may secure a higher rebirth, while bad *karmic* material may result in lower rebirth; however, whether good or bad, *karma* will always lead to some form of rebirth or the other. Therefore, Jainism teaches that one needs to first stop the influx of all *karma* and then focus on ridding the soul of past attached *karmas*. Only then is salvation or *moksha* (salvation) possible. The seven principles are:

1. *Jiva* - Soul, intelligent and living substance
2. *Ajiva* - Matter and non-living substances (*pudgala, dharma, adharma, kala, akasa*)

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3. *Asrava* - Influx of *karmic* material through sentient contact
4. *Bandha* - Bondage to the cycle of rebirth through mixture of soul with *karma*
5. *Samvara* - Stoppage of *karmic* material
6. *Nirjara* - Shedding of accumulated *karma*
7. *Moksha* - annihilation of all *karma* and liberation of soul

Tirthankaras (ford-makers). Jainism believes that there are 24 *Tirthankaras* (ford-makers) during each half of the cycle of time. The *Tirthankaras* help humans to know the truth and follow it in order to experience liberation. Mahavira Jaina (the founder of Jainism) is regarded as the 24th and last *Tirthankara*. Self-negation, humility, and worship of *Tirthankaras* helps one to obtain a better rebirth.

Triratna (three jewels). According to Jainism, the path of salvation consists in the three jewels: Right Belief, Right Knowledge, and Right Conduct (*samyag darshana, samyag jnana, samyag charitra*). The three jewels help one to enter into the Abode of gods.

Some modern religious movements in India, influenced by rationalist and Christian principles reject karmic doctrines of rebirth and casteism. The Brahma Samaj, for instance, rejects even the Upanishads since they do not teach strict monotheism. The Navayana Buddhism movement started by B.R. Ambedkar (after his conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism) rejects the Buddhist doctrines of karma and rebirth. Ambedkar and his followers moved out of the Hindu fold when they realized that the dalits (lower or suppressed castes) had no social emancipation as long as they remained under the banner of Hinduism. In public protest against

casteism, they burnt the copy of the *Manusmriti*, the Hindu book of law. Navayana asserts its difference from the mainline Mahayana and Hinayana (Theravada) groups that are karmic in nature. But, though Navayana claimed to only contain the message of social liberation, many neo-buddhists or Ambedkarites regard Ambedkar as a Bodhisattva.

Most rationalist Hindus reject casteism and the theory of rebirth associated with it. There is, in fact, an array of intellectual writings in dalit philosophy and dalit theology that stands as a strong denouncement of caste-Hinduism.

THE CONCEPT OF RESURRECTION IN ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

The concepts of rebirth and resurrection in both KR and AR address a number of human problems, some of which are death, justice, suffering, and existential meaning. These concepts usually help religious adherents to come to terms with the issues of life and realign themselves to their convictions.

Contrary to the *karmic* goal of becoming liberated from the cycle of rebirth (*Samsara*), AR look at resurrection as the hope of salvation. Notably, the goal of both KR and AR is not a comfortable life of immortality in heaven; rather, it is the experience of total liberation from the body of death. In the case of KR, it means liberation from returning to physical rebirth; in the case of AR, the resurrection of this body never to die again. But, while the goal of KR is non-bodiment, AR emphasizes on the salvation of the complete human (body, soul, spirit). Also, while rebirth is a recurring event, the resurrection is an eschatological end-time event. The concept of rebirth may possess a positive tone of a possibility of amendment or return in a future life; but, the doctrine of resurrection teaches that man is liable for all that he does in the one life given to him -- following death, there is no other chance given but only a trial and judgment. Also, in KR, there is no need for a personal, intelligent, and moral god to act as

a judge of human actions - the law of *karma* does the job and even the gods cannot escape it. Therefore, it is very much possible to be *karmic* without being theistic. However, in AR, God is not only the creator of moral beings but also the moral judge of them.

The concept of resurrection is not exclusive only to AR. The Egyptian god Osiris and Greek god Dionysus were regarded as gods of resurrection. However, it is in Zoroastrianism that we begin to find some similarity to the AR concept. The Avestan says:

That will cleave unto the victorious Saoshyant and his helpers, when he shall restore the world, which will (thenceforth) never grow old and never die, never decaying and never rotting, ever living and ever increasing, and master of its wish, when the dead will rise, when life and immortality will come, and the world will be restored at its wish;

When the creation will grow deathless,—the prosperous creation of the Good Spirit,—and the Drug shall perish, though she may rush on every side to kill the holy beings; she and her hundredfold brood shall perish, as it is the will of the Lord.¹⁷

In Judaism

During Jesus' times, there were two schools of thought regarding the resurrection: the Pharisees believed in spirits, angels, and physical resurrection; but, the Sadducees didn't believe in these.

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The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things. (Acts 23:8 NIV)

In modern times, the concept of rebirth/reincarnation (similar to KR) is found within the Kabbalah movement of Judaism. The concept known as *gilgul* holds that souls undergo a cycle of reincarnations. The Kabbalah teaches that the soul has 613 channels and gets elevated when it fulfills the 613 commandments (*Mitzvot*). However, souls are not able to fulfill all these in just one life, and so keep reincarnating until they fulfill them. A number of Jewish scholars reject this view as unorthodox.

In Islam

Islam has a strong emphasis on the doctrine of resurrection. The 75th chapter of Quran is titled *Al-Qiyama* meaning “The Resurrection”. In addition to the Quran, Muslims belief in resurrection is also informed largely by the Sunnah and Hadith literature. The Sunnah records the practices and beliefs of Abraham (Ibrahim) as revised by the Prophet Mohammed. It is regarded as equal in authority and authenticity as the Quran. The Hadith, on the other hand, are a record of the sayings of Mohammed with commentaries by respected Imams. There are levels of authenticity attached to the various Hadiths depending on whether they are authoritative, acceptable, or fake. Much of Islamic theology is based on the Hadith literature.

According to Islam, the resurrection (*Qiyamah*) will occur at the end of the age. A number of key events such as widespread anarchy and irreligiosity, the appearance of the Antichrist, the coming of the Imam Mahdi (among Shiites)

and Jesus and the rise of an army with black banners proceeding to Jerusalem will precede the end of this age. The unbelievers who did not believe the message of the Quran will be punished and then an age of peace will be established. Following this, there will be the resurrection of the dead and final judgment.

The Quran declares in 22:5-9

O People, if you should be in doubt about the Resurrection, then [consider that] indeed, We created you from dust, then from a sperm-drop, then from a clinging clot, and then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed - that We may show you. And We settle in the wombs whom We will for a specified term, then We bring you out as a child, and then [We develop you] that you may reach your [time of] maturity. And among you is he who is taken in [early] death, and among you is he who is returned to the most decrepit [old] age so that he knows, after [once having] knowledge, nothing. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down upon it rain, it quivers and swells and grows [something] of every beautiful kind. That is because Allah is the Truth and because He gives life to the dead and because He is over all things competent. And [that they may know] that the Hour is coming - no doubt about it - and that Allah will resurrect those in the graves. And of the people is he who disputes about Allah without knowledge or guidance or an enlightening book [from Him], Twisting his neck [in arrogance] to mislead [people] from the way of Allah . For him in the world is disgrace, and We will make him taste on

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the Day of Resurrection the punishment of the
Burning Fire [while it is said]

And in 50:17-35

When the two receivers receive, seated on the right and on the left. Man does not utter any word except that with him is an observer prepared [to record]. And the intoxication of death will bring the truth; that is what you were trying to avoid. And the Horn will be blown. That is the Day of [carrying out] the threat. And every soul will come, with it a driver and a witness. [It will be said], "You were certainly in unmindfulness of this, and We have removed from you your cover, so your sight, this Day, is sharp." And his companion, [the angel], will say, "This [record] is what is with me, prepared." [Allah will say], "Throw into Hell every obstinate disbeliever, Who made [as equal] with Allah another deity; then throw him into the severe punishment." His [devil] companion will say, "Our Lord, I did not make him transgress, but he [himself] was in extreme error." [Allah] will say, "Do not dispute before Me, while I had already presented to you the warning. The word will not be changed with Me, and never will I be unjust to the servants." On the Day We will say to Hell, "Have you been filled?" and it will say, "Are there some more," And Paradise will be brought near to the righteous, not far, [It will be said], "This is what you were promised - for every returner [to Allah] and keeper [of His covenant] Who feared the Most Merciful unseen and came with a heart returning [in repentance]. Enter it in peace. This is the Day of Eternity." They will have whatever they wish therein, and with Us is more.

There will be none who will escape death, for everyone on earth will die (55:26).

Resurrection is the only hope that lies ahead. There is no returning back, no rebirth, no chance to amend, but a day of resurrection and judgment that lies ahead.

...behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected. (23:100)

The Arabic word for “barrier” in the text is *barzakh*. According to Islam, the soul, after death, is sent to *barzakh*, a temporary holding place for souls, where it experiences torment or pleasure according to its deeds, awaiting resurrection and judgement.

While, the doctrine of resurrection is the orthodox teaching of Islam, there have also been unorthodox tendencies towards reincarnation beliefs in Islamic history. Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad note:

The doctrine of metempsychosis came originally to Islam from India and gained credence in a number of sects considered outside the orthodox fold. Some persons associated with the Mu'tazila held that God's justice necessitates another opportunity for those whose good and bad deeds are equal and who thus merit neither the Fire nor the Garden. Many of the Shi'a, such as the Isma'ilia, Batiniya and others, applied the doctrine of metempsychosis both to the Imam and to individual believers. Most Sufis, like most orthodox Muslims, have rejected transmigration, although a few accept it as a means of achieving spiritual perfection. (Smith & Haddad, 8)

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For those who believe in the message of the Quran and have surrendered to Allah and have done good deeds, *Jannah* (Paradise) is assured.

Two important personages in Islamic eschatology are the *Imam Mahdi* (on behalf of believers) and the *Al-Masih ad-dajjal* (false Messiah, Antichrist). They both will appear at the end times before the second coming of Jesus the true Messiah, who will destroy the Antichrist (*dajjal*).

Notable among these prophecies are some Hadith declarations regarding an army from Khorasan with black flags. The army will be led by the *Imam Mahdi* (from Muhammad's bloodline) and will move towards Jerusalem to fight the Jewish army led by *dajjal* who will also emerge from Khorasan. Modern Islamic terrorism (esp. ISIS, TALIBAN) has attracted some attention in relation to such passages of the Hadith.

The Messenger of Allah said: 'The Dajjal (False Christ) is blind in his left eye and has abundant hair. With him will be a Paradise and a Hell, but his Hell is Paradise and his Paradise is Hell.' (Sunan ibn Majah 36.33). Grade. *Sahih- Authentic*

The Messenger of Allah told us: 'Dajjal will emerge in a land in the east called Khorasan, and will be followed by people with faces like hammered shields.' (Sunan ibn Majah 36.33.147). Grade. *Hasan - Supportive evidence*

The people of my Household will face calamity, expulsion and exile after I am gone, until some people will come from the east carrying black banners. They will ask for something good but will not be given it.

Then they will fight and will be victorious, then they will be given what they wanted, but they will not accept it and will give leadership to a man from my family. Then they will fill it with justice just as it was filled with injustice. Whoever among you lives to see that, let him go to them even if he has to crawl over snow.'" (Sunan ibn Majah 36.34). Grade. *Da'if- Weak*

Then the black banners will come from the east, and they will kill you in an unprecedented manner." Then he mentioned something that I do not remember, then he said: "When you see them, then pledge your allegiance to them even if you have to crawl over the snow, for that is the caliph of Allah, Mahdi." (Sunan ibn Majah 36.34). Grade. *Da'if- Weak*

Some Comparative Themes

The *Kalki* avatar prophesied in Hinduism and Buddhism is expected to come during an age when evil would be rampant. He will fight against evil forces and establish justice in the world. Similarly, the second coming of Christ prophesied in both Christianity and Islam will be in order to destroy the forces of the Antichrist and to usher in the Kingdom of God. However, there are differences among the identities of the Savior in these religions. However, a climatic anticipation of the triumph of good over evil and of justice over injustice is a common theme.

