

The Lives of Muhammad and Jesus

Dr. Pat Zukeran explores the radical differences between Muhammad and Jesus, and the implications of following their examples and teachings.

Muhammad and Jesus are the founders of the two largest religions in the world and two of the most influential people in the history of the world. Both men serve not only as founders but also the ideal models whose lives are to be emulated by all their followers. What kind of lives did they live? What example did they leave behind, and how is their example impacting our world today?



This work will examine the lives of both men. In my research I have relied on what is considered by Muslims to be some of the most authoritative historical sources on the life of Muhammad. The first source is the Qur'an, the inspired text of Islam. Second is the Hadith, a record of the many sayings and the life events of Muhammad. The most recognized collection is by Ismail Sahih Bukhari, written in 870. Third is the first and most authoritative biography of Muhammad, written by Ibn Ishaq nearly 150 years after Muhammad's death.

In examining the life of Jesus, I relied primarily on the New Testament. The four Gospels are biographies of His life. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written prior to AD 70, and John was written in AD 95. The letters of the New Testament written by His disciples also serve as a historical source. Most were written prior to AD 70 while some, like 1 Corinthians, were written as early as AD 55.

Muslims believe that Muhammad is the perfect example to follow in all aspects of life. The Qur'an states that in Muhammad, "Ye have indeed in the Apostle of God a beautiful pattern and excellent model of conduct" (Surah 33:21). It also states that Muhammad demonstrates "an excellent standard of character" (Surah 68:4).

The Qur'an also emphasizes that obedience to Muhammad's teachings is equivalent to obeying Allah, as evidenced when Surah 4:80 states that "he who obeys the Apostle, obeys Allah." Moreover, Surah 4:115 also reflects how highly Muslims revere Muhammad as it explains the fate of one who disobeys: "If anyone contends with the Apostle even after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows a path other than that becoming to men of faith, we shall leave him in the path he has chosen, and land him in Hell—what an evil refuge."

Muslims are called to imitate Muhammad in all aspects of their lives, even in their daily activities. Islamic scholar John Esposito writes, "Muslims look to Muhammad's example for guidance in all aspects of life: how to treat friends as well as enemies, what to eat and drink, how to make love and war. . . . His impact on Muslim life cannot be overestimated, since he served as both religious and political head of Medina: prophet of God, ruler, military commander, chief judge, lawgiver. . . . Traditions of the Prophet provide guidance for personal hygiene, dress, eating, marriage, treatment of wives, diplomacy, and warfare." {1}

Christians are not called to copy Christ in all aspects of their lives as Muslims do Muhammad. Rather, Christians are called to reflect the character, mindset, and attitude of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1, Philippians. 2:5, 1 Peter 2:21). Christ focused on the inner transformation of the heart and mind of the individual which would result in righteous living (Matthew 5:8, 6:21, 15:8, 18).

When making decisions in their lives, Muslims will ask, "What would Muhammad do?" while Christians ask, "What would Jesus do?" Since these two men serve as models of perfect conduct for their followers to imitate, it is important to learn what kind of lives they lived. This work will present a brief overview and highlight key events in the lives of each person as we explore that which can be learned from their examples.

The Call of Muhammad and Jesus

Muhammad and Jesus lived remarkable yet radically different lives. Muhammad was born in AD 570. His family was part of the Quraysh tribe, which oversaw the Mecca temple where the deities of Arabia were worshipped. His father died when he was very young, and his mother died when he was six. He was raised by his grandfather and later by his uncle. At the age of twenty-five, he married Khadija, his employer, who was fifteen years his elder.

At the age of forty, Muhammad received his first visitation from the angel Gabriel. According to Ibn Ishaq, the giving and receiving of the revelation was quite violent in nature. Gabriel came to Muhammad and ordered him to read his message. Being illiterate, Muhammad asked Gabriel, "What shall I read?" It is then Gabriel pressed Muhammad so hard that Muhammad thought he was going to die. This was repeated three times until Muhammad read the following message from Gabriel: "Read in the name of thy Lord who created, who created man of blood coagulated. Read! Thy Lord is the most beneficent, who taught by the pen, taught that which they knew not unto men." After this the angel Gabriel departed. {2}

Muhammad was terrified by this incident. Bukhari records that Muhammad returned home trembling and sought to hide under a blanket. His first thought was that he had come under demonic influence. {3} In fact, he was so troubled that he became suicidal. Ishaq records that since Muhammad did not want anyone in his tribe to discover that he was possessed, he resolved to go to the top of a mountain and commit suicide. {4} However, his wife and her cousin Waraqa, an Ebionite Christian, encouraged him that he was not possessed but rather a prophet of God. {5} Through their encouragement, he came to believe that he had received a divine message from Allah.

Prior to his encounter with Gabriel and throughout his life, Muhammad struggled with demonic possession. Ishaq records an incident during Muhammad's childhood when his foster parents, al-Harith and Halima, were raising him. One day while behind the tents, two men clothed in white threw Muhammad to the ground, opened up his belly, and searched through it. His foster father felt the boy might have suffered a stroke. Halima, his foster mother who had nursed Muhammad, believed a demon had possessed him. {6}

Another account of Muhammad's struggle with demon possession occurred a few years after his prophetic calling when Muhammad believed he received a revelation allowing Muslims to worship the three gods of the Quraysh. However, he later admitted that Satan possessed him when he uttered those verses. {7} Allah eventually forgave Muhammad but gave him a stern warning recorded in Surah 17:73-75. Also another time after his prophetic calling Muhammad fell under the spell of a Jewish magician named Labid for one year. {8}

In contrast, biblical prophets and apostles clearly understood their visions were from God rather than Satan or demons. Although some were frightened by their vision of God or the angels before them, they were not violently handled. Instead they were given an assuring introduction such as "Do not be afraid" (Luke 1:13, 28-30, 2:10, Isa. 6:6-7, Revelation 1:17). Jesus' birth was miraculous, and He understood His mission from His childhood (Luke 2:41-52). Throughout His life, Jesus clearly distinguished between God's message and Satan's. During His temptation in the desert, He did not struggle with possession but instead defeated Satan's attacks using the word of God. Throughout

His ministry, Jesus demonstrated authority over the demonic realm, and the demons were terrified of Him (Matthew 8:16, Luke 8:26-39). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated Satan and the demonic hosts. Paul states that Jesus “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him” (Colossians 2:15).

The contrast is readily apparent. One man struggled from demonic presence in his life; the other conquered the devil.

The Warrior and the Rabbi

At the beginning of their mission, both Muhammad and Jesus began preaching in their home territory, and both were persecuted for their message. However, the two responded very differently to their opposition. Muhammad resorted to the use of force while Jesus pursued the path of peace.

Muhammad began preaching in Mecca. During his thirteen years preaching in Mecca he preached a message of tolerance towards other religions as he sought to win the favor of the people. It is at this time that several passages teaching tolerance of the Jews and Christians were recorded (Surah 2:62, 5:69, and 22:17). However, as the persecution grew, he fled to Medina in 622. This event is one of the most important events in Islam known as the *Hijira*. In Medina he gained a following and became the leader of the city. It is in Medina as his power grew that his message transformed to one of intolerance of unbelievers. Moreover, he began to encourage the use of military force. Earlier Suras of tolerance were abrogated by the new revelations exhorting Muslims to Jihad against unbelievers.

To sustain his growing army and impress the Quraysh in Mecca of his growing power, he raided commercial caravans on their way to Mecca. He received revelations endorsing his raids to attack unbelievers and seize their valuables (Surah 8:38-45 & 60-65, 22:39-40, 2:244, 4:95-97). Bukhari records that on his first raid at Al-Abwa, Muhammad was asked if it was permissible to attack at night since doing so would endanger the lives of the women and children traveling with the caravans. Muhammad replied, “They (women and children) are from them (the opposition).” In other words, he permitted the killing or capture of women and children during the raids.{9} The booty collected from the raids was distributed among his men.

These raids incited the Meccans to war against Muhammad. Four major battles were fought between Muhammad and the Quraysh armies of Mecca. In 624 the two armies met at Badr where Muhammad defeated the armies of Mecca. This victory instilled confidence in Muhammad of his calling. He believed Allah fought for him to bring about victory (Surah 3:123-125, 8:9, 12-13).

A year later the Meccan army returned and engaged Muhammad’s army at Uhud, a mountain near Mecca. This time Muhammad was defeated, and his army retreated to Medina. Muhammad was bloodied in the battle and he vowed revenge on his enemies.{10}

In the spring of 627, the Jews of Medina plotted with the army of Mecca against Muhammad. Hearing of this plot, Muhammad dug a trench around the city of Medina. The Meccan army laid siege to the city but were unable to capture the city and returned to Mecca. After the retreat of the Meccan army, Muhammad sought to deal with the Jews of Medina who had plotted against him. Ibn Ishaq records that Muhammad “went out to the market of Medina and dug trenches in it. Then he sent for them and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought to him in batches.” Ishaq records that the estimates of those killed were six to seven hundred; others estimate the numbers to be as high as eight to nine hundred.{11}

After the Siege of Medina, a peace treaty was signed between the two armies. However, the treaty was soon violated, and in 630 Muhammad gathered an army of ten thousand and marched on the

city of Mecca. Seeing their hopeless situation, the Meccans surrendered to Muhammad. Muhammad ordered his men to enter the city and fight only those who resisted. He also had a list of those who were to be killed even if they sought refuge in the Ka'bah Temple. Most on the list were those considered apostates. {12} Muhammad rode his camel to the Ka'bah and cleared the temple of all its idols and burned them. Along with these major conflicts were other raids and battles as Muhammad spread his religion. Ibn Ishaq records that in all Muhammad participated in twenty-seven battles, personally fighting in nine of them. {13}

Islam spread throughout the Middle East through the sword. Muhammad sent messengers throughout Arabia and neighboring countries, ordering them to convert to Islam or suffer the consequences. Those who did not submit to his rule were attacked and forced to pay a tax called a Jizya to Muhammad. In Surah 9, Muhammad gave instructions to his men on dealing with unbelievers:

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which has been forbidden by Allah and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued (Surah 9:29).

In this passage, unbelievers are given three options: to convert to Islam, to pay the tax, or to prepare for battle. Today, fundamentalist Muslims who seek to follow the example of Muhammad and follow the literal teachings of the Qur'an view *jihad* (holy war) as a military conflict for the cause of Islam. These believe that jihad will be waged worldwide against all unbelievers until the world comes under the rule of the House of Islam.

In contrast to Muhammad, Jesus preached, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus praised those who make peace by teaching, "Blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called the sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). During His earthly ministry, Christ never engaged in military conflict. Instead, He spread His message through preaching, teaching and accomplishing miracles. His mission culminated in His death on the cross for the sins of mankind and His resurrection from the dead.

Christ's disciples followed the example of Christ. Christianity was spread through the preaching of gospel message. Christ's disciples did not die on the battlefield as mighty warriors but were instead martyred for proclaiming the name of Christ. Today, Christianity is spread through the preaching, teaching, and humanitarian aid in the name of Christ. One leader was a man of the sword; one was a man of peace.

Facing Their Critics

Both Muhammad and Jesus faced sharp criticism for their message and lifestyle. However, the two men dealt very differently with their critics. There were times Muhammad forgave his critics, but there were also many times he exacted revenge on those who criticized him. Jesus, on the other hand, responded in love to those who were critical of Him.

Ibn Ishaq records several of Muhammad's dealings with those who criticized him. On one occasion, a Jewish Poet named Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf composed a poem that was critical of Muslim women. Muhammad asked, "Who will rid me of Ibnu'l-Ashraf?" A young man named Muhammad Maslama volunteered to kill the poet. Maslama's plan, which Muhammad endorsed, was to deceive the poet and lure him into a trap. After luring Ka'b into meeting, Maslama and his companions stabbed him to death and presented his dead body to Muhammad who then praised the men. {14} After the assassination of Ka'b, Muhammad ordered his men to "kill any Jew that falls into your Power." {15}

The first victim of that decree was Ibn Sunayna, a Jewish merchant.

Another poet killed by Muhammad was a man named Abu Afak, who was nearly one hundred years old. He had written poems mocking Muhammad. Muhammad asked, "Who will deal with this rascal for me?" A young man named Salim bin Umayr volunteered and killed the old man while he was sleeping. {16} A female poet named Asma bint Marwan was infuriated by the murder of Afak and wrote verses condemning Muhammad's men. Hearing of her criticism, Muhammad asked, "Who will rid me of Marwan's daughter?" Umar bin Adiy al-Khatami volunteered and killed her and her unborn child that night. Umar was worried that he had committed a sin, but Muhammad reassured him saying, "Two goats won't butt their heads about her." {17} On another occasion Ishaq records that Muhammad killed two girls who wrote satirical songs about him. {18}

Muslims today take seriously any criticism against Muhammad. Many respond peacefully to the criticism but many responses are much harsher. A death *fatwa* (religious ruling) was declared against Salman Rushdie, author of the fictional novel *The Satanic Verses*. Moreover, in early 2006, riots, many of which were violent, broke out worldwide over Danish cartoons depicting Muhammad. Many who reacted violently believed they responded in a manner exemplifying Muhammad's example.

In contrast to Muhammad, Christ never exacted revenge on those who criticized Him. Christ taught, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:43-48)

This does not mean Christ passively ignored those who opposed His teachings. Christ often sharply rebuked those who spoke out against Him (Matthew 12:22-32), or He pointed out their error (Matthew 7:37-50, 9:10-12, 12:9-14), or He allowed his character to speak for itself (Luke 19:1-10). When Jesus was beaten and mocked, He was silent and in the end prayed for the forgiveness of His enemies. Like Muhammad, Christ had the power to take revenge. Before He was taken away by the mob to stand an illegal trial He told Peter that He could call "twelve legions of angels" to destroy His enemies at hand. However, Christ chose to forgive and even love those who hated Him.

One leader chose the sword of vengeance while the other taught us to overcome evil with good.

Treatment of Women

Muhammad's view of women is reflected in his personal relationships and his teachings revealed in the Qur'an and Hadith. Muhammad remained loyal to his first wife Kadhija and did not take any other wives until after her death. They had been married for 25 years. Islamic historians record that Muhammad married eleven to thirteen wives. The Qur'an allows a man to marry up to four wives (Surah 4:3); however, Muhammad received a special revelation from Allah that he may have more (Surah 33:50). Muhammad's marriages have been a source of criticism of his moral character. However, Muslim historians state that Muhammad's marriages were not immoral but instead followed the normal practices of the culture. Many of his marriages were to solidify political alliances and to provide and protect the widows of his men who had fallen in battle. {19} Here is a brief overview of the circumstances regarding the marriages to some of his more prominent wives.

After the death of Kadhija, Muhammad chose a young girl named Aisha, who was Muhammad's favorite wife. He married her when she was seven and consummated the marriage when she was nine. {20} At the time, Muhammad was in his fifties. Aisha was the daughter of Abu Bakr, one of Muhammad's first and loyal followers who eventually became the first Caliph (spiritual leader) after the death of Muhammad. In his final moments, Muhammad died in the arms of Aisha.

One of his most controversial marriages was to Zaynab bint Jahsh, the wife of his adopted son Zayd bin Haritha. Zayd was unhappy in the marriage and knowing of Muhammad's interest in his wife, sought to divorce her. Initially Muhammad discouraged Zayd (Surah 33:37). However, the marriage worsened, and they divorced. Soon after Muhammad married Zaynab. Arabs considered this marriage equal to incest and criticized Muhammad. However, he received a revelation justifying his action (Surah 33:37).

