

# Conversation with a Muslim and a Christian

*An e-mail conversation between a Christian (Don Closson) and an earnest Muslim revealed the mindset and attitudes of a follower of Allah.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

It is always easier to deal with religious belief systems in the abstract. Cataloguing what a particular religion believes concerning the nature of God, human nature, salvation, and morality is usually a straightforward affair. Actually dialoguing with someone who holds to these beliefs can be far more interesting and challenging. So, although I possessed a general knowledge of what Islam teaches, I found that only by carrying on a long-term discussion with a Muslim did I gain a sense of the mindset and attitudes of a follower of Allah. A door was opened for me to experience some of the passion and zeal to be found in the Muslim evangelist. The discussion occurred via email, which muted some of the emotions that often accompany religious exchanges, but they still came through with considerable intensity.

The opportunity to carry on a discussion with a Muslim apologist arose when a campus minister asked if I would help respond to charges against the claims of Christianity being made by an Islamic leader at his school. I agreed, and soon realized that a number of others, both Muslim and Christian would be listening in on our discussion. Once introduced to my Muslim counterpart, let's call him Ali, the interchange began quickly. I wish that I could report that at the end of our discussion Ali placed his faith in Christ. In fact, I don't think that I made much of an impact at all on his thinking. Ali, as with all of us, chooses what to accept as evidence. He refused to even attempt to see any of the issues we discussed

from a Christian perspective. All I can do is pray that God might use our discussion down the road sometime, if God chooses to soften Ali's heart.

Over a six month period our discussion primarily focused on the person of Christ. Ali would ask questions and I would attempt to give an answer. I quickly realized that Ali's tactics and intentions were different from mine. He often used ridicule and intimidation in his responses and would pick and choose what to discuss and what to ignore, deciding when to move on to another topic in order to avoid really considering the material at hand. I have never considered myself a debater, I would much rather have a discussion with people who are really interested in the topic and graciously exchange viewpoints. If I were to enter another dialogue like the one with Ali, I would have to realize that I cannot assume that everyone thinks the way I do regarding dialogue across religious worldviews. The Bible tells us to be ready to give the reason for the hope that we have in Christ, and to do so with gentleness and respect. Don't assume the other person will follow the same rules.

Next we will look at the issue of the person of Jesus Christ from a Muslim perspective and begin to consider how one might make a biblical response.

## **Christological Mathematics**

Since I had never spoken to a Muslim regarding the claims of Christianity, I was looking forward to the kinds of questions that might be raised. I was not surprised that the first issue that came up was the nature of Jesus Christ, since this really is the heart of the matter. Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet, perhaps even a unique prophet, but not in any sense God. Ali got the conversation going by declaring that there was no place in the Bible that says that Jesus is both 100 percent God and 100 percent man. Along with this initial challenge Ali pointed out that he was very sensitive to proper

interpretation and would be looking for incidents of verse twisting in order to make a passage say something that it actually doesn't.

I sent Ali a [2500 word essay](#) that I had written earlier that contained multiple arguments for the deity of Christ and numerous biblical examples of Jesus saying and doing things that only make sense if He were indeed equal with God the Father. My response included indications of Christ's self-perception as God, as well as statements made by His disciples portraying their belief in His deity. I assumed that Christ's humanity was not the real issue. So I did not see a need to defend it. Ali's response was interesting. He noted that Muslims do indeed believe that Jesus was born of a virgin and performed many miracles, with the help of God. But then he stated, "From your response I think we both agree that the Bible does not claim that Jesus is both 100% God and 100% man." He later added, "If you don't have any verses to give us then let's move on to the next point."

At first I thought that Ali had not gotten my entire essay. How could he have missed my point? He reassured me that he had gotten it and then declared that since there is no verse that states the 100 percent deity and 100 percent humanity of Christ, we can go on. What I eventually realized was that he was demanding a single verse that actually declared a mathematical set of percentages for the mixture of deity and humanity in Christ. I was a bit surprised to say the least. When I asked for confirmation, he said that that was indeed what he was looking for.