Also, there is no significance of bodily resurrection and glorification in the *karmic* worldview, so *Kalki* only restarts a new cycle of time. However, Christ, especially in Christianity, comes at the end of the age as Judge of the world to redeem the body and to usher in eternity.

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Both Islamic scriptures and the Bible have reference to the end time battles of Armageddon and of Gog and Magog.

Zoroastrianism also speaks of the victorious Saoshyant who will appear at the end times and bring about the renovation of the world.

In Christianity

The Christian doctrine of resurrection is integral to the doctrines of man, sin, Christ, and salvation. The whole of humanity is in a state of sin and rebellion against the Law of God. This was because the first man, Adam, chose to disobey God's command and thus became the first mortal man. Through Adam, death passed to all humanity.

...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

Also, the whole creation was subjected to corruption (by which one may infer that natural observation cannot give us a complete idea of what the original creation looked like). At the present time, the whole creation groans in agony and awaits physical redemption.

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that[h] the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Romans 8:19-22)

The “children of God” refers to those who will partake of the resurrection of glory in the same manner as Christ also resurrected from the dead.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

This event will happen at the end of times, when Christ will return to this earth. The dead in Christ will resurrect first; then, those who are alive will be transformed and caught up to meet Christ and the saints.

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17)

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I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. (1 Corinthians 15:50-54)

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:20-21)

Most literal interpretations of the Bible hold that there will be a 7 year tribulation on earth at this time, ruled by the Antichrist who will make a treaty of peace with Israel for 7 years, but violate it and desecrate the temple at Jerusalem [There is no temple right now]. Then, Christ will destroy the Anti-Christ and his false prophet. The Biblical passages that talk about this are found in Daniel 9:24-27, Revelation 13-19, and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

The Bible also records that there will be Messianic government for 1000 years which will be followed by the Gog and Magog war. Following this, there will be the resurrection of the godless and the wicked, who will be judged and thrown into hell. These prophecies are mentioned in the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

ESSENTIAL ETHICS IN RELIGION

The many ethical problems of life can be reduced to a few principles that are common to all humanity. Each of these principles is related to:

1. Life - *Don't Kill. Cherish Life. Be compassionate.*
2. Property - *Don't Steal. Be Loyal.*
3. Speech - *Don't Lie. Speak Truth.*
4. Family - *Honor Parents, Care for Own family*
5. Sexuality - *Don't commit adultery. Be faithful to spouse.*
6. Intentionality/Thought - *Don't be greedy or covetous. Practice non-attachment. Rejoice in the good.*

The above six principles may be regarded as occurring at the fundamental level. These basic principles are common to all men. However, their interpretations may take various forms relative to the various religious views or ideologies.

Let's look at some characteristics of religious ethics.

1. They are normative and obligatory.
2. They are usually deontological in nature.
3. They are also often emulative in nature. People point at narratives as examples to look for when solving an ethical problem. E.g., The Sunnah and Hadith provide such answers for practical issues that Muslims grapple with.

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4. Finally, they may also be regarded as retributory in nature. In other words, whether it be the law of Karma or God arbitrating justice, every moral action will return some consequence.

Having said that, we must also understand that religious ethics have an hierarchy of levels:

1. The essential - For instance, *love* in Christianity is the central ethic on which all commandments are centred.
2. The fundamental - e.g. *The 10 Commandments* that include commands against idolatry, murder, theft, adultery, dishonor, and dishonesty are fundamental to every other regulation.
3. The explanatory - The “why” of rules. For instance, the explanatory tries to answer why a law against murder exists: because man is created in the image of God.
4. The extensional - e.g. *Civil code of Judaism* or *Christian ethics in epistles*
5. The theological - These are theological interpretations and reflections on the fundamental principles of religious ethics. E.g. *The 7 Deadly Sins* and the *7 virtues* in Christianity answer to the biblical revelation.
6. The applicatory- Contextual interpretations. These relate to how revealed ethical principles can be applied in day to day situations.

The Essentials in KR and AR

RELIGION	ESSENTIAL ETHIC	ROOT PROBLEM	METAPHYSICAL GROUND
Hinduism	<i>Svadharmā</i> (Personal duty)	<i>Adharma</i> (Duty violation, wickedness)	<i>Divine Origin of Class- Society</i>
Jainism	<i>Ahimsa</i>	<i>Karma</i> (Material aggregate through act-contacts)	<i>Jiva in pure form is karma-less</i>
Buddhism	<i>Ahimsa</i>	<i>Tanha</i> (Desire)	<i>Life is suffering</i>
Christianity	Love	Sin (Violation of Love)	<i>God is love</i>
Islam	Belief/ Surrender	Idolatry (Not surrendering to the sovereignty of Allah)	<i>God is great</i>

The Fundamentals

Hinduism: *Svadharmā (Personal Duty)*

Svadharmā or personal duty is an important concept in Hindu ethics. Ethical values are relative to one's age or stage in life and one's caste into which one is born.

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The duties related to stages of life are known as *ashrama dharma* and are divided into four:

1. *Brahmacharya*. Bachelor's life as a student. Learning *dharma*
2. *Grihastha*. A householder's life as an earner and caretaker. Earning *artha* and enjoying *kama*
3. *Vanaprastha*. Retirement and mentoring. Focus on *Moksha*
4. *Sanyasa*. Renunciation of the world.

Caste-obligation is known as *Varna Dharma*. Originally, the caste system is regarded as having been related to division of labor in society:

1. Brahmins - priests, philosophers
2. Kshatriyas - rulers, soldiers
3. Vaishyas - merchants, traders, businessmen
4. Shudras - laborers

For instance, a Kshatriya's ethical duty is the fulfilling of his *kshatriya dharma* or warrior's obligation. Likewise, a Brahmin's ethical duty is the fulfilling of his *brahmana dharma*.

Modern thinkers regard these divisions as originally functional and not hereditary. However, in popular Hinduism, casteism is linked to the genealogical tree and usually identified by surname and location.

Also, *purusha dharma (of man)* and *stri dharma (of woman)* is an example of *svadharma*. Each gender has its own role, duty, and function.

Hinduism also teaches that there are four goals in life, which it refers to as the four *purusarthas*:

1. *Artha (Wealth)*. Pursuit of wealth and possession is a goal that every *grihastha* (householder) must practice.
2. *Kama (Pleasure)*. The householder also pursues enjoyment of life, having completed the arduous life of a student, and before he retires to pursue solely spirituality.
3. *Dharma (Duty/Righteousness)*. Every pursuit must be governed by the principle of *dharma*.
4. *Moksha (Liberation)*. This is the chief focus of human existence. *Moksha* means liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

Some important virtues extolled in Hindu narratives are

1. *Satya or Truthfulness to self*. An ideal person in Hindu narratives is Satya Harishchandra, who being a king gave away his kingdom to a sage when that sage came and told Harishchandra that he had granted the sage his kingdom in a dream. Harishchandra regarded his promise in a dream as equally binding on him as a promise given in the waking hours.
2. *Devotion to parents*. The story of Shravana is cited as an example of a son who was so devoted to his parents that, wishing to fulfill their desire for pilgrimage, he began the journey by carrying them in baskets suspended on a pole over his shoulder.

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3. Devotion to Guru or teacher. An important example is Eklavya in the Mahabharata. This tribal youth wished to learn archery from Dronacharya, who was the teacher of the Pandavas (the five brothers of the royal family). However, since he could not be admitted as a disciple, he drew inspiration from a sculpture of Dronacharya and became a skilled archer. When Dronacharya asked for his thumb as the Master's fee (*Guru dakshina*), he unhesitatingly cut off his thumb and offered it to the Guru.
4. Devotion to God. The story of Prahlada is cited as the example of an ardent devotee of Narayana. When Prahlada called on his God when persecuted by his own father, Vishnu took the avatar of Narasimha (Man-Lion) and appeared to him and put an end to evil.
5. *Pativrata* or devotion to husband. Sita, the wife of Rama the hero of Ramayana, is regarded as one of the greatest examples of a wife devoted to her husband. She was ultimately tested by fire to prove her integrity and came out pure and spotless.

The fundamental precepts across religions usually have strong similarities.

Hinduism, in addition to *svadharma*, also extols the virtue of *ahimsa* or nonviolence in accordance to the virtues extolled in Jainism and Buddhism. The *Yoga Sutra 2:30* of Patanjali prescribes 5 yamas (duties):

1. *Ahimsa* – Non-violence
2. *Satya* – Truth

3. *Asteya* – Non-stealing
4. *Brahmacharya* – Chastity
5. *Aparigraha* – Non-greed

The phrase “*ahimsa paramo dharma*”, “non-violence is the greatest religion/duty” from the Mahabharata was popularized by Mahatma Gandhi.

Jainism: *Ahimsa*

In Jainism, the Five Great Vows (*Mahavrata*) are strict and extreme for ascetics

1. *Ahimsa*. Non-violence (Life)
2. *Satya*. Truth (Speech)
3. *Asteya*. Non-stealing (Property)
4. *Brahmacharya*. Celibacy (Sexuality)
5. *Aparigraha*. Non-attachment. Non-greed (Intentionality/Thought)

The Five Minor Vows (*Anuvrata*), are the same as above but with less stringency for householders or laymen. For instance, *Brahmacharya*, which refers to celibacy among monks, means only chastity for householders. Thus,

“Abstaining from activity with regard to directions, country, and purposeless sin, periodical concentration, fasting at regular intervals, limiting consumable and non-consumable things, and partaking of one's food after feeding an ascetic, are the minor or supplementary vows.” (*Tattvarthasutra* 7:21)

Buddhism: *Ahimsa*

The five precepts of Buddhism are also similar to the above and are referred to as the *Panchashila*:

1. *Pranatipada-Viratih*. Don't Take Away Life (Life)
2. *Adattadana-Viratih*. Don't Take What's Not Given (Property)
3. *Abrahmacharya-Viratih*. Don't Do Sexual Misconduct (Sexuality)
4. *Mrishavada--Viratih*. Don't Do False Speech (Speech)
5. *Sura-Maireya-Madyapana-Viratih*. Don't Drink Fermented Drink that can cause negligence (Thought)

Note that abstinence from fermented drink takes the place of the principle of non-attachment or greed in Buddhism. However, this does not mean that Buddhism has no regulation against greed. In fact, non-attachment and extinguishing of desire is at the core of Buddhist ethics since desire is regarded as the root of all suffering.

Christian Ethics: Love (*Agape*)

The Great Commandment of the Bible contains two main commands:

1. Love the Lord your God with all your mind, heart, soul, and strength.
2. Love your neighbor (fellow humans) as yourself.

The Commandments related to neighborly love are:

1. "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

2. "You shall not murder.
3. "You shall not commit adultery.
4. "You shall not steal.
5. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
6. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

The Golden Rule stated by Jesus was "In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfills the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12 NET)

Islamic Ethics: Belief in and Surrender to Allah

Islamic ethics have a theocratic legal character. Islamic law comes severely against the crime of blasphemy, murder, adultery, theft, and alcohol and substance abuse. The law code is referred to as *Shariah* and the punishments for violations are known as *Hudud*. For instance, the punishment of theft is amputation.

[As for] the thief, the male and the female, amputate their hands in recompense for what they committed as a deterrent [punishment] from Allah. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise. (Quran 5:38)

Personal Vs State Ethics of Religion

The Quran and the Old Testament include physical punishment, including capital punishment, for crimes. The New Testament acknowledges the political authority to

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punish crime and makes a clear distinction between the state and the church.

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. (Romans 13:1-7)

Jesus said, "those who live by the sword shall die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Also, there was a difference between "what belongs to cesar" and "what belongs to God" (Matthew 22:21). While political authority is backed by the power of the sword, Christian service was to be with the motive of love and servant-heartedness (Matthew 20:25-26). The distinction is clear cut. Jesus refused implementing the law of stoning for adultery, not because He ignored it but

because He came not to condemn but to save.
Transformation, not retribution, is the goal of the New Testament.

