Probe Religious Views Study 2020 – Do Christians Believe in Christ as the Only Savior of the World?

Steve Cable explores the results of Probe's new 2020 survey, examining what people believe about Jesus in His time on earth, and His claim to be the only way to the Father.

Our 2020 survey reveals a striking decline in evangelical religious beliefs and practices over the last ten years. In our first article, we saw a significant degradation in the percentage of American young adults who are born again{1} and profess a biblically informed worldview{2}. Perhaps a biblical worldview, as defined by the set of questions we used, is not an accurate gauge of an orthodox Christian belief.

In this article, we will look at several other areas designed to identify those people who closely align their thoughts with the teaching of the Bible. We will look at two areas of belief for all American young adults and for Born Again Protestants in greater detail:

1. Do you believe in some critical aspects of Jesus Christ and His time on earth?

2. Do you believe that Jesus was right in saying "No one comes to the Father except by Me"?

We will look at these two areas alone and then see how those with a biblical worldview align with these questions.

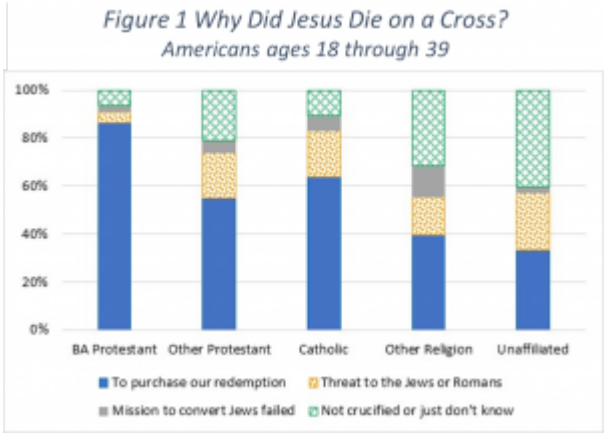
Topic 1: What About Jesus and His Time on

Earth?

In our survey, we asked three questions specifically about Jesus. The first question was about what caused Jesus to die on a cross as given below.

1. Why did Jesus die on a cross?

    a. He threatened the Roman authorities' control over Israel.
    b. He threatened the stature of the Jewish leaders of the day.
    c. To redeem us by taking our sins and our punishment upon Himself.
    d. He never died on a cross.
    e. He failed in his mission to convert the Jewish people into believers.
    f. I don't know.



The responses for ages 18 through 39 are shown in Figure 1. As shown, Born Again Protestants have a far greater percentage, over 85%, stating that Jesus was crucified to purchase our redemption. One would suspect that all Protestant and Catholic leaders would want their people to know that Jesus' death on the cross was for their redemption. Yet, less than two thirds of each group selected that answer. Note that the answer to this question did not say that salvation was through grace alone. So even those with a works-based gospel should still select that answer.

A fair number of Other Protestants and Catholics (about 20% of each group) said that either the Jewish leaders or the Romans caused Jesus' death on the cross. But any Christian should realize that Jesus had to choose crucifixion. Prior attempts

by authoritative groups demonstrated that they could not lay a hand on him otherwise.

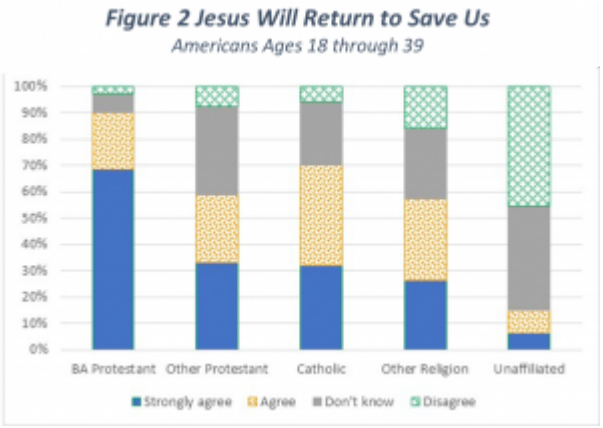
Interestingly, about 40% of Other Religions and 30% of the Unaffiliated say Jesus died to redeem us. They understand this is what Christians say about Jesus' crucifixion. It is the best answer for them because it doesn't say that Jesus' death actually worked to redeem us, only that He did
it to redeem us. Also note that roughly one third of the Other Religion category is made up of people who affiliate with Christian cults, e.g. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The second question is:

2. Jesus will return to this earth to save those who await His coming.

a. **Answers ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree**.

This question is almost a quote of Hebrews 9:27-28 ESV, "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." As you can see, this verse answers question 1 and question 2. The apostle Paul writing in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." He makes it clear that the Lord Jesus will return to the earth to call us to Himself.



The results for this question follow a similar pattern to those for the first question above with a little less surety shown among Christians. As shown, just over two thirds of Born Again Protestants strongly agree that Jesus will return to save. Meaning that almost one third of them are not absolutely sure of Jesus' return.

For other Christian groups, only about one third of them strongly agree with this statement. Almost one third say they Disagree or Don't Know about this statement.

Once again, over half of those affiliated with Other Religions affirm what they believe to be taught by the Christian religion. At the same time, the Unaffiliated continue to show that very few of them affirm any Christian beliefs.