Most people know that the verse numbers in the Bible were added at a later date for convenience sake. After reminding Ali of passages like Philippians 2:6-7 and the first chapter of John, I asked him why it was necessary to find this complex truth in one verse. He ignored my question and responded by claiming victory that indeed, the Bible does not claim in one verse that Jesus is 100 percent God and 100 percent man, and

he declared that we would now move on to the next point.

I must admit that I was a bit baffled, but not ready to concede the issue.

## **The Importance of Context**

Ali's debating tactics might be called the "slash and burn" technique: never admit to using a weak argument and make good use of sarcasm to intimidate your opponent. He also likes to claim victory in the middle of an exchange of ideas and then declare that we are moving on to the next issue. However, before I moved on to his next question I tried once more to answer his first. All that got me was the charge that I was avoiding his second point. He wrote,

You see Don, what you have done in your last email is you completely avoided this verse, and then you went looking in the Bible for other verses in which you think Jesus claimed to be God and gave them to us thinking that it would somehow make us "forget" about John 5:30.

What about John 5:30? Jesus says; "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but Him who sent me." Ali claims that the verse shows that Jesus is inferior and helpless, that in fact He can do nothing. The key to this passage, as always, is in the context. I pointed out to Ali that in John 5:19-23 Jesus says that "He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." Jesus raises the dead, has been given all judgment, and is to be given the same honor that the Father is given. Ali replied, "Great, this is what a messenger does, this doesn't make him god."

I pointed out to him that a messenger communicates on behalf of someone else. He does not claim to do what someone else does. Muhammad claimed to be a messenger of Allah, not to do

what Allah does. In fact, Jesus didn't claim to show the way as a messenger might, but He claimed that He was the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). In fact, the same chapter says that the Jews recognized that Jesus was claiming equality with God the Father and tried all the harder to kill him (John 5:18). Ali might disagree with this claim, that Jesus is God, but that is exactly the argument that is being made by this chapter and the rest of the book of John.

Ali pulls verses from their context and refuses to deal with the entire passage. When given evidence from the chapter that contradicts his views, he changes the meanings of words and ridicules what he finds to be unreasonable. Next we will look at Ali's rejection of the Trinity.

## **The Trinity**

It is not surprising that Ali does not understand nor acknowledge the Trinitarian relationship between Jesus and the Father. Surah 4 verse 171 in the Qur'an calls on people of the book, Christians, not to commit excesses in their religion. It claims that Jesus was just a messenger of Allah and His Word, which was given to Mary. It literally tells Christians to "say not Trinity" for Allah is one. It is possible that Muhammad believed that the Trinity consisted of Jesus, the Father, and Mary. He rejected Jesus as the Son of God because he pictured Jesus as a physical offspring from a union of God the Father and Mary. This would commit the ultimate sin in the eyes of Islam, equating a physical thing with God the Creator (shirk). Ali writes, "To say that Jesus is God or Son of God is not only a mockery of Godhood, but blasphemy of the lowest order and an insult to the intelligence of men."

As a result, Ali alternates between denying that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God and ridiculing as illogical the notion the Jesus can be both God and man. He refuses to acknowledge the notion of the Trinity, even when it is the best way to bring together difficult passages. When enough

evidence is given that the Bible does teach that Jesus is both God and man, admittedly a difficult concept, Muslims reject the Bible as having been corrupted. They really have no other choice since the Qur'an specifically rejects the Trinity. It literally comes down to either rejecting their prophet Muhammad or accepting the validity and message of the Bible.

An interesting side note to this discussion is that Ali's position is very similar to believers of other religious groups who respect Jesus but reject Christianity. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the Bible was corrupted following the passing of the apostles, and that they now have its correct interpretation, as do Mormons and the Baha'is, an offshoot of Islam. Mormons claim that their prophet Joseph Smith received their view of Jesus, found in the Book of Mormon, from the angel Moroni. Muhammad claimed to have received the Qur'an from the angel Gabriel. It is obvious that all of these revelations cannot be true as they each give us a very different Jesus. Paul has something to say about these different gospels. He writes to the church in Galatia:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:6-8)

## **A Difficult Decision**

As I mentioned earlier, the outcome of the six-month interchange was neither a conversion, nor even a congenial agree-to-disagree ending. In fact, I ended the dialogue after realizing that continuing the exchange could profit little and that my time might be better spent elsewhere. I must add that this was not an easy decision to make. I wondered whether I

had given up too easily or had somehow not communicated adequately the hope that I have in Christ.