Ahimsa and Agape

Ahimsa or nonviolence is the essential ethic of Jainism and Buddhism. The positive aspect of *ahimsa* in Buddhism is *karuna* or compassion for all living beings. The positive aspect of *ahimsa* is *jiva-daya* or kindness to all life in Jainism.

Agape or sacrificial love is the essential ethic in Christianity. It is based on the very nature of God who is love.

Ahimsa, the essential ethic in Jainism, is based upon its view of life and rebirth.

According to the Jain scripture, *Tattvartha Sutra 7:13*, "The severance of vitalities out of passion is injury [*himsa*]." Thus, violence or *himsa* contains of both intent and act. The intention to hurt itself is violence. And, "the consequence of violence [*himsa*] etc. are calamity and reproach in this world and in the next." (7:9).

The various forms of life are known by the number of senses they possess. Some life is immobile while some life is mobile. All immobile souls have only one sense. Earth, water, fire, air, and plants are immobile beings (*Tattvartha Sutra 2:13*) that contain only one sense (i.e. of touch). The ascetic must try to avoid intentional hurting of even these.

Mobile souls possess more than one sense. Of these,

1. Worms, etc have two senses (taste, touch)
2. Ants, bugs, etc have three senses (taste, smell, touch)

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3. Bees, scorpions, flies, etc have four senses (taste, smell, touch, sight)
4. Humans, cows, lions, etc have five senses (taste, smell, touch, sight, hearing)

There is a higher amount of karma-influx on hurting beings with more senses. One must attempt from hurting any life altogether.

The sins against *ahimsa* are “binding, beating, mutilating limbs, overloading, and withholding food and drink” (*Tattvartha Sutra* 7:25)

Absolute nonviolence is quite impossible to anyone (for instance, one cannot live without at least consuming plant life). However, Jainism teaches that one must court voluntary death at the end of his life (7:22). This is done by voluntarily fasting unto death by gradually reducing intake of food and fluids. In this manner, one is thought to be able to put an end to all form of violence whatsoever.

Through the socio-political combination of these concepts by human rights leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., *ahimsa* and *agape* have come out of their religious closets onto the streets bringing about massive revolutions in modern times. The principles of *ahimsa-agape* lept religious boundaries to bring together humans for common goals of justice, liberty, fraternity, and equality.

As has been seen, *ahimsa* is the essential ethical principle in Jainism and Buddhism, it's positive counterparts being *jiva-daya* (kindness to life) and *karuna* (compassion) in these religions respectively. *Ahimsa* is essential to both right conduct and right thoughtfulness in both Jainism and Buddhism.

But, while there seem to be external similarities between *ahimsa* and *agape*, there are also some root differences. For instance, in contrast to the *ahimsa* of Jainism, the Christian concept of love is NOT geared towards obtainment of liberation. Thus, there are some marked differences between the concept of *ahimsa* in Jainism and the concept of *agape* in the New Testament.

Ahimsa

Agape

Is defined by the concept of *Jiva* (soul)

Is defined by the revelation of God as love.

Is intentional non-injury of both mobile and immobile *jivas* (including clay, iceberg, stone, and plants).

Is first directed to God and secondly towards fellow humans. But, it also involves kindness towards animal life (which do not possess immortal soul).

Flows **towards** liberation

Flows **from** liberation

Austere asceticism (including diet) is considered as liberating to the soul

Ascetic austerity is considered as non-efficacious for the soul (Colossians 2:21-23)

Fasting unto death is considered as ideal

Laying down one's life for one's friends is considered as the greatest love (John 15:13)

Strict-vegetarianism is required for limiting *himsa*

Religious dietarianism is considered to be a doctrine of

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demons (1Timothy 4:3)

Controlling passion includes refraining from marriage; i.e., perfect chastity is equal to not marrying or having sex

Chastity is defined as love dedicated to only one's own spouse. Marriage and sex within wedlock is considered honorable (Hebrews 13:4)

In all *karmic* eschatologies, *adharma* and *himsa* go necessarily rampant towards the end of the cycle of time.

The escalation of evil in the end times, though prophesied, is not necessitated.

PROBLEM OF EVIL AND MERITORIOUS ACTS

The problem of evil is a root concern of world religions. Approaches to the problem may vary according to the view of reality particular to each religion.

Hindu Non-dualism: Evil is an illusion produced by the subject-object consciousness which is dismissed as soon as the self realizes its non-duality. Goal: Realize non-duality. Practice of yoga has the ultimate goal of *samadhi*, where all duality of subject-object experience vanishes and one gets united with the absolute, realizing absolute indifference to all differentiated reality (heat, cold, hunger, passion, etc).

Hindu Tri-naturalism: The disturbance of balance in *sattva-rajās-tamas* (the three eternal natures or gunas) brings about creation and increasing evil and suffering. The dominance of *tamas* leads to the escalation of evil. One may identify *sattva* as predominant in Brahma, *rajās* as predominant in Vishnu, and *tamas* as predominant in Shiva. However, sects may differ in interpretation. The action goal of Hinduism is *Svadharmā* (one's own duty).

- *Sattva* -knowledge, light
- *Rajās* - passion, heat
- *Tamas* - destruction, darkness

The Hindu gods and goddesses are not the ground for Hindu morality, as they themselves are not immune to evil.

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Examples of Impurities and Defects that may affect the soul:

- *Karmic* impurities - related to sins in this life and the previous lives
- Contact impurities - related to contact with things considered as unclean or defiling (e.g. a corpse)
- Physiological impurities: e.g. menstruating women, barren women
- Astrological impurities and defects: e.g. being born under an ill-boding planetary confluence

Examples of some acts of purification:

- *Puja* (worship of deity) using lamp, bells, and incantations
- Sacred baths (in holy rivers)
- Expiation ceremonies for cleansing (*prayaschita*)
- Vows of abstinence, etc (*vrata*)
- Fastings (*upavasa*)
- Sacrificial ceremonies (*yajnas*)
- Pilgrimage to holy sites (*tirtha yatra*)

Jain Dualism: The *jiva* (soul) is good and free of all pain, but contact with *ajiva* (media of motion and rest, space, time, matter) brings about suffering. This association must be stopped for liberation of the soul. The action goal of Jainism is to free *jiva* from *ajiva* to realize omniscience

Cause of Evil Karma (*papa*):

- Violence
- Stealing
- Lying
- Sexual acts

Problem of Evil and Meritorious Acts

- Internal and External possessiveness (e.g. clothes, lands, servants, beds; ego, anger, lust or desire for sex, greed, fear, sorrow, dejection, pleasure, laughter for joke or out of contempt, disgust)

Ways to Erase Bad Karma and Accrue Good Karma:

- Offerings to ascetics: non-vegetarian food, bed, shelter, clothes
- Virtuous thoughts
- Benevolent speech
- Kind acts
- Paying homage to the Five Worships (Arihants, Liberated ones, Head Teachers, Teachers, Saints)

Buddhist Nihilism: Nothing has intrinsic qualities. Desire, from the falsity of ego attachments, is the cause of suffering. Liberating oneself from attachment leads to cessation of desire and suffering. The action goal of Buddhism is enlightenment or *Buddhahood*. *Nirvana* means extinguishment.

``Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.`` (Samyutta Nikaya 56)

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The 10 Evils According to Buddhism:

3 Bodily Evils:

- Killing
- Stealing
- Immoral Sexual acts

4 Verbal Evils:

- Lying
- Slandering
- Harsh speech
- Frivolous and Vain chatter

3 Mental Evils:

- Covetousness
- Ill-will
- Wrong view

10 Meritorious Acts to Wipe off Bad Karma:

- Charity or Giving (*Dana*)
- Morality or Virtue (*Sila*)
- Mental culture (*Bhavana*)
- Honoring others, Respect
- Service in helping others
- Sharing merits with others (Transfer of merit by wishing)
- Rejoicing in the merits of others
- Listening to the Dhamma
- Preaching and teaching the Dhamma
- Straightening one's views

Christian Trinitarianism: God is Love (Triune- Tri-personal, interrelated, mutual indwelling, eternally one, spiritual), foundation of freedom, morality, and knowledge. Love is unselfish and cheerfully self-giving. The purpose of creation is co-heirship and sharing of authority. Authority requires coming to sonship (glorification). Evil is the result of thwarting this purpose through an act of disobedience or rejection of authority (Adam's disobedience). God manifested His love by self-giving. Christ redeemed the creation through His death and resurrection. Those who accept His authority (Lordship) by faith will be part of the first resurrection which is the same as glorification and manifestation of the sons of God. The goal of Christianity is to participate in the resurrection and attain sonship, i.e. heirship and inheritance with Jesus Christ at His Second Coming.

Christianity teaches that humans cannot accrue merits towards liberation, as all humans have sinned and the penalty of sins cannot be cancelled just because of an equal amount of or more good works. However, it teaches that the penalty for all human sins has been paid by Jesus Christ through His eternal sacrifice and that those who take refuge by faith in Him will inherit eternal life that was obtained through the death and resurrection of Christ. The others who willfully choose not to accept the sovereignty of Christ will not have divine governance over their lives; in biblical terms, they will stay outside the kingdom (government) of God. But, such a godless world is chaotic, dark, and miserable because it is totally devoid of love.

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The present solution to evil comes through Christian discipleship and the pursuit of the divine command to love one's neighbor as oneself. But, evil will intensify towards the end of the age, and will only be terminated by the Second Coming of Christ.

RELIGIOUS RITES IN HINDUISM AND SIKHISM

A rite is a prescribed form of ceremony. Rites, to a great extent, embody the religious meaning of *relegare* (to repeat), since they are prescribed forms in which rituals of ceremonies related to birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, death, commemoration, festival, etc. are performed.

The different types of rites include:

1. Rites of Passage: e.g. birth, puberty, marriage, death.
2. Rites of Protection: e.g. protection against pestilence, evil spirits, etc.
3. Rites of Purification: e.g. cleansing from impure contact, washing off bad karma, etc.

In this chapter, we will mainly focus on the rites of passage, primarily the rites of initiation and marriage.

There are 16 important rites of passage (*sanskars*) in Hinduism.¹⁸ These relate to:

1. Conception. In anticipation of conceiving a child. Towards pregnancy.
2. For a male or vigorous child, for protection of fetus. In the 2nd or 3rd month of pregnancy.
3. For good virtues to develop in the child. In the 6th or 8th month of pregnancy.
4. Childbirth. At the time of delivery
5. Ceremony of Naming. On the 12th day after birth.

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6. Taking baby out for the first time. Usually in the 4th month.
7. Baby's first solid food. Usually, at the time of teething.
8. Baby's first haircut or tonsure. Usually, on a day declared auspicious by the priest.
9. Baby's earlobe piercing. In the 3rd or 5th year.
10. Initiation to education
11. Initiation to discipleship (schooling). Chiefly for the higher caste who are regarded as twice born through this ceremony; the first birth into the world through the mother, and the second birth into knowledge through the Guru or Master/Teacher. The Brahmin child gets a sacred thread at this ceremony.
12. Commencement of Vedic learning. This ceremony is usually on the same day as the previous or on the next day.
13. First shaving of hair
14. Graduation. Marks the end of the student life, especially the completion of vedic learning.
15. Wedding
16. Death

Sikhism:

The main rites in Sikhism are related to

1. Birth. There are rites of purification and protection surrounding the birth of a child in a family.
2. Naming. The child is taken to the gurdwara (Sikh temple) for naming.
3. Amrit. This is the initiation ceremony during which a sikh boy or girl becomes a khalsa (pure), disciple. Sikh boys take the name *Singh* (Lion)

and girls take the name *Kaur* (crown prince) and observe the five K's (*kesh, kanga, kaccha, kara, kripan* - uncut hair, comb, salwar underpants, bracelet, dagger).

4. Marriage
5. Death

Rites of Initiation

In Hinduism, this rite known as *Upanayana* belongs to the 3 upper castes (brahmin, kshatriya, and vaishya) who are regarded as becoming twice born at this ceremony; the first birth referring to the physical and the second to the spiritual through the agency of the teacher). According to *Manusmriti* 2:36,37:

In the eighth year after conception, one should perform the initiation (*upanayana*) of a Brahmana, in the eleventh after conception (that) of a Kshatriya, but in the twelfth that of a Vaisya.