Ibn Ishaq records the story of another wife Safiya. Safiya was the wife of Kinana al-Rabi, the leader of Jews living at the Khaybar oasis. Muhammad attacked this settlement. Ishaq records, "We met the workers of Khaybar coming out in the morning with their spades and baskets." {21} Muhammad and his men killed 93 men during the raid. Muhammad then sought to obtain the riches in the city. Muhammad ordered his men to torture Kinana so that he would reveal the location of hidden treasure. Ishaq writes that Muhammad ordered his men to "'Torture him until you extract what he has,' so he kindled a fire with flint and steel on his chest until he was nearly dead. Then the apostle delivered him to Muhammad b. Maslama and he struck off his head, in revenge for his brother Mahmud." {22} After Kinana's death Muhammad took his wife Safiya and married her. {23}

Muhammad's relationships with his wives were often a source of sorrow and struggle for him. On one occasion, Muhammad threatened to divorce his wives because one of them disclosed a secret to one of his consorts. This caused some of his wives to join together against him. Muhammad then received a revelation rebuking them, saying Allah and Gabriel would back him up. Allah would allow him to divorce them and Allah would provide "consorts better than you." {24} On another occasion, Muhammad's wives continued to irritate him by asking for money. In exasperation, he gave them the choice of divorcing him and seeking worldly pleasure or remaining with him. {25}

Muhammad's teachings regarding women give us insight into his attitude that he did not view women as equals to men. First, it appears that Muhammad viewed women as less intelligent than men. In Surah 2:282, Muhammad taught that the testimony of a woman is worth half that of a man. Moreover, the Hadith also echoes Muhammad's belief in the "deficiency" or inferiority of women's intelligence. Bukhari gives this account:

Once Allah's Apostle went out to Musalla (to offer prayer) of Id-al-Adha or Al-Fitr prayer. Then he passed by a woman and said, "O woman! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of dwellers of Hell-fire were you (women). . . . I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you." The women asked, "O Allah's Apostle! What is deficient in our intelligence and religion?" He said, "Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?" They replied in the affirmative. He said, "This is the deficiency in her intelligence." {26}

Also, the *Hadith* further reinforces this teaching the inadequacy of a woman's intellect as follows:

The Prophet said, "Isn't the witness of a woman equal to half of that of a man?" The women said, "Yes." He said, "This is because of the deficiency of a woman's mind." {27}

These passages teach that women are considered to have a "deficiency" of the mind, which leads us to conclude that they are inferior to men. Second, Muhammad appears to teach that women have less value than men. This is evidenced in passages such as Surah 4:11 which states that a son's inheritance is to be twice that of a daughter's. Also, men are allowed up to four wives, and sex with slave girls is also allowed (Surah 4:3). Third, Muhammad's teachings lead one to conclude that women are less spiritual than men. One reason is that women are not able to pray during their menstrual cycles: "'Isn't it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?' The women replied in the affirmative. He said, 'This is the deficiency in her religion.'" {28} Moreover,

women are spiritually deficient to men because, although prayers are an important part of Islam, a man's prayers will be canceled if a woman walks in front of a man while he is praying. Aisha wrote the following:

The things which annul the prayers were mentioned before me. They said, "Prayer is annulled by a dog, a donkey and a woman (if they pass in front of the praying people)." I said, "You have made us (i.e. women) dogs." I saw the Prophet praying while I used to lie in my bed between him and the Qibla [Ed. note: the direction that should be faced for prayer]. Whenever I was in need of something, I would slip away for I disliked to face him." {29}

Finally, Muhammad's teachings reveal that wives were to live in subjection to their husbands or face physical and spiritual discipline. Muhammad taught, "Your wives are as a tilth [Ed. note: a measure of the quality of soil] for you; so approach your tilth when or how you will" (Surah 2:223). Chapter four of the Qur'an taught men to "beat [their wives] (lightly)" if their wives were guilty of "disloyalty," "ill conduct," or "refusing to share their beds" (Surah 4:34). There may also be spiritual consequences for a woman's lack of subservience as the Hadith states that "If a husband calls his wife to his bed (i.e. to have sexual relation), and she refuses and causes him to sleep in anger, the angels will curse her till morning." {30}

Moreover, the spiritual consequences of wives who were not subservient to their husbands is seen in a passage which records when Muhammad looked into the bowels of hell and stated that the majority in hell were women who, although they believed in God, were there because they were ungrateful to their husbands. {31}

Thus, based on these passages, not only is a woman's physical well-being dependent on her husband, but her eternal destiny is also connected to her subjection to her husband.

From these passages we can conclude that Muhammad did not view women as equals to men. They had a "deficiency" of the mind; thus, their testimony was only worth half that of a man's. They were less valuable; thus, sons received a double portion of inheritance than daughters, and men could have multiple wives or sexual partners. They were less spiritual because of their inability to pray during menses and the fact that they would cancel out the prayers of a man simply by walking in front of him. Finally, the physical and spiritual well-being of a woman was not within her own power, but instead was dependent upon her submission to her husband.

In contrast, Jesus never married; however, He valued women, and several were a very important part of his ministry. Several traveled with Jesus and ministered to Him and His disciples (Luke 8:1-3). Jesus often praised women for their example of love and faith in the Lord (Mark 5:21-34, Luke 7:36-50, 21:1-4). In Luke 7:36-50, Jesus praised a sinful woman as being a person of greater faith than the men who were present! Jesus spent time with and taught women (Luke 10:38-42). The women were at the cross, and in His dying moments Jesus made sure His mother was taken care of (John 19:25-27). The women were also the first ones entrusted with the message of His resurrection. Jesus' treatment of women showed that He viewed women as important and equal in value to men.

Jesus' disciples reflected the attitude of Christ in their teachings. Peter exhorted husbands to honor their wives and treat them as co-heirs of eternal life (1 Peter 3:7). Paul stated in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Paul also exhorted husbands to "love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25.)

Muhammad and Jesus were considerably different in the way they treated and valued women. Muhammad's relationship with his wives and consorts and his teachings reflect his attitude toward

women. Today, in nations where Islamic law is enforced, women struggle for equal rights. In contrast, Jesus valued women, and the teachings of the New Testament have been the foundation for improving the status of women throughout the world.

Muhammad, Jews, and Christians

Jews believe that God presented special revelation to them through the prophets and the Old Testament. When writing the book of Deuteronomy, Moses prophesied that God would raise up another prophet similar to himself who would speak God's words and bring deliverance to the nation. Deuteronomy 18: 15 and 18 state, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— . . . I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

Christians believe that this prophet of whom Moses and the other prophets wrote is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the predicted Messiah who fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament. Muslims believe that the prophet Moses spoke of was Muhammad and that there are New Testament prophecies such as John 14:16 that predict the coming of Muhammad. Islam claims that God's revelation began with the Jews, was built upon by the Christians, and culminates with Islam. Since Muslims believe there is a connection between the three, it is important to explore the relationship of Muhammad to the Jews and the Christians.

Early in his preaching, Muhammad appealed to the Jews and Christians, hoping to win their acceptance. He believed that he was a prophet in the lines of the Old and New Testament prophets and apostles. Various Surahs were written during this period, teaching tolerance of Christians and Jews (Surah 2:62, 5:69, 22:17). In harmony with Jewish teachings, Muhammad taught that pork was forbidden, and he taught followers to pray facing Jerusalem.{32} Muhammad even challenged the Jews and Christians to look in their writings for confirmation of his teachings (Surah 10:92).

However, the Jews and Christians rejected his message, and he became hostile towards them. He received revelation denouncing the Christians and Jews for rejecting his message (Surah 5:12-16). In Surah 3:110 he calls the Jews and Christians ("People of the Book") "perverted transgressors." Coming to the realization the Jews would not acknowledge his prophetic call, Muhammad ordered Muslims to turn from Jerusalem and face Mecca when praying (Surah 2:143-150). Muhammad chastised Jews and Christians for distorting previous revelation and called them to return to the true teachings of scripture (Surah 5:14-16).

After winning control over Mecca and Arabia, Muhammad received a revelation to fight against the Jews and Christians until they accepted paying taxes and living as second-class citizens (Surah 9:29). Muhammad taught that Jews and Christians rejected his message due to their perversion and rebellion to the truth. Therefore, Muhammad announced that the Jews and Christians were accursed (Surah 5:12-16).

According to Bukhari, Muhammad's final moments were spent in the arms of his youngest wife Aisha. His final words were, "May Allah curse the Jews and Christians, for they built the places of worship at the graves of the prophets."{33} Islamic eschatology teaches that Jesus will return, break crosses, slaughter the Christians and the Jews, and establish Islam as the true religion.{34}

Muhammad's example influences the attitude that Muslims display towards Jews and Christians. Throughout Islamic history, Muslims have had conflict with the Jews and Christians. Non-Muslims in Islamic countries continue to face discrimination and, in many cases, persecution.

What was the relationship of Christ to the Jews? The apostle John writes of Jesus that “He came to His own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). Jesus came to save His people but was rejected by them. However, He never stopped reaching out to them in love and, in the end, cried over the city of Jerusalem, knowing the judgment that was coming upon them (Matthew 23:37). Paul reflects the heart of Christ saying, “For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Romans 9:3). Jesus and His disciples gave their lives for the lost, including the Jewish nation that rejected their message.

Christians continue to follow the example of Christ and preach the Gospel message to the Jews and non-Christians throughout the world. There have been times when Christians were guilty of the misuse of force; however, Christians can refer to the teachings of the New Testament and the example of Christ and the disciples to show clearly such use of force to spread Christianity is contrary to Christ’s example and teaching. Muhammad cursed the Jews and Christians while Christ gave His life to save both Jews and non-Jews who were lost.

Conclusion

This article focused on the lives of Muhammad and Jesus. Both serve as the founders and exemplary models of their religion. We have seen that they lived radically different lives. Their examples influenced their early followers and continue to influence followers today.

Both men lived remarkable yet radically different lives. Muhammad’s call reflects the struggle he had with the demonic forces while Christ conquered Satan, sin, and death. Muhammad was a warrior and chose the way of the sword while Christ was a rabbi who gave His life to rescue mankind from sin and death. Muhammad exacted revenge on his critics while Christ reached out to the lost, even those who rejected Him. Muhammad’s treatment and teaching on women stand in stark contrast to Christ. It is apparent that the lives and teachings of both men were significantly different.

It is important that we understand the lives they lived and realize the implications of their teachings and examples for our present situation. I encourage every person to examine the lives of both men and consider the implications of following their examples. Following the path of Muhammad leads one down the road of the sword. Following in the footsteps of Christ will lead one to righteousness and eternal life.

For it is Christ who claimed to be the divine Son of God, and He is the only one who confirmed His claims through His sinless, miraculous life, death, and resurrection from the dead. Even the Qur’an affirms the miraculous birth, sinless life, and miracles of Christ. Even the Qur’an teaches that He did not die but was raised to heaven. So even in the Qur’an, Jesus performs greater works than Muhammad. I encourage all Muslims to study the life of Jesus in the Bible. Muhammad even encouraged Muslims to study the Bible (Surah 10:94, 2:136, 4:163, 5:56, 5:68, 35:31). I believe once you study the life of Christ you will inevitably realize this was indeed was more than a prophet, He was the Son of God, the author of eternal life. {35} (For more, please read my article “Jesus in the Qur’an”).

Notes

1. John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, (New York: Oxford Press, 1988), 13-14.
2. Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1955), 106.
3. Hadith, ed. Sahih Bukhari, vol. 1, bk. 1, no. 3. This translation can be found online at the Univ. of Southern California’s Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement at <http://tinyurl.com/p2ujny>.

4. Ishaq, 106.
5. Ibid., 107.
6. Ibid., 71-72.
7. Ibid., 165-66; Qur'an 22:52, 53:19-23.
8. Ibid., 240. Guillaume's footnote states Muhammad was under the spell for one year.
9. Bukhari, vol. 4, bk. 52, no. 256.
10. Ishaq, 382.
11. Ibid., 464.
12. Ibid., 550.
13. Ibid., 659-60.
14. Ibid., 367-68.
15. Ibid., 369.
16. Ibid., 675.
17. Ibid., 675-76.
18. Ibid., 551.
19. Esposito, 19-20.
20. Bukhari, vol. 5, bk. 58, no. 234, and vol. 7, bk. 62, no. 65.
21. Ishaq, 511.
22. Ibid., 515.
23. Ibid., 511.
24. Surah 66:1-5 and Bukhari, vol. 6, bk. 60, Verse 274.
25. Surah 33:28-29 and Bukhari, vol. 6, bk. 60, Verse 309.
26. Bukhari, Vol. 1, Bk. 6, No. 301, narrated by Abu Said Al-Khudri.
27. Bukhari, Vol. 3, Bk. 48, No. 826, narrated by Abu Said Al-Khudri.
28. Bukhari, Vol. 1, Bk. 6, No. 30, narrated by Abu Said Al-Khudri.
29. Bukhari, Vol. 1, Bk. 9, no. 490, narrated by 'Aisha.
30. Bukhari, Vol. 4, Bk. 54, No.460.
31. See note 26.
32. Bukhari, vol. 6, bk. 60, no. 13.
33. Bukhari, vol. 1, bk. 8, no. 427.
34. F. E. Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 390.
35. For more please read my article, "Jesus in the Qur'an," Probe, 2008, probe.org/jesus-in-the-quran/.

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Introducing Probe's New Survey: Religious Views and Practices 2020

The results are in from Probe's newest assessment of the state of biblical beliefs in America 2020, and the news is not good.

Our 2020 survey reveals a striking decline in evangelical religious beliefs and practices over the last ten years. From a biblical worldview to doctrinal beliefs and pluralism to the application of biblical teaching to sexual mores, the number of Americans applying biblical teaching to their thinking has

dropped significantly over this period. Unfortunately, the greatest level of decline is found among Born Again Protestants.

Our previous survey, the 2010 *Probe Culturally Captive Christians* survey{1}, was limited to Born Again Americans' ages 18 through 40. This survey of 817 people was focused on obtaining a deeper understanding of the beliefs and behaviors of young adult, Born Again Christian Americans.

Our new 2020 survey looks at Americans from 18 through 55 from all religious persuasions. Although still focused on looking at religious beliefs and attitudes toward cultural behaviors, we expanded the scope, surveying 3,106 Americans ages 18 through 55. Among those responses, there are 717 who are Born Again{2}, allowing us to make meaningful comparisons with our 2010 results while also comparing the beliefs of Born Again Christians with those of other religious persuasions.

Two questions were used in both surveys to categorize people as Born Again{3}. Those questions are:

1. Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today? **Answer: YES**
2. What best describes your belief about what will happen to you after you die? **Answer: I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.**

In our 2020 survey, we delve into what American's believe regarding biblical worldview, basic biblical doctrine, pluralism and tolerance, religious practices, applications of religious beliefs to cultural issues, and more. In this first release, we lay the groundwork by explaining the trends in religious affiliation over time using a number of different surveys. Then we look deeper, examining how many of those of each religious faith group adhered to a biblical worldview in 2010 and now in 2020.

Laying the Groundwork: American Religious Affiliations Over Time

How have the religious affiliations of American young adults changed over the years? We have examined data over the last fifty years{4} to answer this question. From 1972 through the early 1990's, the portion of the population affiliated with each major religious group stayed fairly constant. But since then, there have been significant changes. As an example, looking at data from the General Social Survey (GSS){5} surveys of 1988, 1998, 2010, and 2018 and our 2020 Religious Views survey, we see dramatic changes as shown in Figure 1. Note that the GSS survey asks, "Have you ever had a "born again" experience?" rather than the two questions used in the Probe surveys (see above). Looking at the chart it appears that the question used in the GSS surveys is answered yes more often than the two questions used by Probe.

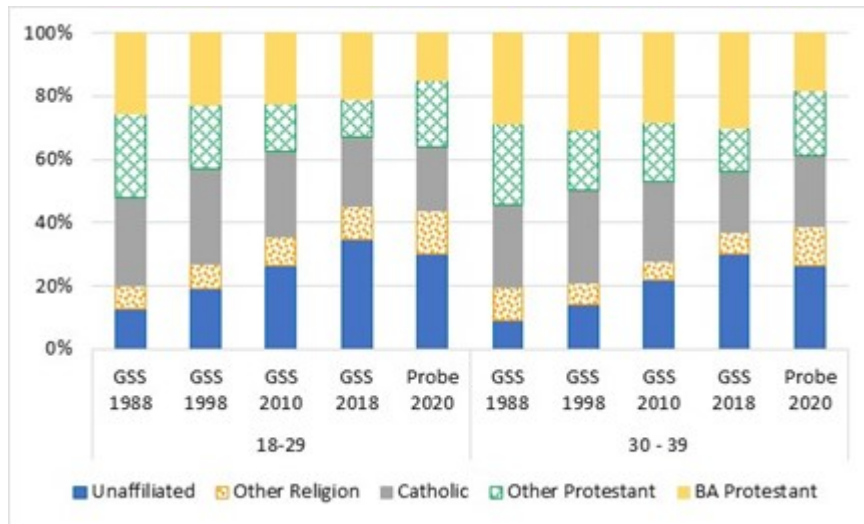


Figure 1 - Religious Affiliations of Young Adults Over Time

As shown, the most dramatic change is the increase in the percentage of those who **do not** select a Christian affiliation (i.e., Other Religion and Unaffiliated). Looking at GSS data for those age 18-29, the percentage has grown from 20% of the population in 1988 to over 45% of the population in 2018. Most of this growth is in the number of Unaffiliated (those who select Atheist, Agnostic or Nothing in Particular). In fact, those from other religious faiths{6} grew from 7% to 10% over this time period while **the Unaffiliated almost tripled** from 13% to 35% of the population.