However, any hesitation to end the conversation was erased when I received a reply to my note to terminate the exchange. Ali told me that I could not quit. That in fact, he would announce on various web sites that both I and Probe Ministries had nothing to say regarding the reliability of the Bible if I did not respond to his challenges. This confirmed to me that Ali was simply using me to gain access to a larger audience in order to get out his message. He had no interest in a real discussion where ideas are considered and a minimal amount of graciousness exists.

I went back to the Scriptures to see how Jesus handled such people and what He taught His followers to do when they encountered ears that would not hear. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus told his apostles that, “[I]f any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.” The meaning communicated was that those who reject the gospel must now answer for themselves. When the gospel is taught, it brings both judgment and salvation.

In Matthew 7:6 Jesus tells the apostles, “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.” Dogs and pigs do not signify any specific race or ethnic group. Jesus is teaching that those who have treated the gospel with scorn and clearly rejected the salvation it offers and have been hardened by their contempt are to be avoided.

When Paul and Timothy were opposed by the Jews, who became abusive, the book of Acts (18:5) records, “[H]e shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility.’”

I get little pleasure from reading these passages. I wanted to change Ali's mind. However, when I told Ali that I was praying for him, he replied, "Don't preach to me, prove it to me." Given that he had ignored much evidence already, it told me that his ears were closed. However, I will continue to pray that God will soften Ali's heart and that one day he might have ears to hear the Gospel.

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# **A Short Look at Six World Religions – Understand the Beliefs of Non-Christians**

*An overview of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses from a conservative Christian perspective.*

## **Islam**

There are three monotheistic religions in the world, religions that teach that there is only one God: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The term "Islam" means "submission" to the will of God, and the person who submits is called a "Muslim."

The founder of Islam is Muhammad, who was born in 570 A.D. At age 40 he claimed to begin receiving revelations from a spirit being he believed was the angel Gabriel. These later were recorded and became the Qur'an, Islam's holy book.

There are Six Articles of Faith that all Muslims hold to. The



first is that "there is no God but Allah." The second Article of Faith is belief in a hierarchy of angels, of which the archangel Gabriel is the highest. Each Muslim is assigned two angels, one to record his good deeds and the other to record the bad deeds. At the bottom of the angelic hierarchy are the jinn, from which we get the word "genie." They are a Muslim version of demons.

The third Article of Faith is belief in 104 holy books, with the Koran as the final revelation. The fourth is belief in the prophets. According to the Qur'an, God has sent a prophet to every nation to preach the message that there is only one God. 124,000 prophets have been sent, most of them unknown but some of them biblical characters, including Jesus. Muhammed, though, is the prophet for all times, the "Seal of the Prophets."

The fifth Article of Faith is belief in predestination. All things, both good and evil, are the direct result of the will of Allah. Islam is a very fatalistic religion.

The sixth Article of Faith is the day of judgment. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad will be rewarded with Paradise; those whose bad deeds outweigh their good will be judged to hell. Islam is a religion of human works. The Bible tells us, though, that we can never earn God's acceptance on the basis of our deeds.

There are Five Pillars of Islam, obligations every Muslim must keep. The first is reciting the creed, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger." The second is prayer: 17 cycles of prayer, spread out over five times of prayer each day. They must wash in a prescribed manner before they kneel down and face toward Mecca.

The third pillar is almsgiving, 2.5% of one's income for the poor. The fourth pillar is fasting during the lunar month of Ramadan. Muslims must forego food, water and sex during

daylight hours. The fifth pillar is making the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.