(The initiation) of a Brahmana who desires proficiency in sacred learning should take place in the fifth (year after conception), (that) of a Kshatriya who wishes to become powerful in the sixth, (and that) of a Vaisya who longs for (success in his) business in the eighth.

During this ceremony, a sacred thread (*janeo* or *yajnopavita*) is given to the initiate. *Manu* prescribes:

The sacrificial string of a Brahmana shall be made of cotton, (shall be) twisted to the right, (and consist) of three threads, that of a Kshatriya of hempen threads, (and) that of a Vaisya of woollen threads. (2:44)

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The rite of initiation in Sikhism is known as *Amrit* (literally, immortal. Or immortal drink, ambrosia). *Amrit* is the holy water that is used to initiate a Sikh (disciple) into the *Khalsa* (Order of the Pure Warriors, i.e. Sikh Brotherhood). The *Amrit* is prepared with water and sugar, stirred by five Sikhs with recitation of five scriptures. The ceremony denotes equality of all humans and gender. Sikhism opposes casteism (though, in practice, casteism is observed unorthodoxically). The female Sikh gets the *khalsa* name of *kaur* (crown prince) signifying her equal position with males to be a Sikh *Khalsa*. The males take the name *Singh* (lion).

The *Amrit* ceremony was initiated by Guru Gobind Singh (the 10th Guru of Sikhism) in 1699 to prepare the Sikhs for defensive war against Muslim aggression and persecution. The *Amrit* ceremony significantly marks Sikhism as a warrior's religion. The five K's (*kesh*, *kanga*, *kaccha*, *kara*, *kripan* - uncut hair, comb, salwar underpants, bracelet, dagger) donned during this ceremony symbolize the *Khalsa's* readiness to defend his religion and people at all times.

At this ceremony, the Sikh is considered born again unto immortal life.

Rites of Marriage

The Hindu law book, *Manusmriti*, prescribes rules of marriage in its third chapter. It prescribes that the higher castes are only to marry damsels from their equal caste. Also, it stipulates rules prohibiting marriage with damsels belonging to unsuitable families. For instance, the higher caste male is prohibited from marrying a girl from a family that "neglects the sacred rites, one in which no male children

(are born), one in which the Veda is not studied, one (the members of) which have thick hair on the body, ... Let him not marry a maiden (with) reddish (hair), nor one who has a redundant member,.... But a prudent man should not marry (a maiden) who has no brother, nor one whose father is not known..." It forbids the higher castes from ever marrying a Shudra. Hindus pay keen attention to caste when considering possible matches for marriage in any traditionally arranged marriage. Hindu matrimonial sites specify caste and clan criteria of search for those seeking a potential match. Also, astrology plays an important role in deciding a life partner for traditional Hindus.

After, choosing a desirable partner, the family usually consults a priest to ascertain the auspicious time of the wedding. Thereafter, there are talks among the two families (bride's and groom's) to agree on the rites, time, place, material contributions, etc.

Betrothal Ceremony. It is the engagement ceremony preceding marriage which must take place, at least, a day before the wedding. The father of the bride promises to give his daughter to the groom and they exchange gifts.

Turmeric. This prepares the bride and the groom at their respective places through the smearing of turmeric which is considered a cleansing and purifying agent.

Giving of the Bride. This is done at the beginning of the wedding ceremony when the bride's father takes her hand and places it into the hand of the groom, giving away his daughter to the groom to be taken care of henceforth.

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Holding the Hand. The groom holds the hand of the bride and the vedic chanting introduces the groom into the householder's life through his union to his wife.

Seven Rounds. The groom and bride walk seven times around the altar of fire (with the fire-god's presence as witness to their marital vows).

Sindoor, Auspicious Thread and Exchange of Garlands. The groom ties a three knot thread (*mangalsutra*) or necklace around the neck of the bride which completes the marriage act. He also applies a sacred red powder (*sindoor*) in the parting line of the bride's hair. The sacred necklace and the red powder signifies a Hindu woman as being married. The couple also exchange flower garlands.

Sikhism regards marriage as the union of a man and his wife in a way that thenceforth, they are one soul in two bodies. A Sikh marriage is known as *Anand Karaj* or blissful union. Some important rites related to the wedding ceremony are:

Pre-wedding agreement. The bride's family may go to the groom's house to obtain consent for marriage and offer a small sum of money as good fortune.

Chunni (scarf) ceremony. The groom's family goes to the bride's home to adorn her with a chunni and gift her jewelry as good fortune.

Betrothal. The bride's family go to the groom's house at a date agreed as suitable for this ceremony. The groom is given some cash in his scarf. The two families exchange gifts and congratulate each other. Thereafter, the date of the marriage, as suitable to both the families, is fixed. Sikhism is against

astrology and against consulting astrology for the purposes of fixing dates of any occasion.

Turmeric Cleansing. This prepares both the groom and bride for the marriage.

Ladies Singing. The ladies sing songs at both the groom's and bride's house to celebrate the joy of forthcoming marriage. There are several singing and dancing rituals surrounding the wedding.

Introductions. The groom's party arrives and is welcomed with songs and prayer recitals by the Granthi (reader of scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib). It is a time of introductions between the families. Thereafter, the marriage takes in the presence of the scripture.

The Marriage. Any initiate Sikh (*amritdhari*) can perform the marriage ceremony which takes place in the midst of the sacred gathering. The solemnizer reminds the groom and bride of the marital meaning and duties. The bride sits to the left of the groom. The bride's father takes the edge of the groom's sash (on his shoulder) and places it in the hand of the bride. The solemnizer reads the four marriage hymns (stanzas) from the scripture. After the first stanza, the couple rise and walk around the Guru Granth Sahib (Scripture). They remain standing to recommence the walk around the scripture after each recitation. After this, there is prayer and reading of scripture. Then, sweet pudding is distributed to those present.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

There are two main political approaches to religion:
Theocratic. Secular

A theocratic state is one that expressly affiliates itself to and regards a particular religion as the official religion of the state. Some modern examples of theocracies are: Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Pakistan, Vatican City, Yemen.

A secular state is one that doesn't regard any particular religion as a state religion. In the political sense, secularism is regarded as "the policy of keeping state and religion separate and free from interference with each other."¹⁹ Types of political secularism range from states that lean towards a particular religion to those that are biased against a particular religion. Laxminidhi Sharma distinguishes four forms of secularism:²⁰

1. **Atheistic Secularism.** Also known as fundamentalist secularism, this form of secularism is sceptical of the good of any religion and considers religion to be an impediment on humanity's road of success. Atheistic secularism is hostile towards religion and openly opposes it. The state, in such instances, supervises and monitors all kinds of religious thought and activity in accordance to its pursuit of state atheism.
2. **Humanist Secularism.** This form of secularism is indifferent towards religion. States adhering to the principles of materialism, naturalism, humanism, Marxism, scientism, and rationalism follow this form

of secularism.

3. **Pseudo-Secularism.** This form of secularism is formal, hideous, and hypocritical in character. While professing to be secular, a pseudo-secular state favours certain religions above others.
4. **Liberal Secularism.** This form of secularism is neither opposed to nor biased against any religion. Liberal secularism recognizes the worth and significance of religious tolerance and of respect for all religions. In a context of religious plurality, this form of a secular nation follows a liberal and sympathetic approach towards religion.

International consideration of human rights standards makes room for any state to bridge relationship with a majority religion, even declare it as an official state religion, provided such a relationship does not prejudice the state against non-adherents (USC2005 18). The UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states:

The fact that a religion is recognized as a state religion or that it is established as official or traditional or that its followers comprise the majority of the population, shall not result in any impairment of the enjoyment of any of the rights under the Covenant, including articles 18 [freedom of thought, conscience, and religion] and 27 [rights of members of religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities], nor in any discrimination against adherents to other religions or non-believers. In particular, certain measures discriminating against the latter, such as measures restricting eligibility for government service to members of the predominant religion or

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giving economic privileges to them or imposing special restrictions on the practice of other faiths, are not in accordance with the prohibition of discrimination based on religion or belief and the guarantee of equal protection under article 26 [equal protection of the law without any discrimination].²¹

However, freedom of religion is not a total reality in many countries. The USC 2018 report notes the following countries of particular concern in the matter of toleration or promotion of violations of the right to religious freedom: Burma, Central African Republic, China, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Laos, Malaysia, Turkey.²²

Religious Propriety

The USC 2017 report indicated 71 countries of the world where blasphemy laws were found, of which the blasphemy laws for Malta and Denmark were repealed later.²³ The 71 countries are: Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbuda, Brazil, Brunei, Canada, Comoros, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Papua New, Guinea, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Russia, Rwanda, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Somalia, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, St Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines, Sudan, Suriname, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates,

Vanuatu, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

In many cases, blasphemy laws may be synonymous with laws that protect the right to freedom of conscience against hurting of religious sentiments through insult, abuse, or hate speech. For instance, Sections 153A and 295 and 295A of the Indian Penal Code states:

153A (1) Whoever— (a) By words, either spoken or written, or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise, promotes or attempts to promote, on grounds of religion, race, place or birth, residence, language, caste or community or any other ground whatsoever, disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities, or (b) Commits any act which is prejudicial to the maintenance of harmony between different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities, and which disturbs or is likely to disturb the public tranquility,.... Shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

295 Injuring or defiling place of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class.— Whoever destroys, damages or defiles any place of worship, or any object held sacred by any class of persons with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction, damage or defilement as an insult to their religion, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both

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295A Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of [citizens of India], [by words, either spoken or written, or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise], insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to [three years], or with fine, or with both.²⁴

In some cases, however, the penalty imposed is capital punishment. 295C of Pakistan Penal Code states:

295-C. Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet: Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.²⁵

According to the USC report, there are 10 declared Islamic states and 12 states, in addition, that also declare Islam as the official state religion but desist from identifying themselves as Islamic states. The Islamic States are Afghanistan, Bahrain, Brunei, Iran, Maldives, Mauritania, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. States that have declared Islam as the state religion are Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iraq (TAL), Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia, and U.A.E.²⁶

In majority of the countries where Islam is the state religion, the *Shariah* is a chief source of legislation and blasphemy laws are stringent, often carrying the penalty of capital punishment. Muslim scholars, however, differ in opinion on

whether the *Shariah* really recommends capital punishment for blasphemy.²⁷ They argue that neither the Quran nor the Hadith directly imposes death penalty for blasphemous acts.

In other cases, political regulation has the purpose of ensuring peace and communal harmony. It attempts to protect the freedom of speech from being misused as freedom of hate speech or freedom to hurt religious sentiments.

Religious Property

In most countries, religious property is protected by specific laws against attack, sacrilege, and misuse. In most states of Europe, attack on religious places is an offence under the general law against criminal damage to property; however, in some states such as Portugal, Cyprus, and Greece, attack on religious property is regarded as a distinct crime.²⁸

Though India is a secular republic, many of the historic Hindu temples and sites are controlled by the government. The same is also the state of temples in urban areas of Hong Kong.²⁹

In most secular states, religious organizations have freedom to obtain and maintain religious property and may even enjoy tax exemption on the same. Some states even contribute financially towards the construction of places of worship. However, there are also states that impose restrictions on religious places; attempts to confiscate and nationalize religious property often lead to conflict between religion and the state.³⁰

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Sometimes states may play a mediating role to manage conflicting claims of various religious groups over some property. For instance, with regard to AR religious sites, Roberta Aluffi and Domenico Francavilla note:

States may also play an important role in the management of conflicts arising from competing claims on sacred places. This kind of conflict is quite frequent. In Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is under the shared control of several Christian Churches, a highly complicated arrangement. In the same city, the Islamic Noble Sanctuary corresponds to the Temple Mount, where both the first and the second Temples stood. The Noble Sanctuary is under Israeli control and administered by an Islamic *waqf* managed by Jordan; access to the site by Jews is a hotly debated issue among Jewish scholars and others. Due to the different kinds of interests involved, special international regimes are sometimes proposed for the administration of highly religiously significant places such as Jerusalem, or, more recently, Mecca and Medina, whose administration by the *sunni* Saudi Kingdom is not completely satisfactory to some other Islamic States.³¹

In India, the historic Babri Masjid was demolished by Hindu nationalists in 1992. The nationalists contended that the Muslim mosque was built on the site of a historic temple of Rama that was demolished by the Muslim general Mir Baqi in 1528. This act sparked communal riots between the two communities throughout the country which resulted in some 2000 deaths. The Ayodhya dispute is a hotly debated political issue in India.