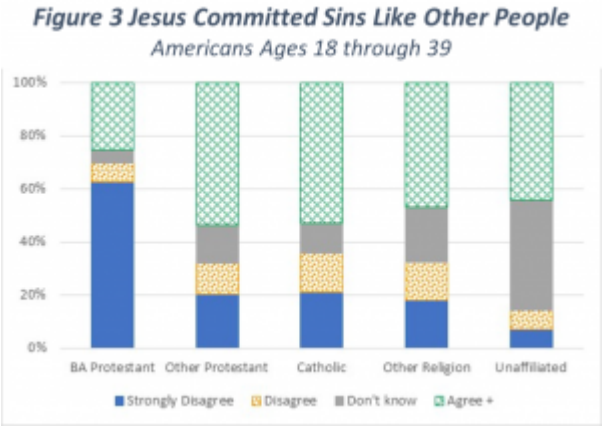
The third question (also used for determining a Basic Biblical Worldview) is:

3. When He lived on earth, Jesus committed sins like other people.

a. **Answers ranging from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly**

The Bible clearly states that Jesus lived a sinless life. For example, Hebrews 4:15 ESV states, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are**, yet without sin**." And again in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made the one who did **not know sin** to be sin for us so that in Him we would become the righteousness of God." As indicated in this verse, God laid our sins upon Jesus in His earthly death. Jesus did not sin but He carried our sins to the cross and the grave to redeem us. If Jesus were a sinner like you and me, His death would have been for His own sin rather than for the

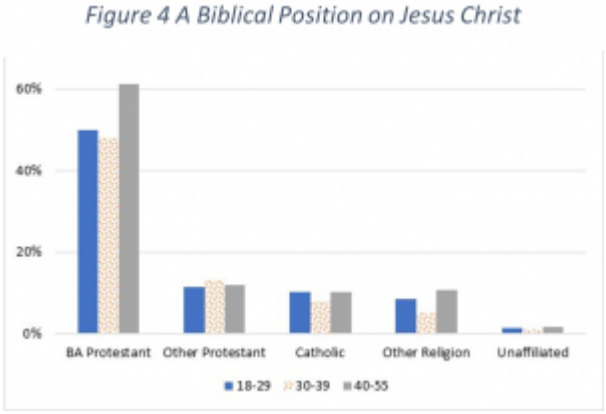
sins of the world.



Young adult American beliefs about this statement follow a similar pattern as the first two questions. Once again, about one third of Born Again Protestants either Don't Know or Agree with this statement. Having this large a number of Born Again Protestants who don't accept a primary belief of Biblical Christianity is disappointing.

However, four out of five respondents who affiliated with Other Protestant or Catholic beliefs do not strongly believe that Jesus lived a sinless life. The Unaffiliated group continues to show their aversion to accepting any Christian religious doctrines.

Accepting a Doctrinally Consistent Set of Beliefs



What happens when we look at how many Born Again Protestants take a biblically consistent view on all three of these questions? Consider the results shown in Figure 4. First, we see that young adult Born Again Protestants drop from about two thirds for the individual questions down to about one half when looking at all three questions. It appears that about one half of those categorized as Born Again Protestants are trusting Jesus to save them but do not have a good understanding of biblical teaching on Jesus.

As you can see, all other religious groups drop to around one in ten or less with a good understanding of Jesus. The

Unaffiliated drop to a level that is basically zero. In toto, about one out of six Americans age 55 and under have an understanding of who Jesus really is in these three fundamental areas.

Does Having a Basic Biblical Worldview Equate to Having a Biblical Understanding of Jesus?

For most people it does. Approximately 90% of people with a Basic Biblical Worldview have a biblical understanding of Jesus, i.e. answer the three Jesus questions from a biblical perspective. This finding (especially if true across other questions where many Born Again Christians ascribe to an unbiblical viewpoint) is important because the four simple questions which define a Basic Biblical Worldview identifies a set of people who also take a biblical view of Jesus' purpose.

Topic 2: Are there multiple ways to heaven?

Pluralism is the belief that there are multiple ways to obtain a right relationship with God, including most if not all world religions. The Bible is very clear on how people can be reconciled to God and obtain eternal life. First, we cannot receive it through our own efforts at righteous living. This truth is addressed throughout the New Testament including Romans 3:23, "For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And Titus 3:5, "He saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy . . ."

Second, we cannot receive it by placing our faith in some other person or deity. If we try, we are still weighed down by our sin, and that other person or deity has no standing before the living God. Even an angel of the living God has no standing on which to intercede for our salvation as we see in Hebrews 2:5, "For He did not put the world to come, about which we have been speaking, under the control of

angels."

The only way God could redeem us was through the sacrifice of Jesus, fully God and fully man. As Romans goes on to say in 3:24, "But they are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." And Titus 3:5 continues, "[T]hrough the washing of the new birth and
the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our savior."

Jesus clearly stated, "No one comes to the Father except through me." The high price of degradation and suffering paid through Jesus' life and death excludes the possibility of Jesus being just one of several options offered by God.