The Pew Research data (not shown in the graph) shows an even greater increase, growing from 27% in 1996 to 59% in 2020. The Probe data from 2020 tracks the GSS data, supporting the overall growth trend shown in the figure.

Looking at the Unaffiliated for the 30-39 age group, we see the same growth trend growing from 9% to 30%. Comparing the 18-29 data with the 30-39 data, we can determine that more people are transitioning to Unaffiliated as they mature. For example, we see that 26% of those in their twenties were Unaffiliated in 2010, growing to 30% of those in their thirties in 2018. This result means that more of the people in their twenties became Unaffiliated in their thirties. This result runs directly counter to the supposition of many that the growth in Unaffiliated will dissipate as young adults age and return to churches to raise their families.{7}

Considering the other religions shown in Figure 1, we see that the group seeing the greatest decline is Other Protestants, i.e. Protestants who did not profess to being born again. As shown, this group dropped by half (from 26% down to 13%) from 1988 to 2018. Similarly, those professing to be Catholics dropped by one quarter (from 24% to 18%) over the same time period.

In the GSS data, Born Again Protestants are remaining a relatively constant percent of the population. There has been a steady decline in those ages 18-29, but those in their thirties have not declined over this time period. This data appears to indicate that some young adults in their late twenties and early thirties are undergoing a "born again" experience.

However, while Born Again Protestants have remained stable, those who say they are affiliated with an Evangelical church have begun to decline somewhat. Pew Research surveys{8} of at least 10,000 American adults do show a decline in young adult Evangelicals from 28% in 2007 to 25% in 2014 to 20% in 2019.

Is a Christian Biblical Worldview Common Among Young Americans?

In assessing the worldview of people, we were not able to sit down and talk to them to fully understand their worldview. So, our 2010 and 2020 surveys include specific questions which help us identify someone with a Christian biblical worldview. A set of four questions is used to assess what we call a Basic Biblical Worldview. Two additional questions are added to get to a fuller assessment first used by the Barna Group. We use the six questions together to assess what we call an Expanded Biblical Worldview. The questions are as follows:

Basic Biblical Worldview

1. Which of the following descriptions comes closest to what you personally believe to be true about God: **God is the all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today.**{9}
2. The Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings: **Strongly Agree**
3. If a person is generally good enough or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven: **Disagree Strongly**
4. When He lived on earth, Jesus Christ committed sins like other people: **Disagree Strongly**

Additional Beliefs for an Expanded Biblical Worldview

5. The devil or Satan is not a real being, but is a symbol of evil: **Disagree Strongly**
6. Some people believe there are moral truths (such as murder is always wrong) that are true for everyone, everywhere and for all time. Others believe that moral truth always depends upon circumstances. Do you believe there are moral truths that are unchanging, or does moral truth always depend upon circumstances: **There are moral truths that are true for everyone, everywhere and for all time.**

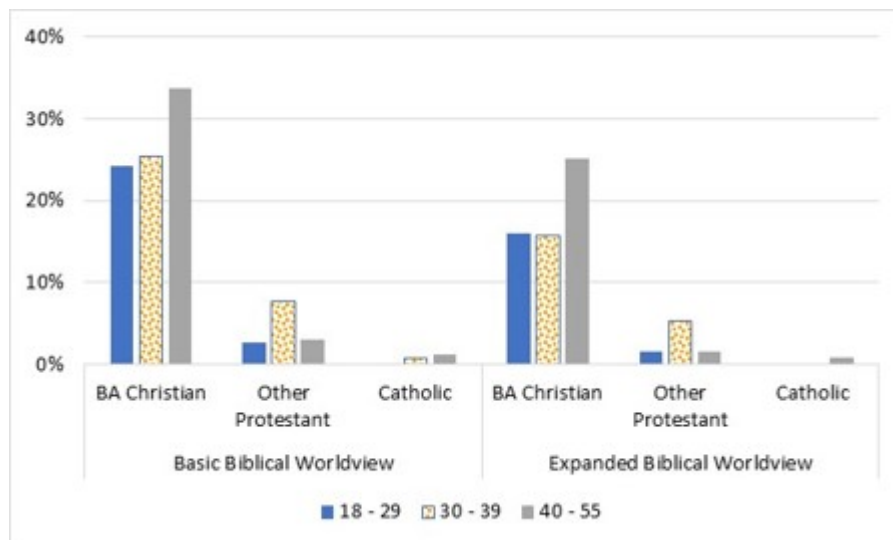


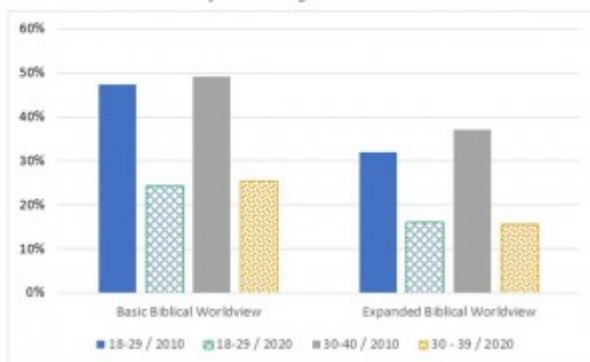
Figure 4 - Worldview Beliefs of 2020 Protestants

First, how do different Christian groups respond to these questions? In Figure 4, we show the percentage of each group in 2020 who have either a Basic Biblical Worldview or an Expanded

Biblical Worldview. We use three groups of affiliations: Born Again Christians, Other Protestants, and Catholics. On the left half of the chart, we indicate the percentage with a Basic Biblical Worldview by affiliation and age group. Those in the Born Again Christian group are at about 25% (about 1 out of 4) for those under the age of 40 and then jump up to 35% (about 1 out of 3) for those between 40 and 55. For those in the Other Protestant group, much less than 10% (1 out of 10) possess a Basic Biblical Worldview. Almost no Catholics possess a Basic Biblical Worldview. For both the Other Protestant group and the Catholics, the concept the vast majority do not agree with is that you cannot earn your way to heaven via good works. The other three questions are also much lower for Other Protestants and Catholics than for Born Again Christians.

Adding in the questions on Satan and absolutes for an Expanded Biblical Worldview, we see each group drop significantly. The Born Again Christian group runs about 15% below age 40 and 25% (or 1 in 4) from 40 to 55. The other two groups drop from almost none to barely any.

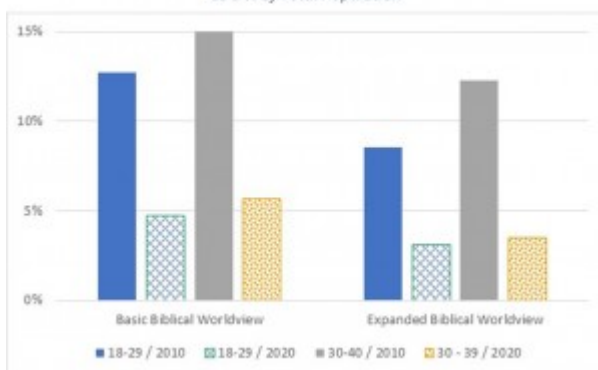
Figure 5 Born Again Christian Worldview Beliefs Across 10 Years
% of all Born Again Christians



Now let's compare these 2020 results with the results from our 2010 survey. Figure 5 shows the results across this decade for Born Again Christians looking at the percent who agree with the worldview answers above. As shown, there has been a dramatic drop in both the Basic Biblical Worldview and the Expanded Biblical Worldview.

If we compare the 18-29 result from 2010 with the 30-39 result from 2020 (i.e., the same age cohort 10 years later), we see a drop from 47% to 25% for the Basic Biblical Worldview and from 32% to 16% for the Expanded Biblical Worldview. **So, the percentage of Born Again Christians with a Biblical Worldview (of either type) has been cut in half over the last decade.** This result is a startling degradation in worldview beliefs of Born Again Christians over just 10 years.

Figure 6 Born Again Christian Worldview Beliefs Across 10 Years
as a % of Total Population



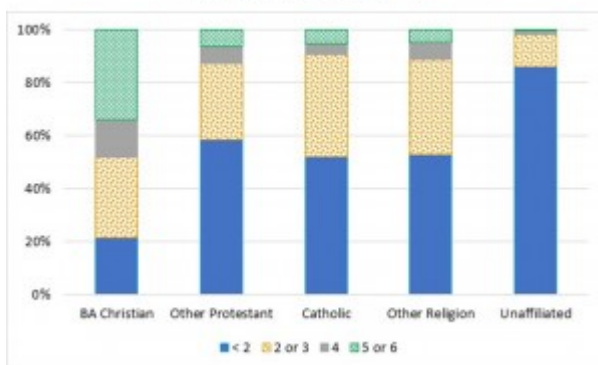
However, because the percent of the population who profess to being born again has dropped over the last ten years as well, the situation is even worse. We need to look at the percent of Americans of a particular age range who hold to a Biblical Worldview. Those results are shown in Figure 6. Once again, comparing the 18-29 age group from 2010 with the same age group ten years later now 30-39, we find an even greater drop off. For the Basic Biblical Worldview, we see a drop off from 13% of the population down to 6%. For the Expanded Biblical Worldview, the decline is from 9% down to just over 3% (a drop off of two thirds).

The drop off seen over this ten-year period is more than dramatic and extremely discouraging. In 2010, we had about 10% of the population modeling an active biblical worldview. Although small, 10% of the population means that most people would know one of these committed Christians. At between 6% and 3%, the odds of impacting a significant number of Americans are certainly reduced.

However, we cannot forget that the percent of biblical worldview Christians in the Roman Empire in AD 60 was much less than 1% of the population. Three hundred years later virtually the entire empire was at least nominally Christian. If we will commit ourselves to “proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light,” {11} God will bring revival to our land.

Second, how do various religious groups stack up against these questions?

Figure 7 Number of Biblical Worldview Topics Affirmed by Americans ages 18 - 39



Rather than look at the two biblical worldview levels discussed above, we will look at how many of the six biblical worldview questions they answered were consistent with a biblical worldview. In the chart, we look at 18- to 39-year-old individuals grouped by religious affiliation and map what portion answered less than two of the questions biblically, two or three, four, or more than four (i.e., five or six).

You can see that there are three distinct patterns. First, Born Again Christians where almost half of them answered four or more questions from a biblical perspective (the top two sections of each bar). Then, we see Other Protestants, Catholics{12}, and Other Religions{13} chart about the same, with over half answering zero or one and very few answering more than three.

Finally, we see that the Unaffiliated have over 85% who answer zero or one. This result is one of many we have identified over the years, clearly showing that the Unaffiliated are not active Christians who do not want to affiliate with a particular group. Some have suggested this possibility, but the data does not support that hopeful concept.

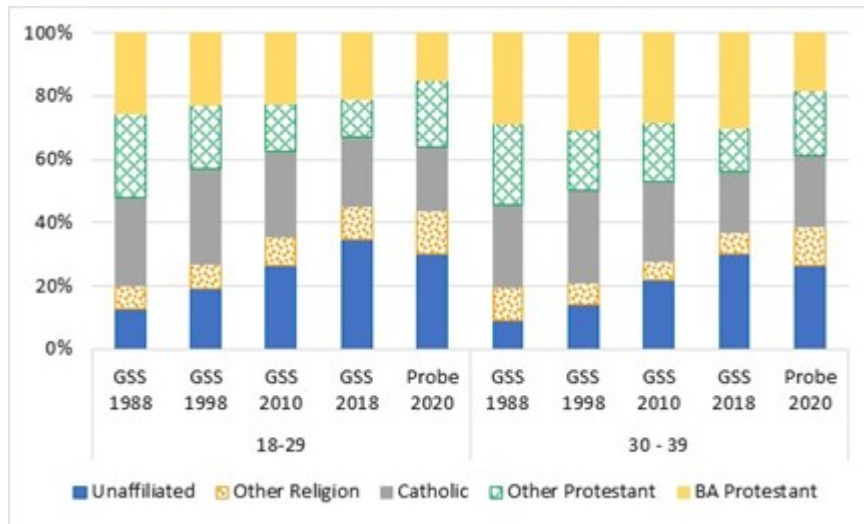


Figure 8 - What Do You Personally Believe to be True About God?

Third, what do they say about God and His relationship to the world?

People have many different views of God or gods in this life. In this chart, we look at how 18-to 39-year old respondents define God across the different religious affiliations used in the prior chart. Our respondents were asked: Which of the following descriptions comes closest to what you personally believe to be true about God? They were given the following answers to choose from (without the titles).

1. **God Rules:** God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today.
2. **Impersonal Force:** God refers to the total realization of personal human potential OR God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach.
3. **Deism:** God created but is no longer involved with the world today.
4. **Many gods:** There are many gods, each with their different power and authority.
5. **No God:** There is no such thing as God.
6. **Don't Know:** Don't know

Once again, the answers fall into three groups. A vast majority of Born Again Christians (~80%) believe in a creator God who is still active in the world today. It is somewhat surprising that over 20% ascribe to a different view of God. The second group consists of Other Protestants who do not claim to be born again, Catholics and Other Religions. These groups are remarkably similar in their responses with around 40% who believe in an active, creator God. So, the remaining 60% have a different view. The third group are the Unaffiliated with less than 10% professing belief in an active, creator God. Over 50% believe in no God or they just don't know. **Overall, only about one third of Americans 55 and under believe in an active, creator God.** We must admit that **America is not a Judeo-Christian nation** as the belief in God is central to Judeo-Christian views. From an evangelistic viewpoint, one needs to be prepared to explain why someone should believe in a creator God. The Probe Ministries website, www.probe.org, is an excellent place to explore the topic. {14}

Summary

This document begins the process of understanding the status and trends of religious beliefs and behaviors in the America of this third decade of the twenty first century. Several findings addressed above are worth highlighting in summary.

- Unaffiliated Americans continue their growth toward one half of the population which began before the turn of this century. The current number of young adults (under the age of 40) who are **unaffiliated ranges between one third and one half of our population.**
- The percentage of young adult Americans who claim to be Born Again Protestants has declined slightly among the youngest group (18-29) but has remained fairly constant during this century.
- Other Protestants and Catholics have seen marked declines during this century. The percentage of **young adult Other Protestants has dropped by one half** (from about one quarter of the population to about one eighth) since 1988.
- Born Again Christians are the only group to have a significant number of adherents who profess to having a Basic Biblical Worldview. This worldview is measured by the answers to four very basic questions at the heart of Christian doctrine. Even among this group, **only about one in four (25%) of them hold to a Basic Biblical Worldview.**
- Over the last ten years, the number of young adult (18-39) Born Again Christians with **a Basic Biblical Worldview has dropped by two thirds** from almost 15% of the population down to about 5%. This is a remarkable and devastating drop in one decade.
- Just under one half of Born Again Christians agree with more than three of the six worldview questions. Amongst other Christian groups and the population as a whole less than one in ten do so.
- **Overall, only about one third of Americans 55 and under believe in an active, creator God.**

In our next release, we will look at how American young adults

- react to the doctrine of Jesus Christ,
- believe that Jesus is the only path to heaven, and
- have a classic view of tolerance.

In the meantime, be in prayer about what you can do in your sphere of influence to stem the trends listed above.

Notes

1. For a detailed analysis of the outcomes of our 2010 survey and other surveys from that decade, go to our book *Cultural Captives: The Beliefs and Behavior of American Young Adults*.
2. The 717 respondents equated to 747 equivalent people when weighted to adjust for differences between those surveyed and the distribution of gender, ethnicity, ages, and location as given by the United States Census Bureau.
3. Our 2010 survey was facilitated by the Barna Group and I would presume they commonly use

these two questions in other surveys to identify born again Christians.

4. We have looked at religious affiliation from Pew Research, GSS, PALS, Barna Group and others.

5. General Social Survey data was downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the National Opinion Research Center.

6. Note that the Other Religions category includes Christian cults (e.g. Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses), Jews, and other world religions.

7. In future releases, we will also see that the Unaffiliated are very unlikely to hold to basic Christian beliefs.

8. U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2007, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014, Religious Knowledge Survey 2019 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

9. Other answers to select from: God created but is no longer involved with the world today; God refers to the total realization of personal human potential; there are many gods, each with their different power and authority; God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach; there is no such thing as God; and don't know.