Most temples in India are run on donations. Some of these are very wealthy. The Padmanabhaswamy Temple in the Tamilnadu state is considered as the wealthiest place of worship in the world. For centuries, its wealth chambers remained undisclosed under the protection of the temple administration. However, by an order of the Supreme Court, five vaults of the eight were opened to discover artifacts, jewels, and precious stones that were worth billions of dollars. According to one report:

The Supreme Court of India and its seven-member committee have already opened six of the secret vaults and have discovered at a depth of 20 feet underground approximately \$22 billion in treasure including, golden idols, golden elephants and idols wearing 18 foot diamond necklaces, as well as countless bags of gold coins from around the world and ceremonial costumes included 66 pound solid gold coconut shells studded with rubies and emeralds.

In an inventory list from August 2014, Vault A contained 2,000 pounds of gold coins, dating to around 200 B.C. Also found, was a pure Golden Throne adorned with hundreds of diamonds and fully precious stones, meant as a seat for the 18-foot-long Deity. In addition solid gold crowns have been found, all studded with diamonds and other precious stones. The valuables are believed to have been accumulated in the temple over several thousands of years, having been donated to the Deity by various Dynasties and Kings.³²

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Another issue relates to the government's dealing with property encroachment by emerging temples. In 2008, during the tenure of Narendra Modi as Chief Minister of Gujarat, 80 temples were demolished as counter-move against illegal encroachment of public property by those temples. This came as a surprise for many since Modi's political affiliation is to the Hindutva ideology that cherishes Hindu religious and cultural ideals.

Religious Patriotism and Nationalism

A notable example of this confluence is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is the present ruling party in India. The BJP is the political face of the Sangh Parivar which is a family of Hindutva (Hindu essence) movements such as the RSS, VHP, and the Shiv Sena. To them, nationalism takes on a religious-cultural identity, so much that being Hindu and being a nationalist are considered to go together.

According to M.S. Golwalkar, who became *Sarsangchalak* of the RSS in 1940, from his book *We Or Our Nationhood Defined* (1938):

“There are only two courses open to the foreign elements, either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or to live at its mercy so long as the national race may allow them to do so and to quit the country at the sweet will of the national race. That is the only sound view on the minorities problem. That is the only logical and correct solution. That alone keeps the national life healthy and undisturbed. That alone keeps

the nation safe from the danger of a cancer developing into its body politic of the creation of a state within a state.

'From this standpoint, sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment not even citizen's rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation: let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races who have chosen to live in our country.'

Similarly, a key Hindutva ideologist, Vir Savarkar wrote In his book, *Hindutva: Who Is A Hindu (1929)*:

'Hindus are not merely the citizens of the Indian state because they are united not only by the bonds of love they bear to a common motherland but also by the bonds of a common blood...All Hindus claim to have in their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic forefathers.

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Sarvarkar went on to combine this concept of a common motherland with the concept of a common holy land, concluding finally that since only Hindus could claim India as their holy land, therefore, only Hindus were the true inheritors of India.

Similar examples of religious nationalism may be observed in various parts of the world. For instance, Christian nationalism (as either national rootedness in Catholicism or Protestantism or some form of conservatism) may be seen in some Western countries; Islamic nationalism is observed in several countries with a majority of Muslim population; Buddhist nationalism has emerged strongly in Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand.

The international community (of human rights advocates, mostly connecting through social media) puts enormous pressure on governments to protect human rights against violent forms of nationalism.

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND PEACE

In its original usage, the term “religious fundamentalism” referred to the religious approach of those Protestants who regarded some key Christian doctrines such as the Virgin Birth, sinfulness of humanity, the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, His atoning death, and His Second Coming as fundamentals of faith that cannot be compromised. However, in modern times, the term has come to be increasingly associated with religious intolerance, prejudice, discrimination against people of different faith, and a closed authoritarian exclusivism that is antagonistic against opposing views. Terms such as orthodoxy, conservatism, right-wing, extremism, and fanaticism are synonymous to it.

Fundamentalism seems to exhibit itself differently in different religions. For instance in Hinduism, it appears as traditionalism or cultural nationalism. In Christianity, it appears as evangelicalism and an emphasis on the final authority of Bible and the importance of missionary work. In Islam it appears more as a form of legalism or authoritarianism (e.g. shia-sunni conflict) and the *jihad* ideal. In Buddhism, it is appearing more as a form of nationalism. The more problematic form of fundamentalism is that which is intolerant towards other religions.

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It must be noted that fundamentalisms obtain identity from their clashes with opposing fundamentalisms. In other words, it is impossible to have a case of clashes where fundamentalisms don't exist. On such terms, even liberalism may be considered as a form of fundamentalism.

In all forms of fundamentalism, the issue of religious conversion is vehemently opposed and apostasy is highly discouraged. In some Islamic societies, apostasy invites a death penalty. While Christianity does define apostasy as renunciation of faith, it doesn't have any socio-political penalty system whatsoever. The Christian worldview requires freedom of choice in religious matters to be of utmost importance. In Hindu societies, especially in rural communities, conversion can result in social ostracization. Oftentimes, Hindu fundamentalist vigilante groups attack churches and missionaries suspected of being involved in religious conversions. One tragic case was the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons by burning in 1999.

One of the most crucial issues in Hindu fundamentalism is the opposition to cow slaughter. The cow, revered as divine and given the status of a mother, is considered sacred to Hindus who find cow-slaughter and beef eating a highly criminal violation. Most orthodox Hindus regard the cow as an extremely gentle and emotional being, and consider benevolence and reverence towards it to be virtuous. A rhetoric that uses non-Hindu status of a beef-eater or that tries to show the absurdity of the Hindu reverence for cow doesn't help at all in the peacemaking process. On the other hand, it only aggravates the situation.

Hindu fundamentalist groups such as Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Ram Sena, Bajrang Dal, and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

conduct vigilante activities against paintings, movies, literature, celebrations (e.g. Valentine's Day) that appear to contradict Hindu ideals, beliefs, and sentiments.

Among Muslims, the status of women is a fundamental issue. The Taliban, active in Afghanistan and Pakistan, violently opposes women's education and imposes strict resolutions on them that include a ban on women's work outside the home, ban on women being treated by male doctors, ban on women studying at educational institutions, requirement of burqa (long veil), ban on cosmetics, and several such restrictions.³³

Islamic fundamentalist groups include Army of Islam, Boko Haram, Taliban, Al Qaeda, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Lashkar-e-Taiba, ISIS, and the Indian Mujahideen.

Malala Yousafzai (born in 1997) is a Pakistani activist for women's education and the youngest recipient of the Nobel peace prize. She was shot by a Taliban gunman in 2012. After recovery, she continued her activism for the education rights of Muslim girls and received international recognition and support.

Among Buddhists, a surge of violent events stirred by Buddhist fundamentalism has appeared in the past few decades. These include violence incited by the *MaBaTha* and the 969 Movement against "Rohingyas in Burma, Thai monks against Muslims in Southern Thailand and the *Bodu Bala Sena* against Muslims in Sri Lanka". Much of this violence is communal in nature (not necessarily doctrinal) and takes on nationalistic tones.

Among Christians, the Reconstructionists, led by R. J. Rushdoony, were a conservative Reformed group in the

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United States a few decades ago who advocated the application of the Old Testament civil law code in modern times. Their influence has now declined. However, there are dominionists who regard Christianity as the only socio-political answer to world crises. In the United States, Christian evangelicals who are opposed to abortion, homosexuality, and promiscuity are labeled as fundamentalists and right-wing by the liberals.

Types of Religious Fundamentalisms

It may be observed that there are at least three kinds of religious fundamentalisms:

1. Magisterial Fundamentalism. This refers to the kind of fundamentalism that is centered on an ideology in the form of doctrine or dictum. This is usually the pure form of fundamentalism that focuses on the fundamentals and calls forth for a return to the originals. The key word for this form would be Law. Magisterial fundamentalism expresses itself in verbal and intellectual engagement with various concepts. Examples are Evangelical Christianity, the Arya Samaj, and the Ahmadiyyas.

2. Militant Fundamentalism. The concern of this form of fundamentalism is identity, territory, and power. This form of fundamentalism often uses physically violent methods to defend or occupy territories or avenge some communal injury. The key word for this form of fundamentalism would be War. Religious fundamentalism involves an identity problem, the existential question of who we are and what we are in relation to the physical and social world. This identity problem is basically philosophical and revolves around few

commonalities known as basics or essences of a particular religious group. These commonalities produce tribal feelings that act as social cohesion and set a particular tribe in distinction from, or even in opposition against, others. In modern times, totemism takes clandestine forms through implementation of psychological mechanisms like deindividuation and dehumanization through propaganda and social suggestion. Examples are the Al-Qaeda and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh.

3. Mercantile Fundamentalism. The keyword for this form of fundamentalism is Profit. This form is utilitarian in nature and promotes fundamentalism not as a cause in itself but as a means to some other goal or advantage. These are not truly fundamentalist in nature but only promote communal tensions to gain advantage of the situation. The persecution of Paul by Demetrius and the other tradesmen of Ephesus, who were losing business because of Paul's preaching, may be quoted as an example of this (Acts 19).

Ultimately, fundamentalism and political activism are not always separable.

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND PEACEBUILDING

A dialogue is a two-way communication. It involves the engagement of at least two persons in a meaningful conversation or discussion. An interreligious dialogue aims at the resolution of an important problem between two religious entities (persons or groups) in order to enhance peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit. A more ideal form of dialogue would be one which "is not about comparing beliefs or religious practices, but involves living radically according to one's own religion and being attentive to and interested in the other's."³⁴

Busquet observes the above as the dialogue that was established between the members of the Buddhist Risshō Kōsei-kai association and the Catholic Focolare Movement in Japan, about a decade ago. The dialogue helped the participants see Buddhist-Catholic shared values like compassion and love in a more mutual light and enabled them to find areas of collaboration for the common good. Busquet concludes:

Interreligious dialogue is ultimately not about exchanging information and knowledge, but about communion of hearts in the deepest layer of human existence. It is a shared experience that transforms us into brothers and sisters living together for the common good—for the "common well-being" of all humankind and the natural world.³⁵

The biggest hindrance to interreligious dialogue comes from a form of fundamentalism that is unwilling to listen to the voice of the other; and, even if there is some listening done, it is done with a negatively biased ear of rejection. Thus, the information received is one that is processed through a heart that is unwilling of any mutual learning and communion; the result, there is no shared experience.

There are two levels at which interreligious dialogues take place: interpersonal and interdoctrinal.

1. **Interpersonal religious dialogue** involves two or more persons between whom the dialogue takes place. These may be formal or informal. **Informal dialogues** happen every now and then between members of two different faiths living in the same context. Students at school, workers at workplace, passengers in train, may at times share their religious beliefs and experiences with each other in a more meaningful and pluralistically appreciative manner. **Formal dialogues** may be arranged in some meetup format like a roundtable conference or a symposium. Participants in these are usually religious leaders and professionals.
2. **Interdoctrinal religious dialogue** involves a person's dialogue with the religious writings and teachings of another religion. Such dialogues played a significant role in the modern reform movements of Hinduism. Reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), Keshub Chandra Sen (1838-1884), Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) entered into meaningful dialogues with Christian teachings on God, Christ, and peaceful living and made significant contributions

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towards the Indian society.³⁶ While Anantanand Rambachand includes Swami Dayananda Saraswati's (1824-1883) interactions with Christianity, Dayanand's approach was more fundamentalist and revivalist (of Hinduism) and did not engage in significantly productive contribution to mutuality between Hinduism and Christianity. Among Christians, the writings of people like Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907), Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929), and Narayan Vaman Tilak (1861-1919) exemplify positive contributions to the Hindu-Christian dialogue.