Sometimes you will hear people say that Allah is another name for the God of the Bible. Is it the same? "Allah" is the Arabic name for God, and Arab Christians use the name Allah to describe the God of the Bible. Mohammed taught that there is one true God who is the same God that Jews and Christians ("the People of the Book") worship. He began Islam on the foundation of the God of the Bible. We can say that in principle, we worship the same God. Islam began on the foundation of belief in the one true God to combat the pagan polytheism of the area. However, Mohammed departed from this foundation, and we differ in our understanding of how God has fully revealed Himself. In the Qur'an, Allah is a distant spiritual being, but Yahweh is a Father to His children. Allah does not love wrongdoers, but God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Allah has predetermined everything about life; the God of the Bible invites us to share our hearts with Him.

## **Hinduism**

Hinduism may seem like an alien religion of people on the other side of the world, but it has infiltrated our culture in all sorts of ways. You're probably familiar with most of the basic Hindu concepts without even realizing it. Have you seen the *Star Wars* movies? They are filled with Hindu ideas. Ever watch *Dharma and Greg* on TV? "Dharma" is an important Hindu term for moral duty. 30% of Americans believe in reincarnation, which is a Hindu concept. Transcendental Meditation is thinly disguised Hinduism. George Harrison's song "My Sweet Lord" invokes a Hindu chant. New Age philosophy is Hinduism wrapped in Western garb.

Hinduism is tremendously diverse. It encompasses those who believe in one reality, Brahman, as well as those who believe in many gods—as many as 330 million! Some Hindus believe the

universe is real; most believe it is illusion, or *maya*. (This world view isn't consistent with reality. You won't find Hindus meditating on railroad tracks, for instance.) Some believe Brahman and the universe are one; others see them as two distinct realities.

Despite the diversity within Hinduism, there are five major beliefs of this religion. The first is that ultimate reality, called Brahman, is an impersonal oneness. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Yoda tells Luke that everything—the tree, the rock, etc.—is all part of “The Force.” This is monism: the belief that all is one. Nothing is distinct and separate from anything else.

Another Hindu belief is that just as the air in an open jar is identical to the air around the jar, we extend from and are one with Brahman. All is one, all is god—and that means that we are god. In her book and movie “Out on a Limb,” Shirley MacLaine relates a time when she stood on a beach, embracing this concept and declaring, “I am god! I am god!” It's a very Hindu concept.

Humanity's primary problem, according to Hinduism, is that we have forgotten we are divine. The consequence is that we are subject to the Law of Karma, another important Hindu belief. This is the moral equivalent to the natural law of cause and effect. You always reap what you sow. There is no grace, there is no forgiveness, there is never any escape from consequences. It's a very heavy burden to carry. Not only that, but Hinduism says that the consequences of our choices, both bad karma and good karma, follow us from lifetime to lifetime. This is another Hindu concept: samsara, the ever-revolving wheel of life, death, and rebirth, also known as reincarnation. A person's karma determines the kind of body—whether human, animal, or insect—into which he or she is incarnated in the next lifetime.

The final major Hindu concept is liberation from the wheel of

birth, death, and rebirth. One can only get off the reincarnation merry-go-round by realizing that the idea of the individual self is an illusion, and only the oneness of Brahman is real. There is no heaven, though—only losing one's identity in the universal oneness.

Praise God that through the Lord Jesus, Christianity offers hope, forgiveness, grace, and a personal relationship with a personal God in heaven. Jesus means there's a point to life.

## **Buddhism**

Buddhism does not believe in a personal God. It does not have worship, prayer, or praise of a divine being. It offers no redemption, no forgiveness, no hope of heaven, and no final judgment. Buddhism is more of a moral philosophy, an ethical way of life.

In his essay "De Futilitate," C.S. Lewis called Buddhism "a heresy of Hinduism." Buddhism was founded by a Hindu, Siddhartha Gautama, during the sixth century B.C. After being profoundly impacted by seeing four kinds of suffering in one day, Siddhartha committed himself to finding the source of suffering and how to eliminate it. One day he sat down under a fig tree and vowed not to rise again until he had attained enlightenment. After some time, he did so and became the Buddha, which means "enlightened one." He started teaching the "The Four Noble Truths," the most basic of Buddhist teachings.