10. Born Again Christians include Catholics who answered the born again questions to allow comparison with the 2010 survey but in the Catholic category we include all Catholics including those who are born again.

11. 1 Peter 2:9

12. Catholics here include about 20% who profess to be born again. That subset is included in both the BA Christian column and the Catholic column in Figure 7 and Figure 8.

13. One of the reasons that Other Religions include some that answer more than three worldview questions is that Mormons and other Christian cults are included in that category.

14. Articles on our website addressing this topic include Evidence for God's Existence, There is a God, Does God Exist: A Christian Argument from Non-biblical Sources, The Impotence of Darwinism, Darwinism: A Teetering House of Cards, and many others.

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Atheist Myths and Scientism

Steve Cable exposes some atheist myths and the false ideology of scientism, all designed to destroy people's faith.

A Two-Pronged Attack Against Christianity



Atheist attacks against American Christianity are gaining more traction in our society. Their success can be readily seen in the growth of the number of American young adults who do not profess to be

Christians. Tracking recent trends, around 50% of American Millennials fall in this category, with most of those identifying as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. More identify as nothing in particular than as atheist, but the atheist attacks certainly have a role to play in their ambivalent feelings about Christianity.

What have atheists done to create a cultural milieu that is drawing more and more young Americans away from Christianity? In this article, we will focus on two prominent prongs of the attack against Christianity. Those prongs are:

1. Fabricating myths around the premise that Christianity and modern science are enemies of one another and have been so since the advent of modern science, and
2. Promoting the philosophy of scientism as the only way to view science.

First, the myths are an attempt to cause people to believe that the Christian church and a Christian worldview were and are anti-science. They want us to believe that the findings of science are counter to the make-believe teachings of Christianity and the Bible. They want us to look back at history and believe that the church was actively opposing and trying to suppress scientific knowledge. As Michael Keas tells us in his 2019 book *Unbelievable*, “These stories are nothing but myths. And yet some leading scientists . . . offer these stories as unassailable truth. These myths make their way into science textbooks . . . (and) enter into popular culture, whereby the myths pass as accepted wisdom.”{1}

However, many historians and philosophers have correctly pointed out that the Christian worldview of an orderly universe created by an involved God produced the mindset that gave birth to the scientific revolution. In his book *How the West Won*, sociologist Rodney Stark states, “Christianity was essential to the rise of science, which is why science was a purely Western phenomenon . . . science only arose in Christian Europe because only medieval Europeans believed that science was possible and desirable. And the basis of their belief was their image of God and his creation.”{2} In this article, we consider the key figures who propagated this myth and some of the falsified stories they have foisted upon us.

Second, they want us to accept scientism as the only valid way to view the role of science in our understanding of the universe. What is scientism? In his 2018 book *Scientism and Secularism*, professor of philosophy J. P. Moreland defines it this way: “Scientism is the view that the hard sciences provide the only genuine knowledge of reality. . . . What is crucial to scientism is . . . the thought that the scientific is much more valuable than the non-scientific. . . . When you have competing knowledge claims from different sources, the scientific will always trump the non-scientific.”{3}

But scientism “is not a doctrine of science; rather it is a doctrine of philosophy . . . (In fact,) scientism distorts science.”{4} This philosophical doctrine came into favor among the public not because of scientific results, but rather as the result of proponents presenting it in popular ways as if it were the undisputable truth. As Moreland points out, “It is not even a friend of science but rather its enemy.”{5}

Myths about Christianity and Science

Atheists want to create stories to demonstrate that Christians are and have been the enemies of scientific exploration and discovery. Why this drive to recreate the past? They want to encourage

people to turn away from Christianity as an enemy of science and weaken the faith of believers.

As Michael Keas makes evident in *Unbelievable*, this thinking is not based on reality. Instead, historical myths have been created to bolster their position either as a result of ignorance of the actual history or intentional deceit. After creating these myths, they use the educational system and mass media to ingrain these myths into the thinking of the masses.

Keas specifically looks at seven myths used for this purpose which we find embedded in our textbooks and proclaimed by popular television programs. To understand the nature of these myths, let's consider two of the ones discussed by Keas.

Many of you learned of the Dark Ages, a period of time between A.D. 500 and 1500 where textbooks have claimed that science and the arts were stifled by the control of the church which opposed scientific understanding. In truth, this view is not supported by historical evaluations of that time. As reported in Stark's revealing book, *How the West Won*, "Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Dark Ages myth is that it was imposed on what was actually "one of the great innovative eras of mankind." During this period technology was developed and put into use on a scale no civilization had previously known.{6} Keas found that this myth first appeared in textbooks in the 1800s but did not surface with an anti-Christian slant until the 1960s. Carl Sagan, and later Neal deGrasse Tyson, would help promulgate this myth on television through their *Cosmos* series.

Another myth exploded by Keas is that "Copernicus demoted humans from the privileged 'center of the universe' and thereby challenged religious doctrines about human importance." {7} In fact, Copernicus as a Christian did not consider his discovery that the earth orbited the sun a demotion for earth or humans. What Copernicus saw as unveiling the mysteries of God's creation over time began to be pictured as a great humiliation for Christians. In the 1950s some scientific writers began using the term "the Copernican principle" to refer to the idea "that the Earth is not in a central, specially favored position" {8} in the cosmos. As one Harvard professor has noted, "This is the principle of mediocrity, and Copernicus would have been shocked to find his name associated with it." {9}

Keas also documents how this atheist strategy also pretends that many early scientists were not Christians. Johannes Kepler, known for his discovery of the three laws of planetary motion, is cited by Sagan in *Cosmos* as someone who "despaired of ever attaining salvation," {10} implying that Kepler always felt this way. Sagan leads one to believe that in his astronomical discoveries Kepler was somehow freed from this concern. Yet from Kepler's own writing it is very clear that he was a Christian, telling people shortly before his death that he was saved "solely by the merit of our savior Jesus Christ." And speaking of his scientific endeavors he wrote, "God wanted us to recognize them [i.e. mathematical natural laws] by creating us after his own image so that we could share in his own thoughts." {11}

Much of the reported relationship between science and Christianity is a myth made up to strengthen the atheist position that science repudiates Christianity and makes it superfluous and dangerous in today's enlightened world. Nothing could be further from the truth, as a Christian worldview was foundational for the development and application of the scientific method.

Methodological Naturalism: A Farce

What about the prevalence of scientism, a belief system claiming that the hard sciences provide the only genuine knowledge of reality?

When considered carefully, the whole concept of scientism is a farce. Why? Because as philosopher J. P. Moreland points out, “Strong scientism is a philosophical assertion that claims that philosophical assertions are neither true nor can be known; only scientific assertions can be true and known.”{12} So the premise is self-refuting. They are saying that only scientific facts can be objectively true. Thus, the statement that only scientific facts can be true must be false because it is a philosophical assertion, not a scientific fact.

Another example of the faulty philosophy behind scientism comes in their insistence on adopting methodological naturalism as a criterion for science. Methodological naturalism is “the idea that, while doing science, one must seek only natural causes or explanations for scientific data.”{13} This idea immediately demotes science from being the search for the truth about observable items in this universe to being the search for the most plausible natural cause no matter how implausible it may be.

Although they appear to be unsure as to whether to apply the concept uniformly to all forms of science, its proponents are sure that it definitely should be applied to the field of evolutionary science. They make the *a priori* assumption that life as we know it originated and developed by strictly impersonal, unintelligent forces. No intelligence can be allowed to enter the process in any way. This approach to trying to understand the current state of life on earth is certainly an interesting exercise leading to a multitude of theories and untestable speculations. It is a challenging mental exercise and is valuable as such. However, scientism does not stop there. They declare that their unsupported (and I would say unsupportable) theories **must be the truth** about our origins, at least until replaced by another strictly naturalistic theory.

This approach seems to be an odd (and unfruitful) way to go after the truth due to at least three reasons. First, many other areas of science which include intelligent agents in their hypotheses are respected and their results generally accepted, common examples being archaeology and forensic science. Second, the current state of evolutionary science primarily appears to be tearing holes in prior theories, e.g. Darwinian evolution, rather than closing in on a plausible explanation. And, third, scientists are continuing to find evidence supporting a hypothesis that intelligent actions were involved in the formulation of life on earth.

If the sum of the available evidence is more directly explained by the involvement of some intelligent agent, then it would be reasonable to accept that potential explanation as the leading contender for the truth until some other answer is developed that is more closely supported by the available evidence. This is the attitude embraced by the intelligent design community. They embrace it because so much of the evidence supports it, including

1. the inability of other hypothesis to account for the first appearance of life,
2. the complexity of the simplest life forms with no chain of less complex forms leading up to them,
3. the relatively sudden appearance of all types of life forms in the fossil record,
4. the fine tuning of the parameters of the universe to support life on earth, and
5. the emergence of consciousness within humans.

In contrast, those supporting theistic evolution appear to do so in order to conform to the methodological naturalism of their peers. They claim to believe that God does intervene in nature through acts such as the miracles of Jesus and His resurrection. But they claim that God did not intervene in the processes leading up to the appearance of mankind on this planet. In my opinion, they take this stance not because the evidence demands it, but because methodological naturalism does not allow it. As Moreland opines, “Methodological naturalism is *one bad way* to put science and Christianity together.”{14}

Things Science Cannot Explain / God of the Gaps

As we have seen, scientism is a philosophy that says the only real knowledge to be found is through application of the hard sciences and that no intelligence can be involved in any of our hypotheses. So, they believe hard science must be capable of explaining everything (even if it currently doesn't).

In this section we will consider some very important things that science cannot now nor ever be able to explain. In his book, *Scientism and Secularism*, J. P. Moreland lists five such things for us.

First, the origin of the universe cannot be explained by science. Why? Science has been able to identify that the universe most likely had a beginning point. But as Moreland points out, "Science can provide evidence that the universe had a beginning; it cannot, even in principle, explain that beginning; that is, it cannot say what caused it. . . No real thing can pop into existence from nothing." {15} He points out three specific logical reasons science cannot address this issue:

1. A scientific explanation cannot be used to explain the universe because scientific explanations presuppose the universe.
2. Science cannot explain the origin of time and without time no explanation can be considered.
3. Coming-into-existence is not a process which can be reviewed and explained because it is an instantaneous event. Something either does or does not exist.

Second, the origin of the fundamental laws of nature. All scientific explanations presuppose these laws. We can conceive of a universe where these laws might be different resulting in a different reality, but we cannot explain how our universe came into being with the laws we see active around us.

Third, the fine-tuning of the universe to support life. As far as science is concerned the parameters of the forces within this universe can be observed but we cannot know what caused them to assume the values they do. However, in recent years it has been discovered that our universe "is a razor's edge of precisely balanced life permitting conditions." {16} Over one hundred parameters of this universe, such as the force of gravity, the charge of an electron, the rate of expansion of the universe, etc., must be precisely balanced or there could be no life in the universe. Science cannot answer the question of why our universe can support life.

Fourth, the origin of consciousness. In this context consciousness is the ability to be aware of oneself and entertain thoughts about things which are outside of oneself and possibly outside of one's experience. From a naturalist point of view, "the appearance of mind is utterly unpredictable and inexplicable." {17} However, God may choose to create conscious beings; beings that are capable of asking about and discovering the works of their creator.

Fifth, the existence of moral laws. As the late atheist philosopher Mackie admitted, the emergence of moral properties would constitute a refutation of naturalism and evidence for theism: "Moral properties constitute so odd a cluster of properties and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events without an all-powerful god to create them." {18}

These five important questions can never be answered if scientism's flawed premise were true. However, Christian theism answers each of these questions and those answers are true if God is the real creator of the universe.

Integrating Christianity and Science

Scientism claims that you cannot integrate Christianity and science. Instead, they claim all theology is nonsense and only science exists to give us the truth. As Moreland points out, "One of the effects of scientism, then, is making the ridicule of Christianity's truth claims more common and acceptable (which is one of scientism's goals)."{19}

If this view is clearly wrong, how should we as Christians view science and its relationship with Christianity and the Bible? First, we need to understand that the topics addressed by science are in most cases peripheral to the topics covered in the Bible. The Bible is primarily concerned with God's efforts to restore people from their state as enemies of God back into eternal fellowship with Him.

One area of significant interaction is the question of how this universe came to exist in its current state. How one views that interaction (i.e. as adversarial or as complementary) depends on whether they are clinging to the unsupported myth of unguided evolution or to the new science of intelligent design. As Moreland states, "Science has done more to confirm the Christian God's existence than to undermine it, and science has provided little or no evidence against belief of theism. Science has, however, raised challenges to various biblical texts, and Christians need to take those challenges seriously."{20}

Moreland suggests there are five ways to relate issues in science and Christian philosophy. Let's consider two of those methods. One is the complementarity model. In this model, two disciplines are addressing the same object or feature but from different, essentially non-overlapping perspectives. "Neither one purports to tell the whole story, but both make true claims about reality."{21} This is the model used by advocates of theistic evolution who take as gospel the latest claims of evolutionary science while saying of course God kicked off the whole process including us in His plan for the universe.

Another way to interact is called the direct interaction model. In this model, theories from theology and from science may directly interact with one another on some topic, either positively or negatively. One area might raise rational difficulties for the other. This approach has the most potential for bringing information from different fields together into a fuller picture of truth. Intelligent design is an area where this model is applied as it questions the validity of eliminating intelligence from the options considered in understanding the development of life on earth.

Since scientism swears that science is the only source of truth, even when scientists cannot agree as to what that scientific truth is, they want to discount inputs from any other source no matter how helpful. So the direct interaction model is a difficult road to take. What are the rational criteria for going against the experts? Moreland suggests there are four criteria for Christian theologians to decide to take this road.

1. Make sure there is not a reasonable interpretation of the Bible that resolves the tension.
2. There is a band of academically qualified scholars who are unified in rejecting the view held by a majority of the relevant experts. In this way, we know that there are people who are familiar with the details of the majority view, who do not believe that it is true.
3. There are good non-rational explanations for why the expert majority holds the problematic view. For historical, sociological, or theological reasons, the majority is not ready to abandon their position rather than because their evidence is overwhelming. "For example, the shift from creationism to Darwinism was primarily, though not exclusively, a shift in philosophy of science."{22}

Given the large amount of evidential support for a Christian worldview, any view that is counter to central components of a Christian worldview should be rejected precisely for that reason. Any view meeting the first three criteria that also attempts to undermine key parts of a Christian worldview will be overwhelmed by the significant rational support for a Christian worldview.

As followers of the God of real truth, Christians need to realize that the so-called truths being taught to justify science over theology are in fact myths and/or self-refuting statements. Every Christian needs to be able to address these fallacies in today's popular science culture. Equip your young adults with this understanding and more by attending our summer event called Mind Games Camp. More information can be found at probe.org/mindgames.

Notes

1. Michael Keas, *Unbelievable: 7 Myths About the History and Future of Science and Religion*, ISI Books, 2019, 2.
2. Rodney Stark, *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity*, ISI Books, 2014 p. 304, 315.
3. J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology*, Crossway, 2018, 26 and 29.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
6. Stark, p. 76.
7. Keas, p. 4 and Chapter 6.
8. Herman Bondi, *Cosmology*, Cambridge University Press, 1952.
9. Owen Gingerich, *God's Universe*, Belknap Press, 2006.
10. Sagan, 1980 *Cosmos* TV series, episode 3.
11. Kepler, letter to Herwart von Hohenburg, April 9/10, 1599.
12. Moreland, p. 52.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
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15. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
18. J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, Oxford, 1982, p. 115.
19. Moreland, p. 31.
20. *Ibid.*, p.174.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

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The Mormon Veneer

Having spent many hours of conversation with those in Mormon leadership, Don Closson considers some of the theological assumptions behind today's evangelical-sounding Mormon proponents.

The Need for Precision

Recent events have helped to pull Mormonism from the fringe of American culture to a place much closer to mainstream thinking about religion and family. Mitt and Ann Romney's campaign for the presidency is only one factor among many contributing to a changing perception of Mormons and their beliefs. For instance, in March of 2011 a musical called *The Book of Mormon* opened on Broadway depicting Mormon missionaries in Uganda. It went on to win multiple awards including nine Tonys and a Grammy. We have also seen the production of popular cable TV programs depicting both real and fictional polygamous families in ways that make them much less controversial. The result is that modern and historical Mormonism seems a little less foreign or isolated from our everyday experiences.