What do Americans believe about multiple ways to heaven? And, especially what do Born Again Christians believe? To determine who was a pluralist, we asked what the respondents thought about the following two statements:

1. Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God. **Answers from Disagree Strongly to Agree Strongly**

2. I believe that the only way to a true relationship with God is through Jesus Christ. **Answers from Disagree Strongly to Agree Strongly**

Who Believes in Multiple Ways to God

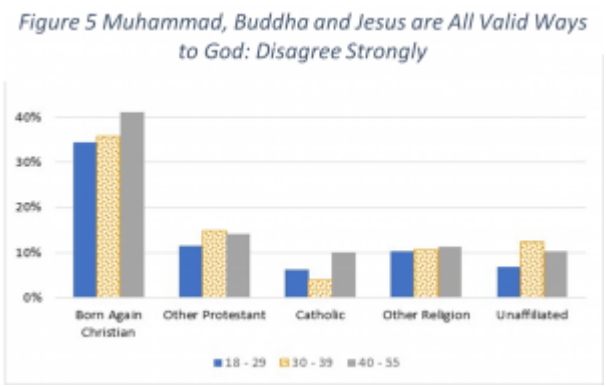


Figure 5 Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus are All Valid Ways to God: Disagree Strongly

First let's look at just question number one across the various religious groups, looking for the answer **Disagree strongly** as shown in Figure 5{3}. If someone disagrees with this statement, they could be a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist, etc. The first thing you may notice is that all religious groups other than Born Again Christian all

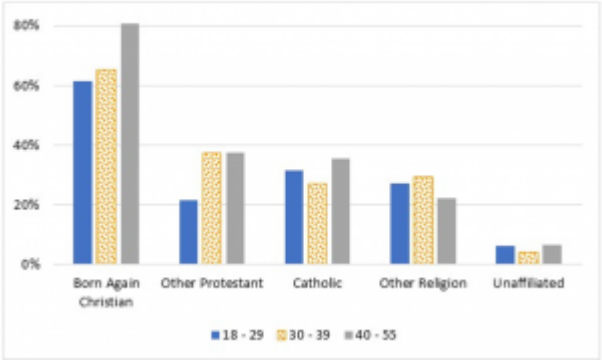
congregate around 5% to 15%. So, for all these groups, around one in ten people take a strong non-pluralistic view. Or turning it around, about 9 out of 10 of them are pluralists.

The real shocker jumping from this page is that over 60% of Born Again Christians are also pluralists. Apparently, a majority of Born Again Christians are ignorant about the basic teachings of their faith. Also, it is interesting and disturbing that the percentage of Born Again Christians who are not pluralistic is almost flat across the ages from 18 to 55. A strong majority of Born Again Christians are pluralists across that entire age range.

Who Believes Jesus is the Only Way

Now to narrow the question even further, we could have stated "Only Jesus taught valid ways to God." The percentage of people strongly agreeing with this statement should be a subset of the people who disagreed strongly with the question above, "Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God."

Figure 6 Jesus is the Only Way to a True Relationship with God



Instead, we asked this second question in a slightly different way but with the same intent: "I believe that the only way to a true relationship with God is through Jesus Christ." We thought that this question would be
equivalent to the first one in the prior paragraph. But as we will see, people's brains allow them to give answers that contradict each other.

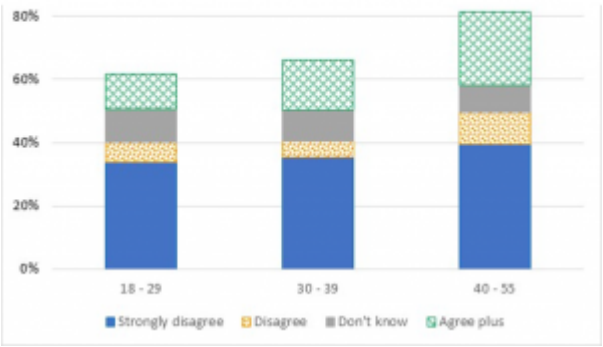
Comparing this chart with the prior one, we see that Born Again Christians are at least 25 percentage points higher for this second question. And, the other Christian religious groups are higher by about 25 percentage points as well. And

even Other Religions are up by over ten percentage points. Only the Unaffiliated drop from the first question to the second, dropping by almost half from ten percentage points down to about five percentage points.

An Inconsistent Worldview Among Many Born Again Christians

The results outlined above are disconcerting in that if the answers to the two questions were consistent, we would see Figure 6 reporting lower numbers than Figure 5 which is clearly not the case. Logically, one could say that Mohammad, Buddha, and Jesus are not all valid ways to God while still saying that Jesus is not the only way to God. You could believe, for example, that Buddha is the only one who taught a valid way to God. But, if you say that Jesus is the only way to a true relationship with God, then it follows that you believe that Mohammad, Buddha, and Jesus cannot all be valid ways to God.

*Figure 7 What Born Again Christians Who Say **Jesus is the Only True Path to God** Say About **Mohammad, Buddha, and Jesus All Teaching Valid Ways to God***



However, the survey respondents show us that one does not have to give answers which logically support one another. Even if some of the respondents misread the statement, the difference between the two is great enough that it is safe to assume that the results are not primarily attributable to misreading.