Dialogue has various objectives, some of which are:

1. In order to understand the other and oneself in light of the other. This helps in the reformulation of religious thought in a relevant context. The *saccidananda* view of the Trinity in Upadhyay and the Christ-bhakti of Tilak exemplify such contextual reformulations of Christian thought through dialogue with Hindu theologies.
2. In order to address contemporary inter-communal issues. Religious conversion is one such issue. Leaders of different religions might meet at a formal meeting to discuss such an issue. An example of this is a series of meetings between the RSS and Christian leaders in Bangalore involving notable persons such as K.S. Sudarshan of the RSS, the then Bangalore Police Commissioner H.T. Sangliana (in 2002), and Ken Gnanakan of ACTS Academy.³⁷ While the goal is to have a peaceful solution to the problem so that communities could peacefully co-exist, the presence of fundamentalist attitudes may function as a sharp

hindrance to the entire process. However, there are times when an understanding between the leaders is reached and bridges are built or repaired. Obviously, until there is an openness to achieve objective 1, objective 2 remains unattainable.

3. In order to address common problems for which unity is sought in order to collaboratively solve them. A good example of this is the Kenya's Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics Trust (CICC) with representatives of Islamic, Hindu, Christian, African and traditional faiths. They found a common cause of uniting for the protection of child rights and attained a remarkable level of success in the same.³⁸

Four Approaches

There are at least four approaches to inter-religious relationship:

1. **Fundamentalist.** The fundamentalist has an exclusive and, usually, superiority complex stance. This makes any dialogue not just difficult, but impossible.
2. **Syncretist.** This approach attempts to combine the various faiths and blend them into one. A successful attempt towards this was made in the traditions of the 14th century Kabir panth and Sikh religion that tried to resolve the Hindu-Muslim conflict by combining them into a syncretistic spirituality. Emperor Akbar's (1542-1605) attempt to do the same through his newly found *Din-e-ilahi*, however, did not achieve much success. The modern Bahai

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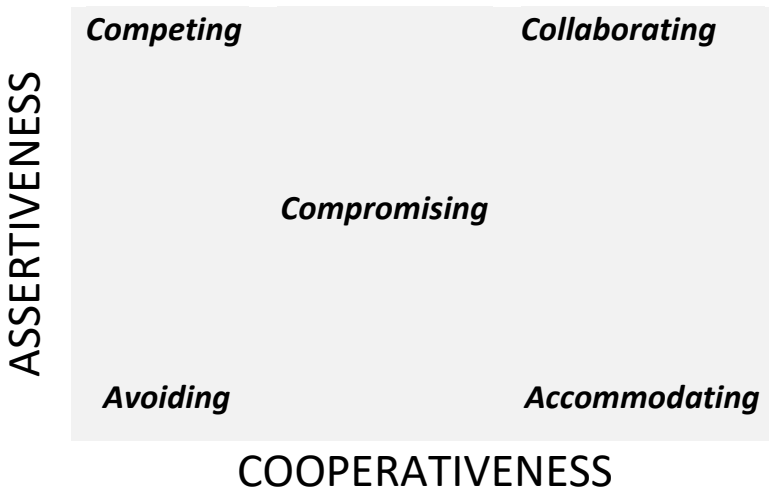
religion is an example of the syncretist approach to interreligious interaction.

3. **Inclusivist.** An inclusivist approach looks at other religions as finding fulfillment in one's own faith. An example of this is Karl Rahner's (1904-1984) concept of the "Anonymous Christian" according to which it is possible for "Christians" to anonymously exist outside of the church. They are anonymous because they have not explicitly confessed the name of Christ; also, it is possible that they do not even know the Christ of the Christian Gospel.³⁹ A similar inclusivism is avouched by Sri Prabhupada (1896-1977), founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), who regarded Jesus as the Hindu deity Krishna.⁴⁰

4. **Pluralist.** There are two forms of pluralism that one observes in relation to interreligious dialogue:
 - (a) *Theological Pluralism.* This view regards all religions as equally valid and fundamentally truthful. Theological pluralism itself suffers from the problem of exclusivism by taking up a position of itself making a claim to truth, thus invalidating its own claim of many truths. A study of religions shows that there are fundamental differences between them.
 - (b) *Humanistic Pluralism.* This approach focuses on mutual respect, peaceful co-existence, dialogue towards peace, and humanitarianism. This approach is able to find common goals for active collaboration while not compromising one's core beliefs. It fulfills the ideal of "living radically according to one's own religion and being attentive to and interested in the other's".

The Thomas-Kilmann Model for Conflict Resolution

The Thomas-Kilmann model by Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann (1974) illustrates the options we have when handling conflict. The vertical axis represents Assertiveness options while the horizontal axis represents Co-operativeness (empathy) options.⁴¹ We may apply this instrument to resolve interreligious conflicts.



1. **Avoiding.** The lowest point in assertiveness and cooperativeness, avoiding the conflict is willing to neither assert nor cooperate. This is the position of the one who wishes not to enter into any dialogue whatsoever.

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2. **Competing.** This is the position of the fundamentalist who wishes to dominate and steer the entire discussion to meet his own goals.
3. **Compromising.** This is the middle path between fundamentalism and accomodation. This is the stance taken by some forms of inclusivism and syncretism.
4. **Accommodating.** This the position of surrender through renunciation of one's faith and capitulation to the other's wishes. It is a violation of the right to conscience and faith.
5. **Collaborating.** This not only maintains its core-center but is also willing to cooperate with the other to realize objectives that are mutually valued.

In an increasingly globalizing world, it may seem that fundamentalisms must eventually come to an end. However, facts show the contrary. Communal conflicts make headlines every now and then. Fundamentalisms garner strength through these conflicts; offensive attitudes only add fuel to the fire, ameliorating nothing. Assertiveness without cooperativeness disturbs the peacebuilding process. In the process of resolving conflicts one must consider:

1. Not to assert something that is not definitive of one's core beliefs. Apostle Paul's caveat is very valuable here:

If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as

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evil....Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (Romans 14:15,16,19)

2. To focus on what is beneficial and constructive and not on what is one's rights. Again, Paul's instruction is quite helpful here:

"I have the right to do anything," you say--but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"--but not everything is constructive. (1 Corinthians 10:23)

3. To be respectful of the religiosity of others though one may disagree with the elements of the religion. When Paul came to Athens, he was distressed by the idolatry practiced there; however, his speech at Mars' Hill did not outrightly condemn this element; rather, he looked at the positive side of their religiosity and used it as a platform for interaction as well as stating his own rationale for his beliefs (See Acts 17:16-34).

CONCLUSION

So far, we have only caught a small glimpse of the main concepts of KR and AR. As the reader may understand, it is absolutely impossible to squeeze in everything regarded as significant by believers and adherents in a tiny little book like this. The function of this book, therefore, may only serve as a little map containing only some main facts and guides to obtain a fair idea of these religions. There have also been hints at various books, thinkers, and movements that the reader may, if interested, look more into in other resources. But, it is hoped that this book will be helpful in understanding the nature of the plurality of religious beliefs and practices and respect the religious nature of humanity without compromising the commitment to live a rational life that promotes mutual respect, freedom of conscience, openness to reason, and service to alleviate the plight of humanity.

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APPENDIX

1. FOUR RELIGIONS THAT ORIGINATED IN INDIA

HINDUISM

Symbol:



Countries: India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bali, Fiji, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, West Indies

History:

- Name derived from River Sindhu
- Originally, *Arya Dharma*
- Vedic Age (2000-600 BC)
- Protests Age (600-200 BC)
- Epics & Puranas (200 BC-AD 1000)
- Bhakti Age (AD 1000-1750)
- Modern Age (AD 1750-)

6 Schools of Philosophy: *Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisesika, Uttara Mimmsa, Purva Mimamsa*

Sects: *Saivism, Saktism, Vaishnavism*

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

Modern Movements: *Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, Brahma Samaj, Guru Cults*

Scriptures:

- *Sruti (Vedas); Smriti (Puranas, etc)*
- *Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur, Atharva): Consists of Mantras, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads*
- *Itihasas: Ramayana & Mahabharata*
- *Puranas*
- *Bhagavad Gita*
- *Agamas: Manuals of Worship*

Beliefs:

- *4 GOALS OF LIFE: Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha*
- *4 STAGES OF LIFE: Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha, Sanyasa*
- *3 WAYS OF SALVATION: Jnana, Karma, Bhakti*
- *Karma, Punarjanma, Bhakti*

Festivals: *Diwali, Durga Puja, Dasara, Ganapati Puja, Navratri, etc*

Practices:

- *Temples-Mandir, Puja, Yagna, Yoga*
- *Idol Worship*
- *Ashrama Dharma (4 Stages of Life)*
- *Varna Dharma (Caste Duty)*

Appendix

BUDDHISM

Symbol:



Countries: State religion of Burma, Thailand, Tibet, Cambodia and Laos.

Great following in Sri Lanka, China, Japan, South Korea.

History:

- 6th c. BC: Birth of Siddhartha, Prince of Kapilavasthu
- The 4 Sights: Old man, Sick man, Dead corpse, Hermit
- At 29, leaves wife Yasodhara and son Rahul to become a hermit
- At 35, attains Enlightenment
- At 80, dies at Kusinara on a full-moon day

Sects:

- *Theravada Buddhism:* Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand
- *Mahayana Buddhism:* Northern countries
- *Lamaism and Tantrik Buddhism:* Tibet
- *Zen Buddhism:* Japan

Scriptures: *Theravada Scriptures in Pali Language*

Tripitaka (Three Baskets)

- *Vinaya-Pitaka (Discipline)*
- *Sutta-Pitaka (Discourse)*
- *Abhidhamma-Pitaka (Metaphysical Basket)*

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

Mahayana Scriptures in Sanskrit

- *Vinaya*
- *Sutras*
- *Shastras*

Beliefs:

- **Four Noble Truths:** (a) Dukkha (suffering) is universal (b) Tanha (Desire) is the cause of suffering (c) Nirvana is the state of emancipation (d) 8-Fold Path of Emancipation: Right views, aspirations, conduct, livelihood, efforts, awareness, meditation
- **Anatta:** No-soul. The “I” (ego) is a delusion formed by the 5 skandhas of nama-rupa (name-form): (a) material attributes (rupa) (b) feeling (Vedha) (c) Perception (Samjana) (d) mental dispositions and will (samskaras) (e) Reason (Vijnana)
- **Karma and Punarjanma:** Karma is the law of cause and effect. Cycle of Samsara: the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth
- **No need of God-hypothesis**
- **Ahimsa:** non-violence

Festivals: *Vesak (month of May): Birth of Buddha, Enlightenment, Death*

Practices:

- Monasticism: *bhikkus*
- *Sangha:* The monastic order “community”
- *Mahayana:* Worship of Buddhas and goddesses
- The Three Refuges (Buddha, Doctrine, Brotherhood of monks)

Appendix

- Offerings, Prayers and Invocations, Transference of Merit, Pilgrimages
- Relic Worship

JAINISM

Symbol:



Countries: India

History:

- 599 BC: Birth of Vardhamana (Vaisaliya) in Magadha (Modern Bihar)
- After 12 years of penance, attained *Keval Jnana* (omniscience)

Sects: *Svetambara, Digambara*

Scriptures: *Agamas (Ganipitakas). Angas (12), Angabahyas*

Beliefs:

- **Vows:** (1) Not to take life (*Ahimsa*) (2) Not to lie (*Satya*) (3) Not to steal (*Asteya*) (4) Not to own property (*Aparigraha*) (5) Chastity (*Brahmacharya*) (6) Confession
- **Cycle of Time:** *Utsarpini, Avarsarpini*
- **7 Principles:** *Jiva, ajiva, asrava, bandha, samvara, nirjara, moksa.*

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

- **6 Dravyas (Substances):** *Ajiva (pudgala, dharma, adharma, akasa, kala)+Jiva*

Festivals: *Paryushana Parva, Mahavir Jayanti, Diwali, Gyana Panchami, Pausha Dashmi, Varshi Tapa, Maun-agiyara, Navapad Oli, Mahamastakabhisheka*

Practices:

- Idol Worship of Tirthankaras, Yaksha and Yakshini
- Monasticism
- Asceticism
- Meditation and Chanting of Mantras

SIKHISM

Symbol:



Countries: India

History:

- 15th c. AD: Founded by Guru Nanak (1469–1539)
- 1539: Guru Nanak chose Lahina (Guru Angad) as successor
- Persecution under Aurangazeb
- 1699 : Rise of Khalsa under Guru Gobind Singh

Scriptures: *Guru Granth Sahib. Adi Granth, Dasam Granth, Janamsakhis*

Appendix

Beliefs:

- Monotheism, Influence of Kabir, Salvation by grace
- *5 K's: Kesh, Kanga, Kaccha, Kara, Kripan*

Festivals: Gurburbs, Visakhi

Practices:

- Gurudwara
- *Kirtan, Satsang, Langar*
- Prohibitions: Cutting hair, intoxication, priestly class

2. CLASSIFICATION MODELS OF THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO RELIGIONS

E.C. Dewick, *The Gospel and Other Faiths*, Canterbury Press, 1942. [Principal of St. Andrew's College, Gorakhpur, UP; sent by National Missionary Society. Earlier, (succeeded J.N.Farquhar as) Literary Secretary of YMCA for India, Burma, & Ceylon]

- (1) Conflict—other religions are enemies of the gospel
- (2) Fulfillment—Christianity fulfills the good and true in other religions
- (3) Co-operation—God speaks through non-Christian religions
- (4) Discontinuity—Christian revelation has nothing in common with non-Christian religions.