A 2012 Pew Research Center poll found that while eight in ten Americans said they learned little or nothing about the beliefs of Mormons or about the church itself during the past presidential election, it found that Americans are now more likely to describe Mormons as “good people,” “dedicated,” and “hardworking.”^{1} This adds to the evidence that Mormonism has gained a favorable mainstream standing among typical Americans. This growing acceptance of individual Mormons adds to the perception that Mormonism itself is less controversial and perhaps different from other self-labeled Christian groups in only a denominational sense. Some, even in our Bible Churches, feel that we have been too harsh on Mormons and should seek to find common ground rather than point out distinctive theological differences that keep us apart.

While finding common ground is an important part of sharing our faith in any setting, it is essential that when talking with Mormons we clearly distinguish between Mormon and traditional Christian beliefs. This is because both traditions place Jesus Christ at the center of worship and theology, creating an appearance of commonality when, in fact, little exists. The rest of this article will make these differences explicit.

Our society's heavy emphasis on tolerance places pressure on Christians to be more accepting of other belief systems, to focus more on loving people and less on insisting that our beliefs are in some sense universally true. However, it is possible to express love for people without sacrificing the truth that the gospel of Jesus Christ stands on. In the end, it is neither loving nor honest to sacrifice the good news found in the New Testament in the name of a redefined tolerance that refuses to admit that real differences divide orthodox Christianity from Mormon beliefs.

The Person of Christ

Mormons are highly offended when others question whether or not they are Christian. They point out that in 1830 Joseph Smith initially named their religious movement the Church of Christ and that Christ is at the center of every Latter-day Saints Sacrament service. So let me begin by acknowledging that Mormons do place a Jesus Christ at the center of their theological system and that I do not doubt for a minute the sincere faith of my Mormon friends in the Jesus taught by the Mormon Church. However, this leaves us with the problem of defining who this Mormon Jesus is. After all, it is the object of our faith that saves us, not faith itself.

The Mormon view of Jesus is dramatically different from the traditional view held by Christians for

the last two thousand years. Although we use the same names to identify him—Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, and the Word—and we agree on many of His sayings and actions, we differ widely on what kind of being He is. This is important if we are to place our salvation in His hands.

Mormons believe that all conscious entities—God the Father, Jesus the Son, angels, and humanity—are the same kind of beings. As Mormon Apostle John Widtsoe has written, “God and man are of the same race, differing only in their degrees of advancement.”^{2} They also believe that everyone on earth has existed from eternity past, first as disembodied intelligences, then as spirit beings born of God the Father and an unnamed Goddess, and finally incarnated into bodies of flesh and bone. It is interesting to note that, although Jesus is God the Father’s firstborn son, Satan and all of humanity are His spiritual brothers and sisters.

The only difference between you, me, and Jesus is that He has advanced further along the path of spiritual progression to Godhood than we have. According to Latter-day Saints teachings, Jesus is a god today because of His obedience to our heavenly Father and Mother, and to a set of eternal spiritual guidelines. What makes Mormonism dramatically different from traditional Christian belief is that it teaches that we, too, can become Gods just as Jesus has. In fact, it is the Father’s, or Elohim’s, desire that we all become gods and have our own spirit children just as He has.

Are we the same kind of being as God the Father and Jesus Christ? Since Mormons accept the Bible as revelation from God, is this what the Bible teaches? We need to grasp that Jesus is different from every other living thing in the universe, and very different from the way He is represented by the Later-day Saints.

The Latter-day Saints teach that all of humanity is essentially the same kind of being as Jesus, just not as spiritually advanced. Rather than saying that Jesus is God in the flesh, they would emphasize that He is a man of flesh who has become a god. Mormons also reject the doctrine of the Trinity, the idea that there is one God, one being, revealed in three Persons. Instead, they teach that there are three separate beings united in purpose in the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—who cooperate together in order to accomplish the Mormon plan of salvation.

As a result of this thinking, Mormons teach that Elohim in the Old Testament refers to the Father, while Jehovah or Yahweh refers to Jesus. But is this supported by the Bible? The OT uses Jehovah and Elohim as interchangeable titles for the Godhead, of which both the Father and Jesus are part. Deuteronomy 6:4 is a good example of this. It reads, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD [Jehovah] our God [Elohim] is one LORD [Jehovah].” It would be difficult to make this verse fit the Mormon view. Using their ideas it would have to be translated “Hear, O Israel: Jesus our Father is one Jesus.” This doesn’t make sense, especially if Jesus and the Father are two discrete beings.

The Mormon view runs into more difficulty in the New Testament. I asked a Mormon Bishop to confirm that Mormons believe that all sentient beings existed from eternity past, which he agreed to. Then I asked him to read Colossians 1:16-17 which states that Jesus created all things visible and invisible, that He existed before all things, and that all things are held together in Him. At this point I asked him to tell me which idea about Jesus he believed, that we have all lived in eternity past with Jesus or that Jesus made all things and was before all things. He thought for a moment and then replied that both statements are true. At which point I suggested that these are mutually exclusive ideas; we cannot have lived in eternity past with Jesus while at the same time Jesus was before us and made us. He finally admitted that when faced with logical contradictions like this he has to trust in what his prophet Joseph Smith taught.

This is a pretty important idea. Either Jesus is eternally God who, with the Father and Spirit, brought into existence all things and holds all things together moment by moment as the Bible teaches, or He

is merely a human being who happens to be more spiritually advanced than we are.

The Atonement of Christ

If you ask a Mormon what he is trusting in for salvation, he will most likely say that it is the atoning suffering and death of Jesus Christ in the garden called Gethsemane and on the cross. They also believe that there is no other hope by which we can be saved. Although this sounds pretty good to an evangelical's ears, these words mean something quite different than what traditional Christianity teaches.

According to the Latter-day Saints, Christ's death and suffering made it *possible* to be saved from sin, *if we do our part*.^{3} What this means becomes clearer when we read a parable given to explain what Christ's death accomplished in a chapter on the atonement in the Mormon book *Gospel Principles*.

The parable tells of a foolish man who ignored warnings about going too far into debt. Although he made payments along the way, he could not pay the debt in full when it came due. The creditor (God the Father) appeared and threatened to repossess all that the man owned and throw him into prison. The man begged for mercy, but the Father was only concerned about justice and the law. The parable weaves a picture of two eternal ideals, mercy and justice, in conflict.

Christ is depicted as a friend of the debtor who knew him to be foolish but loved him anyway. As mediator, Jesus stands before the Father and says "I will pay the debt if you will free my friend from his commitment so he may keep his possessions and not go to prison." Sounds good so far, but then Jesus turns to the debtor and says, "If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?" And then he adds, "You will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible."

Although mercy is offered in the Mormon view, the word *grace* is nowhere to be found. This isn't a parable that teaches grace and forgiveness; it's a description of a loan being refinanced. Mormons believe that trusting in Jesus' atonement creates a path to salvation in that it provides for our resurrection and the forgiveness of past sins. However, to reach exaltation or complete salvation, in their view, one must earn it through celestial marriage, tithing, attending sacrament meetings, and sustaining the current Prophet, among other responsibilities.

Rather than earning our salvation, Paul teaches grace in Galatians 2:16, writing, "And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified."

The Priesthood

We come now to what Mormons believe to be at the heart of their theological system, the priesthood. They argue that along with the birth of their church in 1830 came a restoration of a priesthood that had been lost since the end of the apostolic period around A.D. 100. According to the Mormon Church, one cannot receive the Holy Spirit, be baptized or be married for time and eternity without proper priestly authority.

Mormons teach that priesthood power literally created heaven and earth; it is the power and authority of God himself. Mormon men can tap into this power, eventually obtaining to two levels of priesthood. At the age of twelve, most Mormon boys are ordained as deacons of the Aaronic

priesthood. By the time they are finished with secondary school, most have become elders within the priesthood order of Melchizedek. Throughout these years Mormon young men receive training, usually prior to the beginning of each school day, for various offices or positions within the two priesthood levels.

Mormons believe that every miracle in the Bible is an example of priesthood power. This is problematic for evangelicals. First, we don't associate miracles with priests. In the Old Testament it was usually prophets who performed miracles, not priests. In the New Testament, miracles are performed by Jesus and his disciples without mention of a specific priesthood. In fact, Peter says that all believers as priests{4} and their function, according to Paul, is to proclaim the gospel of God.{5}

The book of Hebrews teaches that the Mosaic covenant along with the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood was passing away because it was useless for making us righteous or holy. The author tells us of a better covenant and a better priest entering the picture as a result of Christ's ministry. We now have a new covenant in Christ's blood and Jesus is our permanent, perfect, and eternal high priest, replacing the limited imperfect priests of the Mosaic covenant.{6} Nowhere are the followers of Christ told to train for or to seek entry into a priesthood. And Jesus is the only person given the title of priest according to the order of Melchizedek in the New Testament.

Although Mormons and Christians use similar language to describe their faith, they represent two very different belief systems. Mormons see themselves as eternal creatures working their way towards becoming gods and populating a planet with their offspring in the future. Traditional Christians draw a clear line between the creator and creation. We are not gods and will never become one.

Notes

1. www.pewforum.org/Christian/Mormon/attitudes-toward-mormon-faith.aspx accessed on 12/21/12.
2. Apostle John Widtsoe (Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages*, SLC: Stevens and Wallis, 1945, p. 107).
3. *Gospel Principles*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, SLC, Utah, 1997, p. 75.
4. 1 Peter 2:9-10.
5. Romans 15:16.
6. Hebrews 8:6-7.

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The Qur'an From a Christian Perspective

Steve Cable provides a biblical understanding of Islam's holy book, drawing on James White's book What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an {1}. Christians interacting with Muslims will benefit from a basic understanding of the development and the teaching of the Qur'an.

Introduction and Background



Beginning with the basics, we need to understand how the Qur'an came into our possession and how it is viewed by most Muslims. The founder of Islam, Muhammad, was born in Mecca around AD 570 and began to receive instruction leading to the religion of Islam at the age of 40 in AD 610. "The classical belief is that while [the Qur'an's] entirety was "sent down" in one night, the Night of Power, but Muhammad himself received it piecemeal over twenty-two years." {2} Muhammad did not receive a written version as Joseph Smith claimed to have received for the Book of Mormon. Rather he memorized what was told him by the Angel Gabriel and passed it on to certain followers.

The popular Muslim belief is summarized in a recent guide to Islam as follows: "The Qur'an is the literal word of God, which He revealed to His Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. It was memorized by Muhammad, who then dictated it to his Companions. They, in turn, memorized it, wrote it down, and reviewed it with the Prophet Muhammad. . . . Not one letter of the Qur'an has been changed over the centuries." {3}

"From the position of Sunni Islamic orthodoxy, the Qur'an is as eternal as Allah himself. It is the very Word of God, without even the slightest imperfection. The finger of man has no place in it, as the book held reverently in the hand today is an exact copy of a tablet in heaven upon which the Qur'an has been written from eternity past." {4}

How this view holds up to a critical review of the history of Muhammad and the early days of Islam following his death will be addressed later in this document. For now it is important to understand that to a devout Muslim, the Qur'an in its original Arabic is above analysis and above question, for it is a matter of faith that it has been perfectly transmitted and maintained. Note the Qur'an exists only in Arabic. Even though most Muslims depend upon a translation for their access to the teachings of the Qur'an, Muslims still would say the Qur'an itself is not translatable and the public prayers must also be done in Arabic.

It is interesting to realize that the Qur'an in multiple places states that Allah "sent down the Torah and the Gospel" as works that serve as guidance to mankind. One cannot help but wonder, why God would send down the Torah and the Gospels when the Qur'an existed from eternity past and according to Muslim thought supersedes and corrects misconceptions men developed from reading these earlier texts. Why didn't God protect the Gospels in the same way as the Qur'an?

In what follows, we will look at where teachings of the Qur'an are counter to the truth of the Bible and to the historical facts. We will also consider how the current Qur'an came into existence, asking why the creator of the world would pass down his truth in such an uncontrolled fashion.

The Qur'an and Biblical Beliefs

Most Muslims, if they know anything about Christianity, will point to three primary problems with our faith:

1. the Trinity,

2. the resurrection of Jesus, and
3. the corruption of the Scriptures.

Is there anything taught in the Qur'an that causes them to reject the Christian concept of trinity?

In his book, James White describes the key Islamic belief in this way, "Ask any sincere follower what defines Islam, and they will answer quickly *tawhid*, the oneness of Allah, as expressed in Islam's great confession, "I profess that there is only one God worthy of worship and Muhammad is His messenger." . . . Without *tawhid*, you have no Islam." {5}

Interestingly, the word *tawhid* in that form does not appear in the Qur'an just as the word trinity does not appear in the Bible. They are words to describe a concept clearly taught in those two books. The difference between these two words is a major difference between these religions. The Islamic concept of *tawhid* is that Allah **has only** and **can only** exist in one form, the creator of the universe. The Christian understanding is that the one God is expressed in three ways or persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All the persons of God were involved in the creation of this universe and reflect the full nature of God. The Bible is very clear that the Trinity is one God as shown for example in 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6:

"There is no God but one . . . for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."

In Islam, the most feared of all sins is called *shirk*, associating anyone, or anything with Allah. A person who dies in this state of idolatry cannot be forgiven. In Islamic thought, Allah is free to forgive any other sin if he so desires, but he will not forgive anyone who dies in idolatry.

This teaching causes the Trinity to become an unforgivable sin for Christians. "Many Muslims believe that the doctrine of the Trinity and, in particular, the worship of Jesus is an (unforgivable) act of *shirk*. This has led many of them to conclude that Christians, as a group, are bound for hell." {6}

The Qur'an attempts to address the Trinity but does it show knowledge of the concept so that the criticisms offered are accurate and meaningful? "The reason for the question is self-evident: If the Qur'an is the very words of Allah without admixture of man's insights or thoughts, then it would follow inevitably that its representations will be perfectly accurate and its arguments compelling." {7}

What does the Qur'an say about the Trinity? First, it holds up monotheism as the correction for the false Christian claim of the "three." By holding to this concept of the "three," Christians are actually polytheists, denying that God is one. The author of the Qur'an does not understand that Christians are saying there is one God who manifests in three distinct forms or persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the misunderstanding goes much further than this. The Qur'an is very clear that the "three" are the Father, the Son, and Mary. As stated in Surah 5:116,

And when Allah said: "O Jesus son of Mary! Did you say to mankind: "Take me and my mother for two gods other than Allah?" He said: "Transcendent are you! It was not mine to say that of which I had no right. . ."

And this view is reiterated in the Islamic commentaries, the *hadith*. "Nothing in the Qur'anic text actually addresses the essence of Christian faith, even though it is painfully clear the author thought he was doing so." {8}

White believes this distinction helps us respond to the oft-asked question, “Is Allah the same god as Yahweh?” Although Muslims make reference to the one God of Abraham, they deny the witness of the incarnation and the resurrection. Thus denying the entirety of the Christian faith. “If worship is an act of truth, then Muslims and Christians are not worshipping the same object. We do not worship the same God.”{9}

So, we see the Qur’an misrepresents the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and relegates Allah to a lower status than omnipotent God by declaring that Allah is not capable of appearing in multiple forms.

The Qur’an, Jesus and Salvation

As we consider what Muslims are taught in the Qur’an, we next look at the second stumbling block in their view of Christianity: the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

The Qur’an has quite a bit to say about Jesus as a prophet of God, specifically stating He was not God and was not crucified. The name of Jesus appears 25 times in the Qur’an, almost always as *Isa ibn Mariam*, i.e. Jesus the son of Mary. Jesus is presented as the result of a miraculous virgin birth. In the Qur’an, Surah 3:47, it is written, “She said, My Lord! How can I have a child, when no man has touched me? He replied, “such is the will of Allah. He creates what He will. When He decrees a thing He only says: ‘Be!’ and it is.”{10}

The question of how Jesus came to be is an important topic for comparison. First, we see the Qur’an says that Allah created Jesus by declaring His existence and having Him born of a virgin. Second, we understand that the author of the Qur’an believed Christians teach that Jesus came into being as the child of a physical, sexual union between God and Mary. Third, Christianity actually teaches that Jesus was the preexistent creator of the universe (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16-17), always and fully God, who became fully man being born of a virgin. Note that the primary difference between the Qur’an’s view of Jesus’ birth and a biblical view of Jesus’ birth is not the role of Mary, but rather the Qur’an says that Jesus was created at His human conception and the Bible clearly states that Jesus is eternal and was not created but rather took on a new form at his birth:

Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

The words attributed to Jesus in the Qur’an, beginning with words spoken from the crib, are not found in any source from the 1st through 5th centuries. “But the Muslim understanding is that no such historical foundation is needed for lengthy portions of narrative for its words to be true. This is the Qur’an. It has been preserved. For the large majority, that ends the discussion, even when the same believers will then embrace historical criticism to question the value of His words in the Gospels.”{11}

When it comes to the cross, the Qur’an stands firmly and inalterably against the mass of historical evidence and the almost universal view of the populace of its day. This Qur’anic view is not sprinkled throughout the teaching, but rather appears in only one verse, namely Surah 4:157—

“They slew him not, nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them; and those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge of it except the pursuit of a conjecture; [but] certainly they slew him not. But Allah raised him up to Himself.”