In Figure 7, we look at what the Born Again Christians who stated that Jesus is the only way to a true relationship with God said when responding to the question about Mohammad, Buddha and Jesus. First note that the total height of each column is the same as the Born Again Christian columns in Figure 6. As shown, almost half of each column represents those who did not strongly disagree with the pluralistic view. For the youngest adults, that upper portion is about evenly

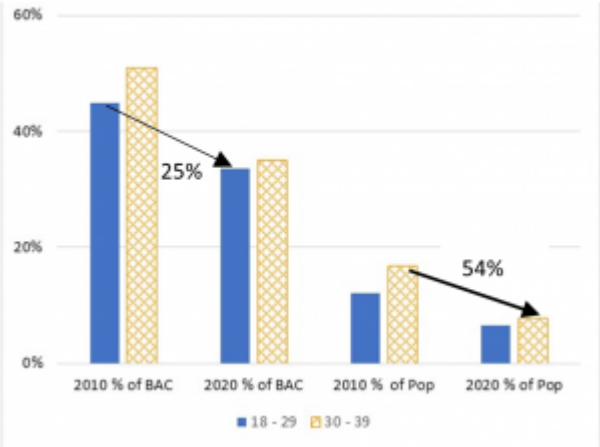
split between those who Don't Know and those who Agree or Strongly Agree that the three men taught valid ways to God. For those ages 40 through 55, we see that a significantly higher percentage affirm that all three men taught valid ways to God.

Based on these results, about one third of Born Again Christians appear to have a consistent biblical view toward pluralism. Another third appear to be totally in line with the pluralist position. The last third are those who want to say that Jesus is the only true path to God AND that Mohammad and Buddha also taught valid ways to God. In church, they may say that Jesus in the only way, but out in the world they act as if Muslims and Buddhists don't need to know this critical truth. These individuals have an incoherent worldview.

Changes over the Last Decade

How have the statistics on Born Again Christians and pluralism changed from 2010 to 2020? As shown in the figure, we see a significant drop in the percent of BACs who are not pluralists. Those age 18 to 29 drop by 25% (from 45% to 34% of all BACs) and those age 30 to 39 drop by 31% (from 51% to 35% of all BACs).

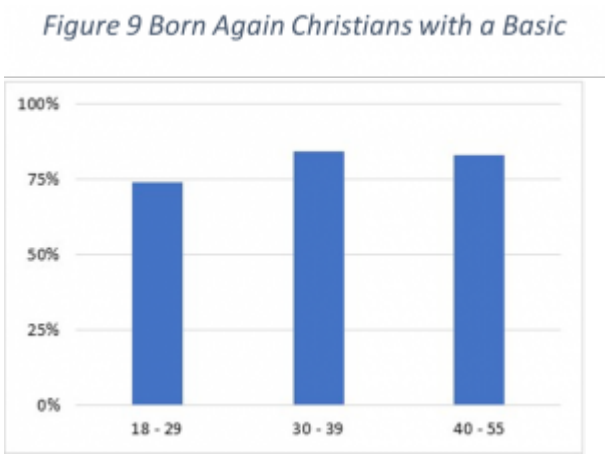
Figure 8 Born Again Christians Who Are Not Pluralists comparing 2010 with 2020



Of course, we need to remember that the percentage of BACs in the population has dropped as well. So, when we look at the percentage of Born Again Christians who are definitely not pluralists in our country the drop off is greater. As shown the number of those age 30 to 39 drops from 17% in 2010 to less than half of that number at 8% in 2020 (a drop of 54%).

Over the last decade, Born Again Christians in America have

continued to grow in the number who are pluralists.



What about that smaller subset of people who have a Basic Biblical Worldview? Do a majority of them also have a pluralistic worldview? The answer is no. As shown, between 75% and 85% of them are not pluralists.

This result is not a surprise since the Basic Biblical Worldview questions do not align well with a pluralistic view. However, the result that about one in four of Born Again Christians with a Basic Biblical Worldview appear to be pluralists is unsettling.

Countering the Negative Slide

If you are reading this, you may want to do something to help reverse this trend among Born Again Christians to misunderstand who Jesus is and His unique ability to redeem us and restore into a relationship with our Creator. Here a several suggestions that can help in this reversal.

Faithful prayer. Daily pray for the lost and against the forces of darkness so visibly arrayed against them. Pray for the saved, that they may take up the true gospel and cling to the eternal truth of Jesus.

Preach, teach and speak OFTEN about the events of the cross and the tomb.

- Explain that only someone perfectly sinless could undertake the task of reconciling us before a holy God. Make sure they understand that “God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf in order that we may become the righteousness of God in him.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

• Explain that only God, in the person of Jesus Christ, could be that sinless sacrifice. God had to undergo the pain and suffering of separating Himself from His Son on the cross. “Though he existed in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!” Philippians 2:6-8

• Explain that the cost was so high, no other way to God is possible for sinful man. No one can come to the Father except through the Son and anyone may come through Him. “God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all, revealing God’s purpose at his appointed time.” 1 Timothy 2:4-6

• Explain that Jesus’ return is delayed only by the loving patience of God who is waiting for all to come to Jesus who will. “The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9

• Explain that accepting pluralism will not automatically get your non-Christian friends into heaven. Only the truth of Christ presented to them by willing lips has the power to change their eternal destiny. If you care about them, you will share with them.

It is critical that every teenager, young adult, and older adult who crosses our path needs to have these truths reiterated for them. Use different techniques and different word pictures as you strive by the power of the Holy Spirit to continually make this message clear. We know God desires to work in their life.

Notes

1. A Born Again person in our survey results is someone who 1) has made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and 2) when asked what will happen to you after you die, they answer I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.
2. See our first article: Introducing Probe's New Survey: Religious Views and Practices 2020 for a description of the biblical worldview questions used.
3. 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. About 20% of Catholics affirm the two born again questions.