The First Noble Truth is that life consists of suffering. The Second Noble Truth is that we suffer because we desire those things that are impermanent. This is absolutely central to Buddhism: the belief that desire is the cause of all suffering.

The Third Noble Truth is that the way to liberate oneself from suffering is by eliminating all desire. (Unfortunately, it's a self-defeating premise: if you set a goal to eliminate desire,

then you desire to eliminate desire.) The Fourth Noble Truth is that desire can be eliminated by following the Eight-Fold path.

In the Eight-Fold Path, the first two steps are foundational to all the others. Step one is Right Understanding, where one sees the universe as impermanent and illusory and believes that the individual does not actually exist. If you ever hear someone say, "The world is an illusion, and so am I. I don't really exist," they're probably exploring Buddhism. (You might want to pinch them and see what they do.) Right Thought means renouncing all attachment to the desires and thoughts of oneself, even as he recognizes that the self doesn't exist.

Other parts of the Eight-Fold path are Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Awareness, and Right Meditation. Ethical conduct is very important in Buddhism. There are commands to refrain from the taking of any life (that includes ants and roaches in your house), stealing, immorality, lying, and drinking.

The Eight-Fold Path is a set of steps that describe not only a good life but one which will move the follower toward Nirvana, the goal of Buddhism. Nirvana is not heaven; it is a state of extinction, where one's essence—which does not actually exist in the first place—is extinguished like a candle flame, marking the end of desire and thus the end of suffering.

One of the important concepts in Buddhism is samsara, a cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It differs from the Hindu concept of reincarnation in that Buddhism teaches there is no self to continue from one life to the next. Another important concept is karma, the belief that you reap what you sow, and your karma follows you through the cycles of samsara. Note the inherent inconsistency here: there is no self to continue from one life to the next, but one's karma does?!

Buddhism says there are many paths to the top of the mountain,

so there are many ways to God. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me."

## Judaism

Both Christianity and Judaism have their roots in Old Testament faith. But Christianity is really a sister, rather than a daughter, to Judaism, which is the religion developed by rabbis from 200 B.C. on.

When the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., that spelled the end of sacrifices and the priesthood. Instead of being guided by prophets, priests and kings, the Jewish people turned to rabbis as their authorities on matters of laws and practice.

There was basically one kind of Judaism until the eighteenth century when the Age of Enlightenment swept through Europe. That's when the three major branches of Judaism arose.

That one basic kind of Judaism is what is now called "Orthodox Judaism." It has a strong emphasis on tradition and strict observance of the Law of Moses.

Reform Judaism began in Germany at the time of the Enlightenment. Reform Judaism is the humanistic branch. In fact, there are many Reform Jews who don't believe in God at all. For them, Judaism is a way of life and culture with a connection to one's ancestors that is about legacy, not faith.

The middle-ground branch, seeking to find moderate ground between the two extremes of the Orthodox and Reform branches, is Conservative Judaism.

If there is any religious principle that Judaism explicitly affirms and teaches, it is the unity of God. You may have heard of the *Shema*, found in Deuteronomy 6:4<sup>3</sup> "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." This one all-important principle is the reason so many Jewish people have a hard time

understanding Christianity, which they see as a religion of three gods, not one God in three Persons.

The Old Testament is the Scripture of Judaism. Many Jews, though, do not consider the Old Testament to be the Word of God or inspired, although they do give it respect as a part of Jewish tradition and history.

There are some lifestyle practices that set people apart as distinctively Jewish. Traditional Jews, usually Orthodox but including some from other branches, observe the Sabbath. This means abstaining from work, driving, and lighting a fire from Friday night to Saturday night. Orthodox Jews also keep kosher, which means keeping the Old Testament dietary laws. The most well known is the prohibition against mixing meat and milk at the same meal, although many people are also aware that most Jewish people do not eat pork or shellfish.

It is difficult for Jewish people to place their faith in Jesus as Messiah because it is not considered a Jewish thing to do. In fact, they see "Jewish Christian" as an oxymoron. For many, being Jewish equals "Not Christian." But there's another big reason it is so hard for Jewish people to come to faith in Christ. They don't see a need for "salvation," because there is nothing to be saved from. If there is a God, then Jewish people already have a special relationship with Him as His chosen people. Jesus is superfluous for Jews.