Alan Race and Gavin D'Costa

Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1982). [Dean of PG Studies, St. Philip's Center, Leicester]

Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). [Professor of Catholic Theology at the University of Bristol, Great Britain.]

Appendix

- (1) Pluralism
- (2) Inclusivism
- (3) Exclusivism

Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Orbis, 1985. [Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York.]

- (1) Conservative Evangelical
- (2) Mainline, Protestant
- (3) Catholic
- (4) Theocentric

Ajith Fernando, *The Christian's Attitude Toward World Religions*, Tyndale House, 1987. [Teaching Director at Youth For Christ, Sri Lanka]

- (1) Christianity is unique but salvation can be mediated through other religions.
- (2) Christianity is an equal with other faiths.
- (3) Salvation is through Christ only.

Dennis L. Okholm, Timothy R. Phillips (Gen.Ed.), *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World (More than One Way)*, 1995), 1996. Both are associate professors of theology at Wheaton College, Illinois.

Throughout 20th Century

- (1) Discontinuity (Hendrik Kraemer)
- (2) Fulfillment (John Farquhar)
- (3) Mutual Appreciation (William Hocking)

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

After Alan Race and Gavin D'Costa's works in the 1980s

- (1) Exclusivism
- (2) Inclusivism
- (3) Pluralism

Clark Pinnock (*A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 1992) and **John Sanders** (*No Other Name*, 1992) invented the term "Restrictivism" in place of "Exclusivism", for those who will not definitely assert that salvation is available outside special revelation. Both terms have accrued negative connotations of arrogance, intolerance, and closed-mindedness.

Okholm and Phillips propose "Particularism" as a more appropriate term.

- (1) Normative Pluralism: All ethical religions lead to God (John Hick) [Vs. Descriptive Pluralism]
- (2) Inclusivism: Salvation is universally available, but is established by and leads to Christ (Clark Pinnock)
- (3) Post-Enlightenment Particularism: Salvation in Christ. Agnosticism regarding those who haven't heard the Gospel (Alister McGrath)
- (4) Evidentialist Particularism: Salvation in Christ Alone.

Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Orbis Books, 2002.

- (1) Replacement (Traditionally called *Exclusivism*)
- (2) Fulfillment (Traditionally called *Inclusivism*)
- (3) Mutuality (earlier called *Pluralism*) – Common Ground (the Real), Common Core (Religious Experience), Common Goal (Salvific liberation), Rough parity of all religions

Appendix

- (4) Acceptance (No Common Ground; Religions are as different as the languages they use, Cf. Wittgenstein)

David Basinger, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2004. [Roberts Wesleyan College, NY]

- (1) Religious Exclusivism. The religious perspective of only one basic theistic system (for instance, only one of the major world religions) or only one of the variants within a basic theistic system (for instance, within Christianity) is truth or at least closer to the truth than any other religious perspective on a given issue.
- (2) Religious Non-Exclusivism. The religious perspective of any basic theistic system or variant thereof is superior to all other religious perspectives on a given issue.
- (3) Religious Pluralism. Not only is it (as a non-exclusivist) that no specific religious perspective is superior but also the religious perspectives of more than one basic theistic system or variant thereof are equally close to the truth.

21st Century:

Particularism has to a great extent blended into Inclusivism (Modal Inclusivism). The present chief “Christian” theological approaches seem to be:

- (1) Humanistic Pluralism (Mutual Respect, Peaceful Co-existence, Dialogue towards peace, Humanitarianism)
- (2) Inclusive Particularism (Contextual Theologizing, Structural Indigenization, Dialogue for mutual understanding (learning), Witness in Word and Deed).
- (3) Fundamentalism (Fundamental Discontinuity, Religio-Culturism, *Religious Conversionism* (explicit)).

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

Christ-unlike Mission Models

- (1) Detachment from the “lost”; catering to the apathetic. (Luke 15; 19:20, Matt 9:12, 23:14; James 1:27).
- (2) Denominationalism, Quantificationism, Subordinationism, Nominalism (Luke 9:50, Gal.1:16-24, 1Chron 21:1, Acts 8:4, Matt 23:15).
- (3) Deceptive and Disguise Models (Rom.16:18).
- (4) Demand and Supply Models (1Thess 2:6,7; 1Pet.5:2).
- (5) Dictatorial Models (1Pet.5:3).

Christ-like Mission Models

- (1) Incarnation Model (Heb. 2:14; 1Cor.9:22)
- (2) Sacrificial Model (Gal.1:20; Phil.2:17; 1Thess 2:6, 9)
- (3) Reconciliation Model (Eph.2:14; 2Cor.5:18; Rom.5:1; Gal.3:28; John 17:21)
- (4) Glorification (Uplifting, Dignifying) Model (John 17:22; Eph.3:8-11; 2Cor.8:9).

3. THREE MAJOR APPROACHES TOWARDS RELIGIONS

APPROACH: PLURALISM

Proponents/Versions:

- **William Hocking** (Mutual Appreciation)
- **John Hick** (Selective Pluralism/Reality-Centeredness/Copernican Revolution)
- **S. J. Samartha** (Theo-centricism)
- **Raimon Panikkar** (Intra-religious Dialogue/Openness)
- **Paul Knitter** (Mutuality)

Common Tenets:

- All religions are equally valid ways to God.
- Religions are varied responses to the same underlying reality
- Salvation is relatively meaningful within the framework of each religion
- There is no one true religion

Common Rationale:

- Ethical promotion of justice and tolerance
- Epistemic relativity of religion (Critical Realism, Objective Ambiguity, Religion-as)
- Commonality of moral values
- Commonality of Ground and Goal/Noumena

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

- Variety of Religious Phenomena (Relative and Valid according to Context... Game)
- Jesus' deity has no scriptural or philosophical ground

Critique:

- Gavin D'Costa: The position is itself exclusivist.
- Mark Heim: It superficializes the value of religious experiences unique to each religion. Pluralists who suggest just one way are actually inclusivists in disguise.
- Alister McGrath: In reality, religions are infrastructurally very different.

Non-Christian Versions (e.g.):

- **Gandhi** (*Sarvadharmasambhava*)
- **Vivekananda/Radhakrishnan** (Advaitic Pluralism)

APPROACH: INCLUSIVISM

Proponents/Versions:

- **Justin Martyr** (God in Philosophy)
- **John Wesley** (Hopeful Inclusivism)
- **J.N. Farquhar** (Fulfillment Theory)
- **K.M. Bannerjee** (Continuity)
- **Karl Rahner** ("anonymous Christians")
- **Vatican Council II** (1962)
- **Clark Pinnock** (Modal Inclusivism)
- **M.M. Thomas** (Syncretistic Inclusivism/ anonymous Christ)

Appendix

Common Tenets:

- Salvation is only in Christ, God's final Revelation
- Salvation is available to people of all religions, but only through Christ through His universal and salvific presence in the world.
- People can be saved though never having heard the Gospel, because of God's grace that gives rise to supernatural elements in the non-Christian religion.

Common Rationale:

- Middle way between Pluralism and Exclusivism
- Relational Ontology (love of God, incarnate in Jesus, experienced through participation in the Spirit).
- Human spirit-in-the-world; spirit-towards-God; *a priori* (spirit's transcendentality)+*a posteriori* encounter (God's Self-communication)
- Omnipresent Spirit of God in the world ministers prevenient grace
- Case studies in Bible and in the world around (Melchizedek, Balaam, Epimenides,....(Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts*)
- Celebrates two central truths: the Particularity axiom (God has revealed Himself definitely and redemptively in the Incarnation), and the Universality axiom (God loves sinners and wants to save them all)

Critique:

- Inclusivism arbitrarily imposes (eisogetes) Christ on those who don't know Him. The assumption is presumptuous (Hans Kung)
- Hans Kung: Why not "anonymous Buddhists"
- John Hick: Inclusivism fails to acknowledge the distinctive religious lives of non-Christians.

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

Non-Christian Versions (e.g.):

- **Shahid Mutahhari** (“dispositional Muslims”)
- ***Bhagvad Gita 4:11*** (“Inclusive Pluralism”) -
- **Sri Prabhupada (ISKCON)** Christ as Krishna
- **Buddhist Inclusivism** (Studies by Kristin B. Kiblinger)

APPROACH: EXCLUSIVISM

Proponents/Versions:

- **Karl Barth** (Christomonism)
- **Hendrik Kraemer** (Biblical Realism)
- **Lesslie Newbigin** (Finality Christology)
- **Alister McGrath** (Post-Enlightenment Particularism)

Common Tenets:

- Salvation is only in Jesus Christ
- World religions cannot mediate salvific grace

Common Rationale:

- Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God.
- Truth by nature is exclusive.
- All religions are infrastructurally different, though superficially the same.
- Apart from God’s special revelation, there is no hope of salvation.

Critique:

- Pinnock: How can God give a powerful general revelation and send no grace with it?

Appendix

- Hick: Jesus never claimed to be God, neither has His dual-nature (hypostatic union) satisfactorily been explained
- Exclusivism can effect discontinuity, intolerance, and dogmatism.

Non-Christian Versions (e.g.):

- **Jewish Exclusivism**
- **Islamic Exclusivism**
- **Buddhist Exclusivism**

4. ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY: CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES

God

Islam and Christianity teach the unity and oneness of God. However, Christianity teaches the tri-unity of God, which Islam condemns as *shirk* and contrary to *Tawheed*, the oneness of God.

World

Both Islam and Christianity teach that the world was created by God.

Man

Christianity teaches that man is a creation of God, made in God's own image and likeness (being moral, rational, volitional, and spiritual). Islam teaches that man is a creation of God and God's agent in the world.

Sin

Sin, according to Christianity, is the violation of love, which is the purpose of all law. Sin, according to Islam, is the violation of *Sharia*, the law of God.

Abraham

Islam regards Abraham as the chosen of God. He had two wives, Hagar and Sarah. Ishmael was his son through Hagar and Isaac was his son through Sarah. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Ishmael in order to test him.

Appendix

Christianity (and Judaism) regard Abraham as chosen and called by God. Sarah was his wife through whom he had Isaac. Hagar was the handmaid of Sarah through whom, on Sarah's request, he had his first son, Ishmael. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in order to test him.

Salvation

Islam teaches that one is saved through surrender to Allah and abiding according to the *Sharia*. Christianity teaches that one is saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by virtue of his atoning sacrifice for the sins of all mankind on the cross of Calvary.