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 introductions 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 Seige 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 a 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.

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

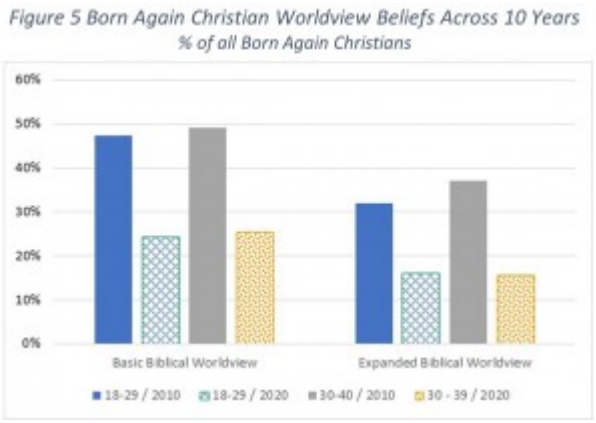
5. The devil or Satan is not a real being, but is a symbol

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**.

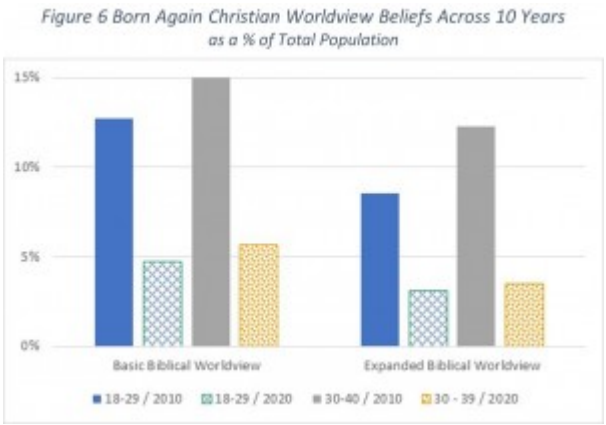
First, how do different Christian groups respond to these questions? In Figure 4, we show the percentage of each group in 2020 who have either a Basic Biblical Worldview or an Expanded Biblical Worldview. We use three groups of affiliations: Born Again Christians, Other Protestants, and Catholics.{10} 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.



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.



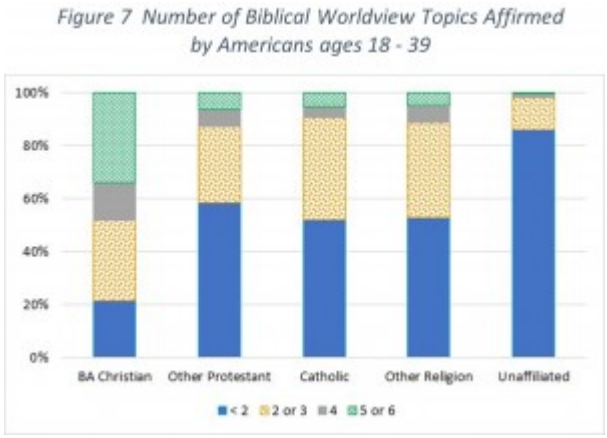
However, because the percent of the population who profess to being born again has dropped over the last ten years as well, the situation is even worse. We need to look at the percent of Americans of a particular age range who hold to a Biblical Worldview. Those results are shown in Figure 6. Once again, 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?



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.

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 relativity 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.
14. Ibid., p. 159.
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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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 intelligensia. 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 newevil 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}

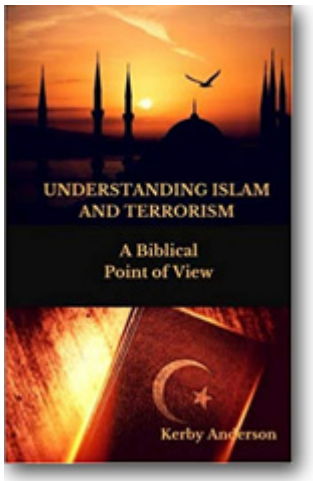
He argued that when the Muslim population is under five percent, the primary activity is proselytizing, usually from ethnic minorities and the disaffected. By the time the Muslim population reaches five percent or more, it begins to exert its influence and start pushing for Sharia law.

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, it leaders focus on winning converts and working to gain sympathy for Sharia law. But then their numbers increase, the radical Muslims leaders takeover 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.

Notes

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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 H_2O. . . . 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 it 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

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12. John 16:33.
13. 2 Cor. 4:17.
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Mormon Beliefs about Prophecy, Heaven, and Celestial Marriage

Russ Wise demonstrates some ways in which Mormonism cannot be true because of false prophecies. He also examines their beliefs about three levels of heaven, and the concept of being married for eternity, even though scripture contradicts these doctrines.

The Book of Mormon: A Superior Revelation or a Hoax?

Missionaries for the Mormon Church have converted millions of people to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by convincing them that the Book of Mormon is true and superior to the Bible.

The Book of Mormon claims to be history of "the period from 600 BC to 421 AD during which the Nephite, Lamanite, and Mulekite civilizations flourished."{1} It is also believed by the Mormon Church that these civilizations were descendants of Lehi, a Jew who led a colony of people from Jerusalem to the Americas in 600 BC.

The Nephite prophet Mormon and his son Moroni played major roles in bringing the lost story of these civilizations to light. War broke out among the descendants of Lehi, and as

they were about to annihilate one another, Mormon wrote their history on golden plates and hid them in the hill Cumorah in New York state.