This verse stands alone in the Qur'an and surprisingly without commentary in the hadith literature as well. This verse, written six hundred years after the events, in a place far removed from Jerusalem, takes a position counter to the gospel texts from the first century and counter to six centuries of Christian teaching. In more recent times, various Muslim apologists have surmised various tales to build upon this one verse. For example, some Muslims believe that someone else died on the cross and Jesus fled to India to continue his ministry there. {12} Regardless of what unsubstantiated fairy tales one conjures up to support its claim, this verse is based on no historical knowledge of the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus.

"This suggests the author did not have even the slightest knowledge of the centrality of God's redeeming act in Christ on the cross. . . The Qur'an places itself, and all who would believe in it, in direct opposition not only to the Gospels but also everything history itself says on the subject. The question must be asked: Who, truly, is following mere conjecture here? Those who were eyewitnesses on the Hill of the Skull outside Jerusalem? Or the author of the Qur'an, more than half a millennium later?" {13}

Without the cross, salvation in the Qur'an comes through an unknowable mixture of predestination, good works, and the capricious will of Allah. "In Islam, forgiveness is an impersonal act of arbitrary divine power. In Christianity, forgiveness is a personal act of purposeful and powerful yet completely just divine grace." {14}

One cannot attribute these differences between the Qur'an and the New Testament to a minor corruption of the biblical text as they reflect the core themes of these books.

Corrupting the Gospels

As discussed above, most Muslims have been taught there are three primary problems with our faith: the Trinity, the resurrection of Jesus, and the corruption of the scripture. We have dealt with the Trinity and the resurrection of Jesus. Now let us turn to the corruption of scripture.

Most Muslims will affirm to you that the Christian scriptures cannot be relied upon because they have been changed and corrupted over the years and do not reflect the true message of Jesus. But is this affirmation what is taught by the Qur'an, and does it have any basis other than hearsay?

The Qur'an is very clear that the messages sent to the prophets of the Bible are to be believed. For example, Surah 3:84 says, "We believe in Allah . . . and that which was sent down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes; and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have surrendered." Or as stated in a hadith, "Therefore, faithful Muslims believe in every Prophet whom Allah has sent and in every Book He revealed, and never disbelieve in any of them." {15}

Very clearly, the Qur'an states that what was given to the Old Testament prophets and to Jesus was the truth of God. It is not just the prophets themselves who were from the Lord, for the Qur'an states that Allah "sent down the Torah and the Gospel" as works that serve as "guidance to mankind." If this is the case, why do Muslims not interpret the Qur'an in light of the truth from the Gospels, assuming that Allah's truth never changes?

In contrast, it is a virtual pillar of Islamic orthodoxy to hold that the Bible has undergone significant revisions so much as to make them totally unreliable and thus, useless to a modern day Muslim. As James White puts it, "Muslims around the world are taught that the Jews and the Christians altered their Scriptures, though there is no agreement as to when this took place. If anything unites Islamic

apologists, it is the persistent assertion of Qur'anic perfection in contrast to the corrupted nature of the Bible, particularly the New Testament." {16}

This position certainly makes sense from a human perspective. For if one takes the position presented by the Qur'an that we are to believe every word of the Bible, then the huge differences between the theology of the New Testament and the theology of the Qur'an leave one little choice: either reject the Qur'an as not from God, or assume that all of the differences are the result of some massive corruption of the message of the Bible. The normal assumption taught to Muslims today is this corruption happened early on, perhaps even with the apostle Paul.

However, the preponderance of verses in the Qur'an which address this issue point to the corruption as being a distortion of the meaning (not the words) of the text. One example is found in Surah 3:78, "And there is a party of them who distort the Book with their tongues, that you may think that what they say is from the Book, when it is not from the Book." As White observes, "We must conclude that the now predominant claim of the biblical texts themselves, having undergone major alteration and corruption, is a later polemical and theological perspective not required by the Qur'anic text itself. It comes not from the positive teachings of Muhammad but through the unalterable fact of the Qur'anic author's unfamiliarity with the actual biblical text." {17}

As noted by a Christian, Al-Kindi, writing to a Muslim around AD 820, "The situation is plain enough; you witness to the truth of our text—then again you contradict the witness you bear and allege that we have corrupted it; this is the height of folly." {18}

In Surah 5:47, we are urged as Christians to judge by what Allah has revealed in the Gospels. If this admonition has any meaning at all, it must assume that Christians had access to a valid gospel in the 7th century during the life of Muhammad. What Christians had as the Gospels in the 7th century is what we have as the Gospels today. In fact, "each canonical gospel we read today we can document to have existed in that very form three centuries before Muhammad's ministry. A Christian judging Muhammad's claims by the New Testament and finding that he was ignorant of the teachings of the apostles, ignorant of the cross, the resurrection . . . and meaning of the gospel itself, is simply doing what the Qur'an commands us to do in this text." {19}

Thus, while modern Muslims claim the Bible is corrupt and unreliable, the Qur'an appears to teach that the scriptures available to Jews and Christians during Muhammad's day were correct and should be followed; as long as one did not reinterpret the meaning into something that was not really said. However, doing so would lead one to the conclusion that the Qur'an was written by someone who was not knowledgeable concerning Jewish and Christian scripture.

The Perfection of the Qur'an

As noted earlier, one of the primary objections Muslims voice toward Christianity is their belief that our Scriptures have been changed and corrupted while the Qur'an in Arabic is exactly the words given to Muhammad fourteen hundred years ago. Does this belief stand up to impartial scrutiny?

The modern Muslim view of the Qur'an does not allow for the critical examination of sources and variations as has been done for the New Testament. Many bible scholars such as Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Daniel Wallace {20}, point out that the large number of ancient manuscripts from different locations and times give us a richness of sources allowing us to identify the original text of the Christian New Testament with a high degree of confidence. Muslims on the other hand are relying on a specific follower, Uthman the third Caliph, who was purported to have assimilated the correct version and to have ordered the destruction of all other versions.

If the Qur'an is a perfect representation of the message from Allah, what accounts for the differences in multiple accounts of the same story recorded in the Qur'an? For example, four different Surahs contain the story of Lot in Sodom. Each recounting of the story is different from the others even when quoting what Lot said to the Sodomites. Thus we have Muslims pointing to differences in accounts among the Gospels but ignoring accounts of the same events throughout the Qur'an which differ in detail, order, and content.

When we find this type of variation in the Gospels, we recognize that each gospel was written by a different author with a different perspective inspired by the Holy Spirit. But if the Qur'an was preexistent in heaven and given to one man by one angel, one would not expect these types of variants. But as James White notes, "We could provide numerous examples of parallel passages all illustrating with clarity that the serious Muslim exegete must face the reality that the Qur'anic text requires exegesis and harmonization." {21}

In addition to these troubling passages recounting different versions of the same events, we also find legendary stories about the life of Jesus which do not appear in any of the known accounts from the first century. White points out, "The Qur'an fails to make any differentiation between what is clearly legendary in character and what is based on the Hebrew or the Christian Scriptures. Stories that developed centuries after the events they pretend to describe are coupled directly with historically based accounts that carry serious weight and truth content. . . . This kind of fantastic legendary material is hardly the kind of source that can be trusted, and yet the Qur'an's author shows not the slightest understanding of its nature and combines them with historical materials." {22}

In addition to the inconsistencies in retelling stories and the incorporation of legends generated centuries after the actual events, we also should consider whether the current Qur'an is the perfectly accurate version of the earliest version supposedly shared verbally by Muhammad with certain followers. The common Islamic claims are strong and clear:

"The Qur'an is the literal word of God, which He revealed to His Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. It was memorized by Muhammad, who then dictated it to his Companions. They, in turn memorized it, wrote it down, and reviewed it with the Prophet Muhammad . . . Not one letter of the Qur'an has been changed over the centuries." {23}

"It is a miracle of the Qur'an that no change has occurred in a single word, a single [letter of the] alphabet, a single punctuation mark, or a single diacritical mark in the text of the Qur'an during the last fourteen centuries." {24}

Interestingly, the hadiths give us early insight into one view of how the written Qur'an was collected and who was involved. At the time Muhammad died, there was no written version of the Qur'an. It was carried about in the minds of a set of men called the Qurra, each of whom had memorized at least a portion of the Qur'an. However, a number of these Qurra were being killed in battles, raising the prospect that a significant portion of the Qur'an might be lost. According to one hadith, Zaid bin Thabit undertook the task of collecting a written version.

"To many outside the Muslim faith, the Qur'an's organization looks tremendously haphazard and even Islamic literature notes how one surah can contain materials Muhammad gave at very different times in his life. Many Muslims assume Muhammad was behind this organization, but there is little reason to believe it. Zaid and his committee are far more likely to have been responsible." {25}

Eighteen years later the third Caliph, Uthman, charged Zaid and others with rewriting the manuscripts in perfect copies. In the process of doing this, Zaid reportedly found at least two more passages that he had missed in his earlier compilation. Once this was accomplished, "Uthman sent

to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt." {26}

Not every scholar agrees that this story from a hadith is accurate and many suggest a much later date after AD 705 for the compilation of the Qur'an we find today. Whether it was Uthman or some later compilation effort, since the eighth century, we have had a fairly stable text for the Qur'an with few variants. "Muslims see this as a great advantage, even an example of divine inspiration and preservation. In reality, just the opposite is the case. When a text has a major interruption in transmission, one's certainty of being able to obtain the original text becomes limited to the materials that escape the revisionist pen. For the Muslim, Uthman had to get it right, because if he was wrong, there is little hope of ever undoing his work." {27}

Al-Kindi, the Christian apologist writing around AD 820, had much to say on the formation of the Qur'an. He records that multiple versions were collated during the time of Uthman stating, "One man, then, read one version of the Qur'an, his neighbor another, and differed. One man said to his neighbor: "My text is better than yours," while his neighbor defended his own. So additions and losses came about and falsification of the text." {28} According to Al-Kindi, this situation caused Uthman to take his action while his rivals, such as Ali (Muhammad's cousin and the 4th Caliph), created and kept their own manuscripts. Al-Kindi listed alterations and changes made to the earlier documents in creating Uthman's version. One of the reasons Al-Kindi had access to this type of information was the open warfare between the Sunnis and the Shiites, led to charges and countercharges of corruption.

Al-Kindi concludes his discussion stating, "You know what happened between Ali, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, how they hated each other and quarreled and corrupted the text; how each one tried to oppose his neighbor and to refute what he (had) said. Pray, how are we to know which is the true text, and how shall we distinguish it from the false?" {29}

As White states, "It is self-evident that no matter how stable or even primitive the Uthmanic tradition is, it is not the only stream that can claim direct connection to Muhammad and the primitive period of Qur'anic compilation. The greatest concern for any follower of Muhammad should be what he said (or what he received from the Angel Gabriel), not what an uninspired Caliph later thought he should have said." {30}

The study of manuscripts shows beyond all possible question that the Qur'an was neither written down in perfection in the days of Muhammad, nor was it never altered or changed in its transmission.

White concludes his study with this thought, "When we obey the command of Surah 5:4 and test Muhammad's claims in the light of the gospel, of history, and of consistency and truthfulness, we find him, and the Qur'an to fail these tests. The Qur'an is not a further revelation of the God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The author of the Qur'an did not understand the gospel, did not understand the Christian faith, and as such cannot stand in the line of Moses to Jesus to Muhammad that he claimed." {31}

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Marianne Williamson

Marianne Williamson, contender for the 2020 Democratic presidential candidate, has been on Probe's radar for over ten years. As Oprah's spiritual advisor and proponent of the New Age "A Course in Miracles," she is a false teacher according to biblical standards.

Here are links to articles that mention her, as well as related articles you may find interesting:

A Course in Miracles – A Christian Worldview Evaluation

"Is A Course in Miracles Heretical? How Do I Talk to My Friend Who Believes It?"
"Your Article on A Course in Miracles Is Very Disturbing"

Oprah: America's Beloved False Teacher

Oprah's Spirituality: Exploring 'A New Earth' - A Christian Critique

The False Teaching of "The Secret" - A Christian Evaluation

Islam and Terrorism

Kerby Anderson provides various perspectives on the link between Islam and terrorism, including how Americans and Christians can think about its encroachment on our culture.

Clash of Civilizations



In this article we will be looking at Islam and terrorism. Before we look at the rise of Muslim terrorism in our world, we need to understand the worldview conflict between Islam and western values. The Muslim religion is a seventh-century religion. Think about that statement for a moment. Most people would not consider Christianity a first century religion. While it began in the first century, it has taken the timeless message of the Bible and communicated it in contemporary ways.

In many ways, Islam is still stuck in the century in which it developed. One of the great questions is whether it will adapt to the modern world. The rise of Muslim terrorism and the desire to implement sharia law illustrate this clash of civilizations.

In the summer of 1993, Samuel Huntington published an article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?" in the journal *Foreign Affairs*.^{1} Three years later Samuel Huntington published a book using a similar title: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. It became a bestseller, once again stirring controversy. It seems worthy to revisit his comments and predictions because they have turned out to be remarkably accurate.

His thesis was fairly simple. World history will be marked by conflicts between three principal groups: western universalism, Muslim militancy, and Chinese assertion.

Huntington says that in the post-Cold War world, "Global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational."^{2} During most of human history, major civilizations were separated from one another and contact was intermittent or nonexistent. Then for over 400 years, the nation states of the West (Britain, France, Spain, Austria, Prussia, Germany, and the United States) constituted a multipolar international system that interacted, competed, and fought wars with each other. During that same period of time, these nations also expanded, conquered, and colonized nearly every other civilization.

During the Cold War, global politics became bipolar, and the world was divided into three parts. Western democracies led by the United States engaged in ideological, political, economic, and even

military competition with communist countries led by the Soviet Union. Much of this conflict occurred in the Third World outside these two camps and was composed mostly of nonaligned nations.

Huntington argued that in the post-Cold War world, the principal actors are still the nation states, but they are influenced by more than just power and wealth. Other factors like cultural preferences, commonalities, and differences are also influential. The most important groupings are not the three blocs of the Cold War, but rather the major world civilizations. Most significant in discussion in this article is the conflict between the Western world and Muslim militancy.

Other Perspectives on Radical Islam

In the previous section, we talked about the thesis by Samuel Huntington that this is a clash of civilizations.

Bernard Lewis sees this conflict as a phase that Islam is currently experiencing in which many Muslim leaders are attempting to resist the influences of the modern world (and in particular the Western world) on their communities and countries. This is what he had to say about Islam and the modern world:

Islam has brought comfort and peace of mind to countless millions of men and women. It has given dignity and meaning to drab and impoverished lives. It has taught people of different races to live in brotherhood and people of different creeds to live side by side in reasonable tolerance. It inspired a great civilization in which others besides Muslims lived creative and useful lives and which, by its achievement, enriched the whole world. But Islam, like other religions, has also known periods when it inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence. It is our misfortune that part, though by no means all or even most, of the Muslim world is now going through such a period, and that much, though again not all, of that hatred is directed against us. {3}

This does not mean that all Muslims want to engage in jihad warfare against America and the West. But it does mean that there is a growing clash of civilizations.

William Tucker believes that the actual conflict results from what he calls the Muslim intelligentsia. He says “that we are not facing a clash of civilizations so much as a conflict with an educated segment of a civilization that produces some very weird, sexually disoriented men. Poverty has nothing to do with it. It is stunning to meet the al Qaeda roster—one highly accomplished scholar after another with advanced degrees in chemistry, biology, medicine, engineering, a large percentage of them educated in the United States.” {4}

His analysis is contrary to the many statements that have been made in the past that poverty breeds terrorism. While it is certainly true that many recruits for jihad come from impoverished situations, it is also true that the leadership comes from those who are well-educated and highly accomplished.