Jesus Christ

Islam regards Jesus as a prophet of God who will return on the Last Day to aid the *Imam Mahdi* to defeat the antichrist, *Dajjal*. Christianity teaches that Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God, the brightness of God's image, and the only Mediator between God and man.

Bible

Islam regards the *Torah* (5 books of Moses) and the Gospels as God-given, but contends that the modern versions are corrupted. Christianity believes in the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God.

Heaven

Islam regards heaven as a place of comfort and pleasure. Christianity regards heaven as the dwelling place of God.

Hell

According to both Islam and Christianity, hell is a place of torment.

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

Politics

In Islamic theology, religion and state are indivisible. In Christian theology, religion and state are two distinct realms. Jesus said that his kingdom was not of the world and made a distinction between what belongs to Caesar (political authority) and what belongs to God.

Holy Places

Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem are three most important places for Muslims.

Ceremonial sanctity to places is attached in Catholicism. But, Protestantism usually regards no geographical place as a holy place.

Temple

Muslims worship in mosques, which are regarded as holy places. Christians usually worship in church buildings which are not considered as inhabited by God who doesn't dwell in man-made buildings. Christianity teaches that the body of the believer is the temple of God and wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, He is there among them.

Offerings

In Islam, offerings are meritorious in nature.

In Christianity, offerings are non-meritorious and must follow the practice of justice, mercy, brotherly kindness. Most Christians believe that more than a ten percent of their income belongs to God and must be given towards church work.

Initiation to Discipleship

Islam practices circumcision of males as a rite of passage and has some purification rites as well. However, it doesn't have discipleship initiation rite.

Appendix

In Christianity, water baptism is regarded as the sacrament that initiates one into discipleship.

Pilgrimage

Islam regards *Hajj* pilgrimage as meritoriously important for every Muslim. Christianity does not have a concept of holy pilgrimages as no place on earth is regarded more sacred than any other.

Prayer

Islam teaches *Salah (Namaz)* as one of the Five Pillars. *Salah* has to be done 5 times a day. Christianity teaches that prayer may be personal or corporate. Prayer is similar to the natural conversation between a child and his/her father and must be free of all hypocrisy, showmanship, religious rituality, and pretence.

Almsgiving

Almsgiving is regarded as one of the Five Pillars in Islam. Christianity teaches charity towards the needy and helpless as the practice of pure piety.

Religious Leader

In Islam, any educated or respected figure and scholar (*'alim*, pl. *Ulamah*) can be a religious leader. In Christianity, pastors and elders are regarded as shepherds of the church.

Community

Islam views the *Ummah* as the Commonwealth of all Muslim believers. Christianity regards the invisible and universal Church as the Body of Christ.

5. HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY: CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES

God

Popular views of God in Hinduism include non-dualism, polytheism, tri-theism (trimurti), pantheism, pluralistic monotheism, and nature worship. Hinduism depicts deities in both as female and male. Also, there are prominent god-sons like Hanuman, Ayyappan, and Ganesha who are celibates. Christianity teaches the oneness of God as the Trinity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

World

Christianity teaches that the world was created by God out of nothing.

Hinduism teaches that the world undergoes a cycle of creation and dissolution. When Brahma is asleep, the world remains in dissolution; when he awakes, he creates the world again. Brahma also eventually dies and there is a cosmic dissolution. Hinduism also teaches that underlying all this phenomena is the undifferentiated reality of the Self as the ultimate reality.

Man

Christianity teaches that man is a creation of God, made in God's own image and likeness (being moral, rational, volitional, and spiritual).

Appendix

Hinduism teaches that mankind is made from the body of Brahma; male and female being his two halves. It also teaches that the various castes of humanity originated from the different parts of Brahma's body.

Sin

Sin, according to Christianity, is the violation of love, which is the purpose of all law. Sin, according to Hinduism, is the violation of *dharma*, which includes one's caste and religious responsibilities. The law of *karma* arbitrates justice to every individual according to his/her deeds.

Angels

Christianity believes that angels are a creation of God. Hinduism believes in devatas as celestial inhabitants of heaven.

Demons

Christianity teaches that demons are evil fallen angels who attempt to tempt, allure, oppress, and influence humans. Hinduism teaches that the demons are *asuras* and *rakshashas* (who may not necessarily be evil). Hinduism also believes in disembodied spirits.

Salvation

Hinduism teaches liberation from the cycle of rebirth through the way of religious works, way of spiritual knowledge, and way of devotion to a personal deity. Christianity teaches that one is saved from sins through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by virtue of his atoning sacrifice for the sins of all mankind on the cross of Calvary.

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

Scriptures

Christianity believes in the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. Hindus regard the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Puranas as holy books.

Heaven

Christianity regards heaven as the dwelling place of God. Hinduism regards heaven as ruled by Indra (a not very revered deity, infamous for his adulterous affairs); heaven is place of pleasure, dwelling place of gods and goddesses

Hell

According to both Hinduism and Christianity, hell is a place of torment.

Politics

In caste-Hinduism, *kshatriyas* are the warrior-castes who had political authority and were responsible for executing political justice. However, in present day democratic and secular India this view does not exist. In Christian theology, religion and state are two distinct realms. Jesus said that his kingdom was not of the world and made a distinction between what belongs to Caesar (political authority) and what belongs to God.

Holy Places

Hinduism has several places of pilgrimage that includes holy mountains, rivers, and temples. *Kumbh Mela* is the largest pilgrimage gathering in the world. Ceremonial sanctity to places is attached in Catholicism. But, Protestantism usually regards no geographical place as a holy place.

Appendix

Temple

Hindus regard temples as presided by deities. Christians usually worship in church buildings which are not considered as inhabited by God who doesn't dwell in man-made buildings. Christianity teaches that the body of the believer is the temple of God and wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, He is there among them.

Offerings

Hindus regard offerings in temple as meritorious in nature. Some offerings are related to fulfillment of vows. In Christianity, offerings are non-meritorious and must follow the practice of justice, mercy, brotherly kindness. Most Christians believe that more than a ten percent of their income belongs to God and must be given towards church work.

Initiation to Discipleship

Among high caste Hindus, *upanayana* is the initiation ceremony to the period of learning. In Christianity, water baptism is regarded as the sacrament that initiates one into discipleship.

Priesthood

Hinduism regards Brahmins as the priestly caste by virtue of birth. Christianity believes in the priesthood of all believers.

Incarnation and Avatar

There are significant fundamental differences between the incarnation and the avatars. Following are a few of them:

1. **Reality Vs Appearance.** Christ truly incarnated in flesh, real flesh. The avatar appears to be in flesh.

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

2. **Permanence Vs Impermanence.** The incarnation was permanent and irrevocable. Christ continues to be in flesh. The avatar returns to its former form after the fulfillment of its mission.
3. **Completeness Vs Partialness.** Christ became full man. He is full man and full God. The avatar is semi and partial. It is never fully incarnated.
4. **Propitiatory Vs Vindictory.** Christ's incarnation was propitiatory. He came in flesh to represent man to God as a Mediator and High Priest, and to sacrifice His body for the sins of the world. There would not be a need for omnipotent God to incarnate in order to destroy sinners. The avatar appears to destroy the sinners and to save the righteous.
5. **Novelty Vs Restoration.** Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection destroys the old order and establishes a new order. The new order is the Kingdom of believers in Christ, who partake of the resurrection from the dead and inherit the Kingdom of the Son. The avatar restores the world to its original state of balance (dharma) by removing the elements of wickedness (adharma). The world then moves along in the same way until the surge of iniquity again invokes another avatara.
6. **Finality Vs Multiplicity.** Christ's incarnation was final. It can't be repeated again. The avatars are many and cyclical.
7. **Trinitarianism Vs Polytheism.** The doctrinal setting of incarnation is Trinitarianism. There is only One God who is Triune, Tri-personal, and distinct from the universe. The setting of avatars is polytheistic that avouches myriads of finite gods, demons, the world of magic, and a cyclical and evolutionary view of the universe.

6. UNDERSTANDING OUR AGE

- Modern Period (19th & Early 20th Centuries)
- Post-Modern Period (Late 20th Century)
- Post-Postmodern Period (21st Century)

MODERN PERIOD (19TH & EARLY 20TH CENTURIES)

- Rationalism
- Scientific Temper
- Utopianism
- Secularism
- Skepticism
- Liberalism

POST-MODERN PERIOD (LATE 20TH CENTURY)

- Mood Against Truth (No Absolutes)
- Rejection of Reason
- Emphasis on Style over Substance
- Privatization of Morals (Morals are personal)
- Pluralism
- Image or Virtual Culture
- Rejection of Metanarratives

POST-POSTMODERN AGE (21ST C)

- Intense Globalization and Trans-nationalism
- Intense Fundamentalism
- Return to Modernism
- Between Modernism and Post-modernism
- Neo-romanticism (Attempting to turn finite into infinite)

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

- Pseudo-modernism (Internet Culture of Clicks, Likes, and Downloads)

LIBERALISM

Friedrich Schliermacher, Harold De Wolf

- Rationalism and Scientific Temper
- Genesis 1-11 as Mythological. Not Literal. No Original Sin.
- Hyper Contextualization of Theology
- Emphasis on Natural Theology (Natural Religion)
- Anti-orthodoxy, Anti-traditionalism
- Scientific Method
- Emphasis on Experience or Empirical Research
- Undermining of Sin
- Division of Jesus of History from Christ of Faith
- Rejection of Fundamentals such as Trinity, Original Sin, Virgin Birth, Inerrancy of Bible, Atonement, Second Coming

NEO-ORTHODOXY

Karl Barth, Emil Brunner

- Emphasis on Biblical Encounter Revelation (Barth called natural theology as demonic; Brunner accepted it)
- Emphasis on the Transcendence of God. God is the “wholly other”
- Emphasis on Regeneration by Grace from Original Sin
- Personal Revelation, Not Propositional Revelation. Encountering Christ as the Word.
- Christo-centric Theology

PROCESS THEOLOGY

A.N.Whitehead, Teilhard De Chardin, Charles Hartshorne

- God is mutable, temporal, and passible (i.e. affected by the world)
- Everything, including God, is in process

Appendix

- Everything in nature has value, every living being is equally important. Eco-centric Theology
- The world is in some sense part of God (Panentheism)
- God is in some sense a physical or material being.
- Emphasis on freewill
- God feels *how* we feel without feeling *as* we feel (e.g. God feels our fear of death but He doesn't fear death)

EXISTENTIAL THEOLOGY

Soren Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann

- Existence precedes essence
- Emphasis on Being
- God as the Ground of Being (God Above God)
- Christ is the manifestation of the New Being
- Authentic Existence
- Anthro-po-centric Theology
- Demythologization

SECULAR THEOLOGY

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Harvey Cox

- Secularization as a Biblical Process in History
- Emancipation of Church from State
- Religionless Christianity
- Church as Witness
- Church as Transforming Factor

DEATH OF GOD SCHOOL

Gabriel Vahanian, Paul Van Buren, William Hamilton, John A.T. Robinson, Thomas J. J. Altizer

- Contemporary culture is godless
- God is Dead Vs There is No God
- Do-It-Yourself Religion (Don't wait for God)
- Anti-Traditional
- Engagement with (not isolation from) the World

Karmic and Abrahamic Faiths

- Churchless Christianity

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Martin Luther Jr. King, Desmond Tutu, Arvind Nirmal, V. Devasahayam, Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether.

- Social Christianity
- Justice & Equality
- Black Liberation Theology
- Feminist Liberation Theology
- Dalit Liberation Theology
- Palestinian Liberation Theology

DOMINION THEOLOGY

R. J. Rushdoony, Gary North, Peter Wagner

- Christian Reconstructionism: Calvinism, Cessationism, Post-millennialism, Biblical Law
- Kingdom Now Theology: Apostolic and Prophetic Movement, Restoration, Spiritual Warfare
- 7 Spheres: Mild Dominionism. Christians must ascend peaks of the mountains of cultural influence: Arts, Business, Church (Religion), Development and Media, Education, Family, Government, (Health).