According to Bruce R. McConkie, a Mormon scholar, the Book of Mormon has three purposes:

> • *To bear record of Christ and clarify his Divine Sonship and mission, proving that he is the Redeemer and Savior;*
>
> • *To teach the doctrines of the gospel in such a perfect way that the plan of salvation will be clearly revealed;*
>
> • *To stand as a witness that Joseph Smith was the Lord's anointed through whom the latter-day work of restoration would be accomplished.{2} (According to the Mormon Church, Christianity was corrupted after the death of the last apostle and Joseph Smith was anointed by God to restore the true church.)*

Referring to the Book of Mormon, the Mormon apostle Orson Pratt, said: "This book must be either true or false. If true, it is one of the most important messages ever sent from God…. If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked…impositions ever palmed upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions."{3}

It is imperative that we recognize the Book of Mormon for what it is and challenge those who continue to perpetuate the false idea that it is true. In order for the Book of Mormon to be accepted as divine truth, the Bible must be discredited.

The book of 2 Nephi in the Book of Mormon says: "Because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words."{4} Joseph Smith said, "I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."{5}

The underlying problem with the Book of Mormon is that there is absolutely no objective, external evidence for much of the information found in the book. And the information that is trustworthy was plagiarized right out of the King James Bible. Beyond the fact that the Book of Mormon cannot be verified externally, the potential convert is told that the Smithsonian Institution uses the Book of Mormon to aid its archaeological work. However, in a letter referring to this Mormon claim, the Smithsonian Institution Department of Anthropology states: "The Smithsonian Institution has never used the Book of Mormon in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archaeologists see no connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the Book."{6}

Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth President of the Church, has unintentionally summarized my thoughts about the Book of Mormon exactly as he stated, "If Joseph Smith was a deceiver, who willfully attempted to mislead the people, then he should be exposed; his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false, for the doctrines of an impostor cannot be made to harmonize in all particulars with divine truth. If his claims and declarations were built upon fraud and deceit, there would appear many errors and contradictions which would be easy to detect."{7}

It is interesting to note that there have been close to four thousand corrections made in the Book of Mormon to date. What an epitaph for a "perfect" book of divine teaching.

Prophesies That Didn't Come True

Mormon writers have influenced millions of people over the years and have been instrumental in developing less than truthful statements concerning the church. These statements, or prophesies, must be looked at carefully, then refuted when they miss the mark of legitimacy.

It is imperative that we understand the biblical teaching

regarding a prophet. Deuteronomy 18:20-22 says:

> *But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken, the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. . ."*[{8}]

If the prophecy does not come to pass, the scripture is plain in stating that the individual is not a prophet of God and that he should be put to death. There is no acceptable average of correctness other than 100% correct, 100% of the time. Anything less had grave consequences.

The president of the Mormon Church is known as the "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator" of the church. It is their duty to divine the word of God, to be His mouthpiece.

Perhaps the most embarrassing prophecy that did not come to pass is the prophecy regarding the temple in Zion. The Doctrine and Covenants, a later book of revelations given by Joseph Smith, says this about the temple:

"Verily this is the word of the Lord, that the city New Jerusalem shall be built by the gathering of the saints, beginning at this place…. For verily this generation shall not all pass away until an house shall be built unto the Lord. . ."[{9}]

This prophecy was in reference to Jackson County, Missouri. It is interesting to note that this prophecy was given in September of 1832 and that there has not been a temple built as of this date nor within the generation of those living in 1832.

Another prophecy related to the temple in Zion is found in Doctrine and Covenants 97:19. It states: “And the nations of the earth shall honor her, and shall say: Surely Zion is the city of our God, and surely Zion cannot fall, neither be moved out of her place, for God is there. . .”

Once again it is noteworthy that a temple was not built in Missouri, but that a temple WAS built in Salt Lake City. If the prophecy is true, Salt Lake City cannot be Zion. However, if Salt Lake City is indeed Zion, the prophecy is utterly false.

On another occasion, February 14, 1835, Joseph Smith said that “it was the will of God that those who went to Zion, with a determination to lay down their lives, if necessary, should be ordained to the ministry, and go forth to prune the vineyard for the last time, or the coming of the Lord, which was nigh even fifty-six years should wind up the scene.”{10} The truth regarding this prophecy that Jesus would return in 56 years is obvious to any living today. His bride is yet waiting His return after one hundred and fifty-five years.

The fact that these and other prophecies of Joseph Smith were not fulfilled leads us to only one conclusion in light of Deuteronomy 18:20-22. Joseph Smith was indeed a false prophet.

The Great Restoration or the Great Fabrication?

The Book of Mormon tells us that many of the truths of the early church were lost when the church fell into apostasy. Joseph Smith taught that after the death of Jesus Christ and the apostles, there was a total apostasy. They further teach that the churches of our day do not represent Christ and have, in fact, done away with many of the original truths of the early church. The Book of Mormon states, “they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they

taken away."{11}

One major aspect of the restoration which Joseph Smith was called to establish was that of the priesthoods—both the Aaronic and the Melchizedek.

The Mormon Missionary Handbook indicates that the only ones who have the authority to baptize new believers are those who hold the Priesthood in the Mormon Church. However, when one takes a critical look, it is obvious that the concept of reintroducing the priesthoods into the church is an unbiblical endeavor.