Tucker therefore concludes that we are effectively at war with a Muslim intelligentsia. These are essentially “the same people who brought us the horrors of the French Revolution and 20th century Communism. With their obsession for moral purity and their rational hatred that goes beyond all irrationality, these warrior-intellectuals are wreaking the same havoc in the Middle East as they did in Jacobin France and Mao Tse-tung’s China.” {5}

Threat from Radical Islam

It is hard to estimate the extent of the threat of radical Islam, but there are some commentators who have tried to provide a reasonable estimate. Dennis Prager provides an overview of the extent of the threat:

Anyone else sees the contemporary reality—the genocidal Islamic regime in Sudan; the widespread Muslim theological and emotional support for the killing of a Muslim who converts to another religion; the absence of freedom in Muslim-majority countries; the widespread support for Palestinians who randomly murder Israelis; the primitive state in which women are kept in many Muslim countries; the celebration of death; the honor killings of daughters, and so much else that is terrible in significant parts of the Muslim world—knows that civilized humanity has a new evil to fight. {6}

He argues that just as previous generations had to fight the Nazis and the communists, so this generation has to confront militant Islam. But he also notes something is dramatically different about the present Muslim threat. He says:

Far fewer people believed in Nazism or in communism than believe in Islam generally or in authoritarian Islam specifically. There are one billion Muslims in the world. If just 10 percent believe in the Islam of Hamas, the Taliban, the Sudanese regime, Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism, bin Laden, Islamic Jihad, the Finley Park Mosque in London or Hizbollah—and it is inconceivable that only one of 10 Muslims supports any of these groups' ideologies—that means a true believing enemy of at least 100 million people. {7}

This very large number of people who wish to destroy civilization poses a threat that is unprecedented. Never has civilization had to confront such large numbers of those would wish to destroy civilization.

So, what is the threat in the United States? Let's take one number and one percentage for an estimate. There are about 4 million Muslim-Americans in the U.S., and we are often told that nearly all are law-abiding citizens. So let's assume that percentage is even as high as 99 percent. That still leaves one percent who believe in jihad and could pose a threat to America. Multiply one percent by 4 million and you get a number of 40,000 individuals that Homeland Security needs to try to monitor. Even if you use a percentage of one-tenth of one percent, you still get about 4,000 potential terrorists in America.

That is why it is important to understand the potential threat we face from radical Islam.

Islamic Tipping Point

When the Muslim population increases in a country, there are certain social changes that have been documented. Peter Hammond deals with this in his book, *Slavery, Terrorism, & Islam*. Most people have never read the book, but many have seen an email on one of the most quoted parts of the book. {8}

He argued that when the Muslim population is under five percent, the primary activity is proselytizing, usually from ethnic minorities and the disaffected. By the time the Muslim population reaches five percent or more, it begins to exert its influence and start pushing for Sharia law.

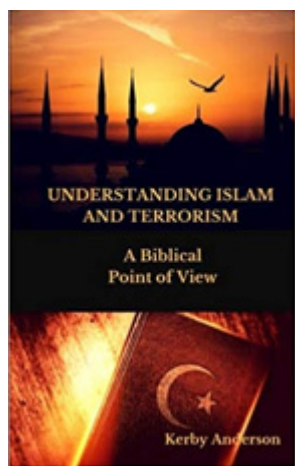
Peter Hammond sees a significant change when a Muslim population reaches ten percent (found in

many European countries). At that point, he says you begin to see increased levels of violence and lawlessness. You also begin to hear statements of identity and the filing of various grievances.

At twenty to thirty percent, there are examples of hair-trigger rioting and jihad militias. In some countries, you even have church bombings. By forty percent to fifty percent, nations like Bosnia and Lebanon experience widespread massacres and ongoing militia warfare. When at least half the population is Muslim, you begin to see the country persecute infidels and apostates and Sharia law is implemented over all of its citizens.

After eighty percent, you see countries like Iran, Syria, and Nigeria engage in persecution and intimidation as a daily part of life. Sometimes state-run genocide develops in an attempt to purge the country of all infidels. The final goal is "Dar-es-Salaam" (the Islamic House of Peace).

Peter Hammond would probably be the first to say that these are generalizations and there are certainly exceptions to the rule. But the general trends have been validated through history. When the Muslim population is small, its leaders focus on winning converts and working to gain sympathy for Sharia law. But then their numbers increase, the radical Muslims take over and the Islamic domination begins.



In this article we have been looking at the challenge of Islam when it comes to jihad and terrorist activity. I document all of this in my new book, *Understanding Islam and Terrorism*. The book not only deals with the threat of terrorism but also takes time to explain the theology behind Islam with helpful suggestions on how to witness to your Muslim friends. You can find more information about my book on the Probe Ministries website.

Sharia Law and Radical Islam

A foundational practice of Islam is the implementation of Sharia into the legal structure. Sharia is a system of divine law, belief, or practice that is based upon Muslim legal interpretation. It applies to economics, politics, and society.

Sometimes the world has been able to see how extreme the interpretation of Sharia can be. Muslims have been put to death when they have been accused of adultery or homosexuality. They have been put to death for leaving the religion of Islam. And these are not isolated examples.

Sharia law is very different in many respects from the laws established through the U.S. Constitution and the laws established through English Common law. In an attempt to prevent Sharia law from being implemented in America, a number of state legislatures have such bans on Sharia law. Voters in other states have approved a ban that has been struck down by a federal appeals court.

Although opponents argue that these Sharia law bans are unnecessary, various studies have found significant cases of Sharia law being allowed in U.S. courts. One report with the title, "Sharia Law and the American State Courts" {9} found 50 significant cases of Sharia law in U.S. courts just from their small sample of appellate published cases. When they looked at state courts, they found an additional 15 cases in the trial courts and 12 more in the appellate courts. Judges are making decisions deferring to Sharia law even when those decisions conflict with the U.S. Constitution and the various state constitutions.

How should we respond to the increased use of Sharia law in America? One simple way to explain your concern to legislators, family, friends, and neighbors is to remember the numbers 1-8-14. These three numbers stand for the three amendments to the U.S. Constitution that prevent the use of Sharia law.

The First Amendment says that there should be no establishment of religion. Sharia law is based on one religion's interpretation of rights. The First Amendment prohibits the establishment of any national religion (including Islam).

The Eighth Amendment prohibits "cruel and unusual punishment." Most Americans would consider the penalties handed down under Sharia law to be cruel and unusual.

The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees each citizen equal protection under the Constitution. Sharia law does not treat men and women equally, nor does it treat Muslims and non-Muslims equally. This also violates the Constitution.

These are just a few ways to argue against Sharia law. As Christians, we need discernment to understand the religion of Islam, and boldness to address the topic of radical Islam with biblical convictions.

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Lifting the Spell

Steve Cable critically considers atheist Daniel Dennett's book Breaking the Spell to gain a better understanding of the contrast between the "bright" perspective and a biblical perspective.

Blinded by the "Bright"

Is your belief in God purely the result of natural evolutionary forces? Has Christianity evolved over the centuries to dupe you into belief for its own survival? This proposition may insult your faith, your intelligence, and your self worth. However, it is the central theme of a recent book by Daniel Dennett entitled *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*.{1}



Philosopher Daniel Dennett is best known for his 1995 book, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, and his July 2003 op-ed entitled "The Bright Stuff." Dennett is a self proclaimed "bright." According to him,

A bright is a person with a naturalist as opposed to a supernaturalist worldview. We brights don't believe in ghosts or elves or the Easter Bunny-or God. . . . Don't confuse the noun with the adjective: "I'm a bright" is not a boast but a proud avowal of an inquisitive worldview.{2}

I am relieved he is not boasting, but my English teacher would say that "a proud avowal" is a good definition of a boast. In any case, Dennett is a proud proponent of a naturalist worldview.

The book's premise is that religion is a powerful, dangerous force in need of rigorous study, using the tools of modern evolutionary science. By understanding the natural forces that imbue religion with so much power, perhaps an enlightened world can neutralize religion while retaining the positive benefits, if any. Our hero, Dennett, has ventured into the sorcerer's den of theologians, ministers, and philosophers to break the spell holding us prisoner. He states, "The spell that I say must be broken is the taboo against a forthright, scientific, no-holds-barred investigation of religion as one natural phenomenon among many."{3}

Dennett lobbies for a truly scientific (meaning atheistic) study of the origins and mechanisms of religion. According to Dennett, we had better understand religion before it destroys us. In today's dangerous world, that may not seem to be such a bad sentiment. Romans chapter 1 tells us that religions not based on God's revealed truth are natural phenomenon because they "worship the creature rather than the creator."{4} However, we should examine the implications of his so-called scientific study before biting into the apple with him.

Critically considering some themes from Dennett's book may help us gain a better understanding of the contrast between the "bright" perspective and a biblical perspective. By examining an atheist's misconceptions, we may discover areas where we have unintentionally adopted a "bright" perspective rather than a biblical worldview. Thoughtfully considering the relationship between Christianity and other religions can better prepare us to defend the hope that is in us.

A Bright's View of Religion

What is religion? Dennett begins by defining religion as “social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is to be sought.”{5} Later he adds that “religion . . . invokes gods who are effective agents in real time and who play a central role in the way participants think about what they ought to do.”{6}

Defined in this way, religion is all about groups of people seeking approval of supernatural agents to obtain real time benefits. He also detects an appearance of design, calling religion “a finely tuned amalgam of brilliant plays and strategies capable of holding people enthralled and loyal for their entire lives.”{7}

You and I are probably not yearning for a social system or an “amalgam of brilliant strategies.” We want an eternal relationship with a real, living God. These definitions are why we sometimes say, “Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship.”

Dennett wants to completely knock the wind out of your sails by stating “that religion is natural as opposed to supernatural, that it is a human phenomenon composed of events, organisms, objects, . . . and the like that all obey the laws of physics or biology, and hence do not involve miracles.”{8} Elsewhere he says that “I feel a moral imperative to spread . . . evolution, but evolution is not my religion. I don't have a religion.”{9}

For a bright, science does not follow the evidence wherever it leads, but assumes natural explanations exist for every experience. Thus, he proposes that we should study religion by assuming that its foundation is false. That is like playing tennis with your feet tied together—you can never get to where you need to be to return the ball.

Let's consider a different definition that better captures the role of religion:

My religion is what I believe about the origin, nature, and future of man and our relationship to the supernatural. My beliefs about eternity form the foundation for how I view my life on earth.

Using this definition, Dennett's naturalism is his religion. And, your relationship with Jesus Christ resulted from your religion, your belief that Jesus is God.

To be fair, *organized religion* is a social system for practicing and propagating a common set of religious beliefs. Organized religion may result in some of my beliefs being ingrained rather than chosen, but they are still my belief system. Determining which, if any, of these organized religions is teaching the truth about eternity should be of utmost importance to every person.

The Purpose of Religion

What is the purpose of religion? Throughout his book, Dennett suggests that religions are evolutionary artifacts. Thus, any benefits of religion must be realized here and now to be favored by natural selection. From Dennett's perspective, what religious people say they want from religion is “a world at peace, with as little suffering as we can manage, with freedom and justice and well-being and meaning for all.”{10}

He also surmises that

The three favorite purposes . . . for religion are:

- To comfort us in our suffering and allay our fear of death.
- To explain things we can't otherwise explain.
- To encourage group cooperation in the face of trials and enemies.{11}

At first blush, these sound like good purposes, things we all desire (except perhaps the last one for those of us who have been burned by group projects). Some churches even promote these goals as the primary message of Christianity. But how can these purposes explain Jesus saying, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world"?(12) Or, Paul saying, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory"?(13) Dennett's purposes cannot explain these statements because they are based on a naturalistic worldview where death is the end.

Ultimately, religion is not about this life. It is about the next life. One of my wife's favorite sayings to help in dieting is, "A moment on the lips means a lifetime on the hips." It is this perspective of lasting consequences for our actions that gives religion such power. Whether it is a Buddhist seeking karma, a Muslim seeking paradise, or a Christian seeking crowns in glory, an eternal perspective is a common trait of the devoted.

The essential contrast between religions is not over which can offer the best temporal benefits or produce moral behavior. It is about which one offers the truth about the nature of God, life, and eternity. Salvation occurs when you believe that Jesus is *the* way, *the* truth and *the* life,{14} and you confess Him as Lord.{15} In contrast, eternal separation is the result of rejecting the truth. As Paul tells us, "[they] perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved."{16}

The purpose of religion is to propagate the truth about the important questions that determine our eternal destiny. The most important topic to study is not "How can we get the temporal benefits from religion, while really assuming that there is no eternity?" but instead "How can I determine which religion has the truth about eternity?"

Defending the Bright Religion

In *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett proposes evolutionary science can explain religious beliefs as natural phenomenon. He believes his religion, Darwinism, can make the world better by neutralizing the power of theistic religion. One problem; his religion is not accepted by most Americans. Dennett laments:

[O]nly about a quarter [of America] understands that evolution is about as well established as the fact that water is H₂O. . . . how, in the face of. . . massive scientific evidence, could so many Americans disbelieve in evolution? It is simple: they have been . . . told that the theory of evolution is false (or at least unproven) by people they trust more than . . . scientists.{17}

Naturally, Dennett argues for his point of view. His argument exhibits three flaws common in many arguments for Darwinism:

1. *Bait and switch definitions.* The Darwinist says, "Fact: Evolution defined as change over time through natural selection occurs. Fact: Darwinism is based on evolution. Conclusion: Darwinism is proven as the explanation for life in this universe." Claiming that Darwinism is proven because evolution occurs is like the over eager detective stating, "Fact: You were in the city on the day of the murder. Fact: The murderer had to be in the city on that day. Conclusion: You are proven to be the murderer." The two facts are correct, but the reasoning is flawed.

2. *Attack the skeptics, not the evidence.* Dennett states that “there are no reputable scientists who claim (that Darwinism is unproven). Not a one. There are plenty of frauds and charlatans, though.”{18} So, anyone who doubts is a fraud regardless of their credentials. His assertion is laughable when one realizes over seven hundred scientists with impressive credentials have signed a statement expressing their skepticism of Darwinism.{19} When you don’t have an answer for the evidence, your only recourse is to attack the witness.

3. *Declare yourself the winner.* Assume Darwinism is true and use that assumption to refute other theories. Dennett states, “Intelligent Design proponents . . . have all been carefully and patiently rebutted by conscientious scientists who have taken the trouble to penetrate their smoke screens of propaganda and expose both their shoddy arguments and their apparently deliberate misrepresentations.”{20}

Since defenders of Darwinism attempt to create smoke screens of propaganda, shoddy arguments, and apparently deliberate misrepresentations, it is not surprising that most Americans have not signed up for his religion. However, they control the media and educational systems, so the battle is far from over. Equip yourself to use this conflict to share the truth by checking out Probe’s material, *on evolution and Darwinism*, at Probe.org.

Toxic Tolerance

In *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett assures us that atheism is the best course, but he may be willing to tolerate other religions if it can be shown they produce some benefits. He lists three main options among those who call themselves religious but vigorously advocate tolerance:

1. *False humility.* “The time is not ripe for candid declarations of religious superiority, . . . let sleeping dogs lie in hopes that those of other faiths can gently be brought around over the centuries.”{21}

2. *Religious equality.* “It really doesn’t matter which religion you swear allegiance to, as long as you have some religion.”{22}

3. *Benign neglect.* “Religion . . . really doesn’t do any good and is simply an empty historical legacy we can afford to maintain until it quietly extinguishes itself (in) the future.”{23}

How does your faith fit into his list of viable options? If you believe your religion is true, none of these options makes sense. How can you “let sleeping dogs lie” or say “it doesn’t really matter” when you have good news of eternal significance? Moreover, if your religion is “simply an empty historical legacy,” don’t put up with it any longer. Join with Paul in saying, “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”{24}

Dennett’s tolerance options assume that religions claiming revealed truth cannot coexist without leading to conflict and suffering. To the contrary, religious wars are the result of the selfish ambition of men rather than the conflict between competing truth claims. Jesus gave us the model of authentic religious tolerance when he said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would be fighting.”{25} Christianity is not about physical or political conquest. It is about redeeming people from slavery to freedom, from death to eternal life.