If you know someone who is Jewish, pray that God will cause the scales to fall from the eyes of their heart and they will see the truth: that there's nothing more Jewish or more godly than submitting in faith to one who was, and is, the very Son of God, and who proved His love for them by dying in their place on the cross.

## **Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses**

Have you ever answered your door to find a couple of nicely-

dressed people asking to talk to you about spiritual things? Chances are they were either Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. Since both groups send many missionaries not only into American homes but to foreign countries, it makes sense to cover them in a discussion of world religions.

Many people think of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses as Christians in slightly different denominations, but this is not the case. To put it bluntly, both religions teach another gospel and another Jesus. They are cults, not Christian denominations.

Mormonism was founded by Joseph Smith, a teenage boy in New York. He claimed that he was visited by first God the Father and the Son, and then by the angel Moroni, who gave him golden plates, which he translated into the Book of Mormon. He said that Christianity had been corrupted since the death of the last apostle, and God appointed him to restore the truth. But Joseph Smith provided nine different versions of these events, which set the tone for the rest of his teachings.

Deuteronomy 18:22 gives God's standards for His prophets: 100% accuracy. Joseph Smith wrote a lot of prophecies, many of which never came true. He was a false prophet, and the religion he founded is not from God.

Mormonism is not Christian because it denies some of the essential doctrines of Christianity, including the deity of Christ and salvation by grace. Furthermore, Mormon doctrine contradicts the Christian teaching that there is only one God, and it undermines the authority and reliability of the Bible.

Jehovah's Witnesses was founded by Charles Taze Russell, another false prophet. His Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has produced a prodigious amount of literature. It has prophesied the return of Christ in 1914, 1925, and 1975. Again, by God's standards, the representatives of the Watchtower Society are false prophets.



Jehovah's Witnesses deny the basics of the Christian faith. They deny the Trinity. They believe there is one singular God, Jehovah. Jesus is actually the created being Michael the Archangel, and who became flesh at the incarnation. The Holy Spirit is not God but an active force much like electricity or fire. They deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. Like Mormons, they deny the existence of hell and eternal punishment.

Both of these religions teach salvation by works, not God's grace. And they teach that salvation is only found in their organizations.

What do you do if they come to your door? First, don't do anything without sending up a prayer of dependence on God. If you are not well-grounded in your own beliefs, unless you know not only what you believe but why it's true, then you should probably politely refuse to talk to them, and work on your own understanding of your faith. Both Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are very successful at drawing in church-goers who can't recognize false teaching because they don't know what's true.

If you do know the Bible and what you believe, then prayerfully and humbly answer their questions and comments by showing them what the Bible says. And pray that God's Spirit will show them the truth. He is grieved that people for whom Jesus died are so deceived.

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# The Mystery of Reincarnation – A Christian Perspective

*Can reincarnation be true? Dr. Pat Zukeran examines evidence for this Eastern belief and compares it to the Biblical concept of resurrection.*



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

## Eastern Doctrine of Reincarnation

Many cultures throughout the world have long held to the concept of reincarnation. A recent Gallup Poll revealed that one in four Americans believed in reincarnation. Reincarnation literally means, “to come again in the flesh.” World religions author Geoffrey Parrinder defines reincarnation as “the belief that the soul or some power passes after death into another body.”[\[1\]](#)

Reincarnation is a major facet of the eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Many sects have variant views of reincarnation. Here is a general summary of the basic principles. Most hold to a pantheistic view of God. Pantheism comes from the Greek *pan* meaning “all” and concept of *theism* meaning “God.” In Pantheism, God is an impersonal force made up of all things; the universe is God and God is the universe. All created beings are an extension of or an emanation from God.