This is of primary importance when one realizes that the structure of the Mormon Church is based on the revelation of Joseph Smith.{12} According to the past president of the Mormon Church, Spencer W. Kimball, "The priesthood is the power and authority of God delegated to man on earth to act in all things pertaining to the salvation of men. It is the means whereby the Lord acts through men to save souls. Without this priesthood power, men are lost."{13} Bishop H. Burke Peterson declared that the effectiveness of the priest's authority, or "the power that comes through that authority—depends on the patterns of our lives; it depends on our righteousness."{14} It is interesting to note that the priest's power to do the will of God is not given by the Holy Spirit but comes from one's personal righteousness.

David Witmer, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, had this to say about the Priesthoods: "This matter of 'Priesthood,' since the days of Sidney Rigdon, has been the great hobby and stumbling-block of the Latter- Day Saints. Priesthood means authority; and authority is the word we should use. I do not think the word priesthood is mentioned in the New Covenant of the Book of Mormon."{15} Witmer goes on to say that it was in fact Sydney Rigdon who gave Joseph Smith the idea of reintroducing the Priesthoods. The Mormon Church had been operating for two full years before the establishing

of this new line of authority. About two thousand followers were baptized into the church and confirmed without the advantage of a recognized priest.

David Witmer addresses his remarks to Joseph Smith as he continues his address to all believers in Christ by saying, "You have changed the revelations from the way they were first given and as they are today in the Book of Commandments…. You have changed the revelations to support the error of a President of the high priesthood…. You have altered the revelations to support you in going beyond the plain teachings of Christ in the new covenant part of the Book of Mormon."{16}

Not only does Joseph Smith have problems with his revelation concerning the priesthoods with the authority of the Book of Mormon and David Witmer, but the Bible does not help him either.

It is apparent that when young Joseph was plagiarizing the Bible that he did not look very closely at the book of Hebrews. If he had, he might have realized that God had sent His Son to be the eternal High Priest.

Three Chances at Heaven

Joseph Smith was a man of revelation. Perhaps the most welcome revelations from young Joseph were his new teachings about salvation. The idea that all people would receive a measure of salvation was widely received by the Mormon Church.

As well, his teaching regarding the celestial kingdom found wide acceptance. According to Bruce R. McConkie, author of Mormon Doctrine, "Heaven is the celestial Kingdom of God."{17} LeGrand Richards, a presiding bishop of the Mormon Church, says that we have "at least five places to which we may go after death."{18} He says we "have three heavens, paradise, and the hell so often spoken of in the scriptures. . . ."{19} Joseph Smith taught that "in the celestial glory there are

three heavens or degrees."{20} However, according to the Holy Bible, Joseph's teaching about man's disposition after death is anything but scriptural.

The revelation or "The Vision," as it came to be known, is found in the Doctrine and Covenants and was given to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon on February 16, 1832.{21} This revelation was given by Jesus {vs. 14} to those individuals who will be in the first resurrection of the Firstborn. The Firstborn are those who held the priesthood.

The Celestial Kingdom is made up of three levels or degrees of heaven. The first, or the lower level of heaven, is known as the telestial glory. This degree of heaven is held for those "who received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony of Jesus,"{22} but who, nevertheless, did not deny the Holy Spirit. The Telestial Kingdom is for those who chose wickedness over godliness.

The second degree of heaven is the terrestrial glory. This level is held for those "who, though honorable, failed to comply with the requirements for exaltation, were blinded by the craftiness of men and unable to receive and obey the higher laws of God."{23} Likewise, it is for those who rejected Christ in mortal life but accepted Him afterwards.{24}

The third, or the highest level, of heaven is that of the celestial. This degree is held for those who have received the Temple ordinances. They have been married in the Temple for all time and eternity and they are gods.{25} According to James E. Talmage, they "have striven to obey all the divine commandments,. . .have accepted the testimony of Christ, obeyed 'the laws and ordinances of the Gospel,' and received the Holy Spirit."{26} Therefore, they are entitled to the highest glory.

The remaining options for the individual who does not qualify

for the celestial glories are paradise and perdition, for the Latter- day Saints do not believe in a hell. Joseph Smith put it this way: "There is no hell. All will find a measure of salvation."{27}

At death the individual's spirit goes either to paradise to later be judged and offered one of the three degrees of heaven, or his spirit is sent to perdition where it is given a chance to repent and thus gain a higher heavenly option.

Perdition, commonly known as Spirit-Prison Hell, is a temporary state even though it lasts more than a thousand years. It is interesting to note that the Book of Mormon does not seem to agree with the Doctrine and Covenants where it clearly states there is no second chance for repentance after death. Alma 34:32 states,

> *"For behold this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God….Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end…if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked."{28}*

Once again it becomes evident that Joseph Smith changed his mind regarding another key revelation, since the teaching of the Bible does not correspond to the changeableness of the Mormon prophet. We must conclude that Mormonism completely lacks of any biblical basis and is truly another gospel.

Celestial Marriage: Fact or Fiction?

Eternal Marriage is essential for exaltation. A key element of Mormon doctrine and the foundation for exaltation in the highest heaven is celestial marriage. Exaltation is the primary goal for each Mormon to achieve. To understand the

Latter-Day Saints' desire to enter into an eternal marriage it is important to understand the term "exaltation."