Truth is not threatened when competing worldviews are able to enthusiastically promote their beliefs. When each person is free to seek the truth and make truth choices without fear of reprisals or coercion, the gospel can flourish. Eternity, not religious wars or religious leaders, will eventually

be the judge of what is truth. In the end, truth is not determined by the majority, but by reality.

One thing we know to be true is that “God does not desire any to perish.”{26} Consequently, we should not accept any version of tolerance which mutes proclaiming the good news.

Dennett wants to “break the spell” against studying religion as a natural phenomenon. Instead, let’s join together in lifting the spell of naturalism by proclaiming the truth that Jesus Christ is indeed our Creator and Lord.

Notes

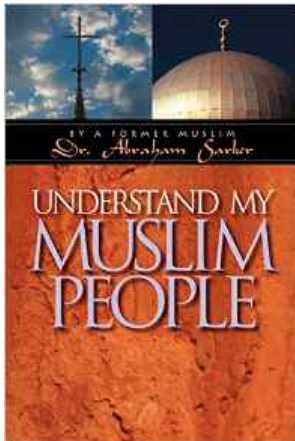
1. Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, Viking Press, 2006.
2. Daniel Dennett, “The Bright Stuff,” *The New York Times*, July, 2003.
3. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 17.
4. Romans 1:25. (All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible, update version.)
5. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 9.
6. *Ibid.*, 11.
7. *Ibid.*, 154.
8. *Ibid.*, 25.
9. *Ibid.*, 268.
10. *Ibid.*, 17.
11. *Ibid.*, 103.
12. John 16:33.
13. 2 Cor. 4:17.
14. John 14:6.
15. Romans 10:9-10.
16. 2 Thess 2:10-12.
17. *Ibid.*, 59.
18. *Ibid.*, 61.
19. www.dissentfromdarwin.org.
20. *Ibid.*, 61.
21. *Ibid.*, 290.
22. *Ibid.*, 290.
23. *Ibid.*, 290.
24. 1 Corinthians 15:19.
25. John 18:36.
26. 1 Timothy 2:3.

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Basic Religious Practices of Worldwide Muslims

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

Between October 2011 and November 2012, Pew Research Center conducted a major survey of Muslims involving more than 30,000 face-to-face interviews in 26 countries across North Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Since Probe has been evaluating similar surveys about the beliefs and practices of Christians and other faiths in America, we wanted to analyze the data in this large survey to see how the beliefs and practices of Muslims in the eastern hemisphere relate to Christians in America. We also wanted to see how Muslim beliefs and practices varied across different regions. To do this, we divided the data into five geographic regions: North Africa, Middle East, Europe, the 'Stans (e.g. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.



To evaluate the religious practices of Muslims, a reasonable place to start would be the Five Pillars of Islam. “Muslims hope that by completing these duties of Islam, Allah will favor them and grant them entrance into heaven.” {1} In other words, performing these duties are necessary but not sufficient to gain the reward of eternal life in heaven. These five pillars are:

1. Declaring “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet.”
2. Praying five times each day in Arabic quoting from the Qur’an
3. Fasting during daylight hours of the month of Ramadan
4. Giving 2.5% of their income for the poor and for the cause of Islam
5. Completing the hajj, a ritual pilgrimage to Mecca

Because the hajj is a once in a lifetime event and according to the survey data is most likely to occur after the age of 60 (if at all), only the first four pillars are considered in our analysis. The results divided into age groups and regions of the world are as follows:

% Practicing Four of the Pillars of Islam					
Age	North Africa	Middle East	Eastern Europe	The 'Stans	South Asia
18 - 29	49%	41%	10%	11%	49%
30 plus	58%	57%	16%	17%	60%

As shown, the geographical groups vary significantly. The composite of all those surveyed is 40% of the respondents claim to practice these four pillars. While not miniscule, this does indicate that the vast majority of those who claim to be Muslim are not seriously attempting to gain favor with Allah by adhering to these four key pillars of the faith.

One startling thing we note from this table is that the Eastern European (e.g. Russia, Bosnia,

Turkey) Muslims and those from the 'Stans do not practice the four pillars to the same degree as other areas surveyed. In those areas, less than 1 in 7 practice the four pillars, while in the other areas it is more than half of the people. In general, Eastern European Muslims and those in the 'Stans do not practice the four pillars, much less the five pillars, of Islam. Given this, one may argue that the Islam practiced in these parts of the world is not Islam at all, but rather another religion with a historical name, Islam, which may at some point in the past been the dominant religion.

The second fact that stands out in the table is the difference in practice versus age. From our earlier blog post on religious beliefs, the results showed very little difference between those ages 18 - 29 and the rest of the respondents, but this is not the case for religious practice. In Eastern Europe and the 'Stans those over the age of 30 are more than 50% more likely to practice the four pillars than are those aged 18 to 29. In the other areas of North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, the older adults are 18% to 37% more likely to practice the key pillars of Islam. In fact, if we compare those ages 18 to 29 with those 60 and older these ratios grow to more than 150% and 31% to 50% respectively.

It appears that the younger adults are not as committed to carrying out these practices as their elders. We can only speculate on whether this difference will diminish as they get older. This difference may in fact shrink over time because, as noted earlier, there is virtually no difference in the percent of young adults and the percent of older adults who profess a Muslim worldview.

The results found for this aspect of religious practice are generally consistent with those reported for religious beliefs (i.e., a Muslim worldview). We find the majority of those who claim to be Muslim to NOT hold a Muslim worldview and do not practice the five pillars of Islam. In our next post, we will compare Muslim religious practice with Christian religious practice in the United States.

Note

1. Dr. Abraham Sarkar, *Understand My Muslim People*, page 169, Barclay Press, 2004.

Acknowledgement: The World's Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center - Religion & Public Life. The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by James Bell, Director of International Survey Research, Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

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The Pagan Connection: Did Christianity Borrow from the Mystery Religions?

Dr. Pat Zukeran examines the myths from mystery religions which are sometimes argued to be the source of our Gospel accounts of Jesus. He finds that any such connection is extremely weak and does not detract from the reliability of the gospel message.

One of the popular ideas being promoted today especially on the internet is the idea that the miracle stories of Jesus were borrowed from ancient pagan myths. Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy write in

their book *The Laughing Jesus*, “Each mystery religion taught its own version of the myth of the dying and resurrecting Godman, who was known by different names in different places. In Egypt, where the mysteries began, he was Osiris. In Greece he became Dionysus, in Asia Minor he is known as Attis, in Syria he is Adonis, in Persia he is Mithras, in Alexandria he is Serapis, to name a few.”{1}



Proponents of this idea point out that there are several parallels between these pagan myths and the story of Jesus Christ. Parallels including a virgin birth, a divine Son of God, the god dying for mankind, resurrection from the dead, and others are cited. Skeptics allege that Christianity did not present any unique teaching, but borrowed the majority of its tenets from the mystery religions.

Indeed, some of the alleged parallels appear to be quite striking. One example is the god Mithras. This myth teaches that Mithras was born of a virgin in a cave, that he was a traveling teacher with twelve disciples, promised his disciples eternal life, and sacrificed himself for the world. The god Dionysius miraculously turns water into wine. The Egyptian god Osiris is killed and then resurrects from the dead.

This position was taught in the nineteenth century by the History of Religions School, but by the mid-twentieth century this view was shown to be false and it was abandoned even by those who believed Christianity was purely a natural religion.{2} Ron Nash wrote, “During a period of time running roughly from about 1890 to 1940, scholars often alleged that primitive Christianity had been heavily influenced by Platonism, Stoicism, the pagan religions, or other movements in the Hellenistic world. Largely as a result of a series of scholarly books and articles written in rebuttal, allegations of early Christianity’s dependence on its Hellenistic environment began to appear much less frequently in the publications of Bible scholars and classical scholars. Today most Bible scholars regard the question as a dead issue.”{3}

Despite the fact that many of the arguments were rejected, this theory has once again emerged through the popular writings of skeptics.

What makes Christianity unique among the world religions is that it is a historical faith based on the historical person of Christ who lived a miraculous life. In what follows, we will examine Christianity to see if it teaches a unique Savior or if it is simply a copy of these pagan myths.

Fallacies of the Theory

There are several flaws with the theory that Christianity isn’t unique. New Testament scholars Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, and Dan Wallace point out several fallacies. The first is the *composite* fallacy. Proponents of this view lump together pagan religions as if they are one religion when making comparisons to Christianity. An attempt is made to show strong parallels by combining features from various religions.{4} However, when the individual myths themselves are studied, the reader soon finds major differences and very little commonality.

A second fallacy is a fallacy of *terminology*. Christian terms are used to describe pagan beliefs, and then it is concluded that there are parallel origins and meanings. Although the terms used are the same, however, there are big differences between Christian and pagan practices and definitions.{5}

A third fallacy is the *chronological* fallacy. Supporters of the theory incorrectly assume that Christianity borrowed many of its ideas from the mystery religions, but the evidence reveals it was actually the other way around. There is no archaeological evidence that mystery religions were in Palestine in the first century A.D. Jews and early Christians loathed syncretism with other religions. They were uncompromisingly monotheistic while Greeks were polytheistic. Christians also strongly defended the uniqueness of Christ (Acts 4:12). Although Christians encountered pagan religions, they opposed any adopting of foreign beliefs. {6} Ron Nash stated, "The uncompromising monotheism and the exclusiveness that the early church preached and practiced make the possibility of any pagan inroads . . . unlikely if not impossible." {7}

Fourth is the *intentional* fallacy. Christianity has a linear view of history. History is moving in a purposeful direction. There is a purpose for mankind's existence; history is moving in a direction to fulfill God's plan for the ages. The mystery religions have a cyclical view of history. History continues in a never ending cycle or repetition often linked with the vegetation cycle. {8}

Christianity gains its source from Judaism, not Greek mythology. Jesus, Paul, and the apostles appeal to the Old Testament, and you find direct teachings and fulfillments in the New Testament. Teachings such as one God, blood atonement for sin, salvation by grace, sinfulness of mankind, bodily resurrection, are sourced in Judaism and foreign to Greek mythology. The idea of resurrection was not taught in any Greek mythological work prior to the late second century A.D. {9}

Legends of the Mystery Religions

As noted above, critics of Christianity point to several parallels between Christianity and the myths of the mystery religions. However, a brief study of the legends reveals that there are few if any parallels to the life of Jesus Christ. Historians acknowledge that there are several variations to many of these myths and that they also evolved and changed under the influence of Roman culture and, later, Christianity. Historical research indicates that it was not until the third century A.D. that Christianity and the mystery religions came into real contact with one another. {10} A brief overview of some of the most popular myths reveals the lack of resemblance with Christianity.

In the matter of death and resurrection, major differences are seen between Christianity and pagan myths. First, none of the resurrections in these myths involve the God of the universe dying a voluntary death for His creation. Only Jesus died for sins; the death of other gods was due to hunting accidents, emasculation, and other calamities. The gods in these stories die by compulsion, not by choice, sometimes in bitterness and despair, never in self-giving love. {11}

Second, Jesus died once for all (Heb. 7:27, 9:25-28), while pagan gods repeat the death and rebirth cycle yearly with the seasons.

Third, Jesus' death was not a defeat but a triumph. The New Testament's mood of victory and joy (1 Cor. 15:50-57 and Col. 2:13-15) stands in contrast to the mood of pagan myths which is dark and sorrowful over the fate of their gods.

Finally, Jesus' death was an actual event in history. Christianity insists on and defends the historical credibility of the Gospel accounts while the pagan cults make no such attempt. {12}

A popular myth that some believe parallels the resurrection of Christ is the story of Osiris. The cult of the gods Osiris and his wife Isis originated in Egypt. According to the legend, Osiris' wicked brother Set murdered him and sank his coffin to the bottom of the Nile. Isis recovered the coffin and returned it to Egypt. However, Set discovered the body, cut it into fourteen pieces, and threw the

pieces into the Nile. Isis collected thirteen of the body parts and bandaged the body, making the first mummy. Osiris was transformed and became the ruler of the underworld, and exists in a state of semi-consciousness.

This legend hardly parallels the resurrection of Christ. Osiris is not resurrected from death to life. Instead he is changed into another form and lives in the underworld in a zombie state. Christ rose physically from the grave, conquering sin and death. The body that was on the cross was raised in glory.

Resurrection Parallels

Two other popular myths compared to Christianity are those of Mithras and Attis.

There is a belief that the story of Mithras contains a death and resurrection. However, there is no teaching in early Mithraism of neither his death nor his resurrection. Ron Nash stated, "Mithraism had no concept of the death and resurrection of its god and no place for any concept of rebirth — at least during its early stages. . . . Moreover, Mithraism was basically a military cult. Therefore, one must be skeptical about suggestions that it appealed to nonmilitary people like the early Christians." {13}

Moreover, Mithraism flowered after Christianity, not before, so Christianity could not have copied from it. The timing is incorrect to have influenced the development of first-century Christianity. It is most likely the reverse: Christianity influenced Mithraism. Edwin Yamauchi, one of the foremost scholars on ancient Persia and Mithraism states, "The earliest mithraea are dated to the early second century. There are a handful of inscriptions that date to the early second century, but the vast majority of texts are dated after A.D. 140. Most of what we have as evidence of Mithraism comes in the second, third, and fourth centuries AD. That's basically what's wrong with the theories about Mithraism influencing the beginnings of Christianity." {14}

The legend of Attis was popular in the Hellenistic world. According to this legend, Cybele, also known as the mother goddess, fell in love with a young Phrygian shepherd named Attis. However, he was unfaithful to her so she caused him to go mad. In his insanity, he castrated himself and died. Cybele mourned greatly (which caused death to enter into the world). She preserved Attis' dead body, allowing his hair to grow and little finger to move. In some versions, Attis returns to life in the form of an evergreen tree. However, there is no bodily resurrection to life. All versions teach that Attis remained dead. Any account of a resurrection of Attis does not appear till a hundred and fifty years after Christ. {15}

To sum up, the claim that Christianity adopted its resurrection account from the pagan mystery religions is false. There are very few parallels to the resurrection of Christ. The idea of a physical resurrection to glory is foreign to these religions, and the stories of dying and rising gods do not appear till well after Christianity.

Myths of a Virgin Birth

Let us now look-at the alleged parallels between virgin births in the mystery religions and the virgin birth of Christ. Parallels quickly break down when the facts are analyzed. In the pagan myths, the gods lust after women, take on human form, and enter into physical relationships. Also, the offspring that are produced are half human and half divine beings in contrast to Christ who is fully human and fully divine, the creator of the universe who existed from eternity past.

The alleged parallels to the virgin birth are found in the legends of Dionysus and Mithras. Dionysus is the god of wine. In this story, Zeus disguised as a man had relations with Semele and she became pregnant. In a jealous rage, Hera, Zeus' wife, attempted to burn Semele. Zeus rescued the fetus and sewed it into his thigh until the offspring, Dionysus, was born. The birth of Dionysus was the result of a sexual union of Zeus, in the form of a man, and Semele. This cannot be considered a virgin birth.

One of the popular cults of the later Roman Empire was the cult of Mithra which originated in Persia. Mithra was supposedly born when he emerged from a rock; he was carrying a knife and torch and wearing a Phrygian cap. He battled first with the sun and then with a primeval bull, thought to be the first act of creation. Mithra slew the bull, which then became the ground of life for the human race. {16} The birth of Mithra from a rock, born fully grown, hardly parallels the virgin birth of Christ.

New Testament scholar. Raymond Brown states that alleged virgin parallels "consistently involve a type of *hieros gamos* where a divine male, in human or other form, impregnates a woman, either through normal sexual intercourse or through some substitute form of penetration. They are not really similar to non-sexual virginal conception that is at the core of the infancy narratives, a conception where there is no male deity or element to impregnate Mary." {17}

The Gospel of Luke teaches that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and through the power of the Most High she became pregnant. Mary had no physical relationship with a man or a deity who became a man.

Our study of the mystery religions reveals very few parallels with Christianity. For this reason, the theory that Christianity copied its major tenets from the mystery religions should be rejected.

Notes

1. Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, *The Laughing Jesus* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 55-56.
2. Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, and Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications: 2006), 221.
3. Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2007), 167.
4. Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, 223-4.
5. Ibid., 224-6.
6. Ibid., 231-234.
7. Ronald Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks* (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 168.
8. Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, 221.
9. Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, MO.: College Press Publishing, 1997), 34.
10. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 129.
11. Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL :InterVarsity Press, 1984),53.
12. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 171-172.
13. Ibid., 144.
14. Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 169.
15. Ibid., 177.
16. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 144.
17. Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 182.