Exaltation, according to an official Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints publication, "is eternal life, the kind of life that God lives. He lives in great glory. He is perfect. He possesses all knowledge and all wisdom. He is the father of spirit children. He is a creator. We can become gods like our Heavenly Father. This is exaltation."{29}

We find in the Book of Moses in Mormon scriptures God saying, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."{30}—in other words, to help man and woman become gods and goddesses in the celestial kingdom.

"An eternal marriage must be performed by one who holds the sealing powers and authority"{31}—one who holds the priesthood authority. The marriage "must also be done in the proper place. The proper place is in one of the holy temples of our Lord. The temple is the only place this holy ordinance can be performed."{32} Mormons believe that if they are married by any other authority the marriage is for this life only and therefore negates their opportunity for celestial exaltation.

William Clayton, Hyrum Smith's clerk, was present when Joseph Smith first announced the revelation regarding plural and celestial marriage. Clayton wrote that from Joseph he "learned that the doctrine of plural and celestial marriage is the most holy and important doctrine ever revealed to man on earth, and that without obedience to that principle no man can ever attain to the fullness of exaltation in celestial glory."{33}

This revelation was first given publicly at Nauvoo, Illinois, July 12, 1843. In May of that year Joseph revealed that "In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it."{34}

Joseph goes on to reveal that "if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned."{35}

It has already been pointed out that the individual will receive a measure of salvation regardless of his disposition. The recurring question that remains is, Why should I subject myself to the regimen of the church (ie. the hassles) if I will receive salvation anyway? We find the answer further in the revelation. "We must be obedient to every covenant that we make in the temple of the Lord. He (God) has said that if we are true and faithful we shall pass by the angels to our exaltation. We will become gods."{36} The Mormon hopes to become a god himself but only if he is in complete compliance with the church.

It is noteworthy that the teaching that reveals the foundation for celestial marriage {exaltation} is not to be found in the Book of Mormon, the "most correct" of any book on earth.{37} Therefore, it seems that the motivation for entering into celestial marriage is not based on fact but on the possibility of being a god or a goddess.

The teachings of the Mormon church often go unchallenged and many in the church, along with a growing number outside its doors believe it to be a Christian institution. Those in the church have in many cases been "fellowshipped"; that is, they have been catered to for the specific reason of gaining their membership in the church. Often these members have not clearly discerned the doctrine of the church.

Those outside the Mormon Church see the good works of its members and because of their lack of understanding of Christian teaching and their acute lack of knowledge regarding Mormon sources, they tend to think that the Mormon church is as Christian as the Baptists, Methodists and the Presbyterians.

Brigham Young, second President of the Mormon Church,

challenged the world to test the teachings of the Latter-Day Saints. This essay is an answer to his challenge.

Notes

1. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1979), 98.
2. Ibid., 98-99.
3. Orson Pratt, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (Liverpool, 1851), 1-2.
4. Joseph Smith, Jr., The Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 29:10 (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982).
5. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 194. See also, The History of the Church (Vol. 4, November 28, 1841), 461.
6. Letter from the Smithsonian Institution (SIL-76, Summer 1979).
7. *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 1, p. 188.
8. The Holy Bible, New King James Version, Deuteronomy 18:20-22) Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982).
9. Doctrine and Covenants 84:1-5 (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1968). See also verse 31.
10. *The History of the Church*, Vol. 2 (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 2nd ed. revised, 1976), 182.
11. The Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 13:26.
12. Joseph Smith, *Pearl of Great Price* 2:68-73 (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1968).
13. “The Example of Abraham,” *Ensign* (June 1975):3. See also Gospel Principles, First Quorum of the Seventy, (1986), 103.
14. “Priesthood Authority and Power,” *Ensign* (May 1976), 33.
15. David Witmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 64.
16. Ibid., 49.
17. McConkie, 348.
18. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 1950), 263.
19. Ibid.

20. McConkie, 348.
21. Doctrine and Covenants, 76:11-119.
22. Ibid., 76:82.
23. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 92.
24. Doctrine and Covenants, 76:73-74.
25. Doctrines and Covenants, 76:58.
26. Talmage, 91.
27. John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith: Seeker After Truth, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Press, 1951) 177-78.
28. Book of Mormon, Alma 34:32.
29. *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978, revised 1986), 289.
30. Ibid., 290. The Doctrine and Covenants, Moses 1:39.
31. *Gospel Principles*, 233.
32. Ibid.
33. Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1977), 345.
34. Doctrine and Covenants 131:1-3.
35. Ibid., 132:4.
36. *Gospel Principles,* 234. See also Doctrine and Covenants 132:19-20 and the Mormon publication by Oscar W. McConkie, Jr., God and Man (The Corporation of the Presiding Bishop of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1963), 5.
37. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 194.

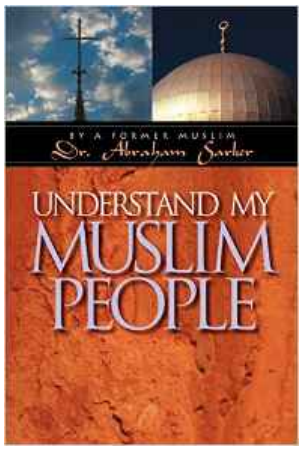
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Basic Religious Practices of

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 earnest 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 a 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.

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