Living things possess a physical body and an immaterial entity called the soul, life force, or Jiva. At death, the life force separates from the body and takes a new physical form. The law of karma determines what form the individual will take. This law teaches that one’s thoughts, words, and deeds have an ethical consequence, fixing one’s lot in future existences.[\[2\]](#) Our present state is the result of actions and intentions

performed in a previous life. The amount of good or bad karma attained in our present life will determine if one returns in a higher or a lower form of existence.

One will endure hundreds, even millions of reincarnations, either evolving into a higher or lower form of life to work off the debt of karma. This cycle of reincarnation is called the *law of samsara*. Eventually one hopes to work off all bad karma and free oneself from the reincarnation cycle and attain unity with the divine. This freeing from the cycle of reincarnation is called *moksha*. The soul is viewed as imprisoned in a body and must be freed to attain unity with the divine.

Each school of thought varies in their teaching regarding how one attains ultimate deliverance from the reincarnation cycle. Most agree that it is only from the human form one can attain unity with the divine. Deliverance from the bondage of the body can be attained through various means. Some schools teach that through enlightenment that comes from knowledge, meditation, and channeling, one can break the cycle. Other schools teach that deliverance comes through faith and service to a particular deity or manifestation of the divine. In return, the deity will aid you in your quest for moksha. Other schools teach that one can attain deliverance through discipline and good works.

Much of the reincarnation teaching in the West is adapted from the teachings in the eastern religions. Is there evidence that proves reincarnation to be true? We will examine these next.

## **Evidences for Reincarnation**

Leading reincarnation researcher Dr. Ian Stephenson, head of the department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, believes there is compelling evidence for reincarnation. Proponents give five proofs: hypnotic regression, déjà vu, Xenoglossy, birthmarks, and the Bible.

The first proof is hypnotic regression. Reincarnation proponents cite examples of individuals giving vivid and accurate descriptions of people, places, and events the individual could not have previously known. Today there is a small branch of psychology that practice past life therapy, the belief that one's present problems are the result of problems from a previous life.

However, the accuracy of facts attained from hypnosis remains highly questionable. First, some people are known to have lied under hypnosis. Second, human memory is subject to distortions of all sorts. Third, under hypnosis a patient's awareness of fantasy and reality is blurred. Dr. Kenneth Bowers, a psychologist at the University of Waterloo and Dr. Jan Dywane at McMaster University states:

“. . .although hypnosis increases recall, it also increases errors. In their study, hypnotized subjects correctly recalled twice as many items as did unhypnotized members of a control group but also made three times as many mistakes. During hypnosis, you are creating memories.”[\[3\]](#)

Fourth, studies have shown that under hypnosis, patients are easily influenced by leading questions. In the process of hypnosis, the patient is asked to release control of his or her consciousness and body. Hans Holzer states, “Generally women are easier to hypnotize than men. But there are exceptions even among women, who may have difficulty letting go control over their bodies and personalities, something essential if genuine hypnosis is to take place.”[\[4\]](#) In this state, memories can be altered by the cues from the hypnotist. For these reasons, many law courts do not consider testimony under hypnosis reliable evidence.

Past life recall can also be attributed to the influence of culture. Cultures heavily steeped in the doctrine of reincarnation create an environment conducive to past life recall. The countries of India, Sri Lanka, Burma, and western

Asia have a very high number of cases. Many who make claims of past life recall win the respect of their society. In areas like these the culture can have a strong influence on one's subconscious mind. If reincarnation is true, past life recall should be prevalent in all cultures, not primarily in one area.

Finally, the majority of the incidents occur among children. Dr. Stephenson states, "Many of those claiming to have lived before are children. Often they are very emotional when they talk of the person they used to be, and they give minute details of the life they lived."[\[5\]](#) Children are the most susceptible to suggestion and their testimony should be viewed with caution.

At best, the evidence from hypnotic regress can only suggest a possibility of reincarnation, but it does not conclusively prove it.

Déjà vu refers to a distinct feeling you have been to a place or performed an event before, while engaged in something that is presently happening. Reincarnation proponents attribute this to a previous life. However, researchers give alternate explanations. In our subconscious, we often relate a present event with a past one that the conscious mind does not remember. Since the two events are similar we often fuse the events together in our minds, thus creating an impression that we have experienced this before. Other researchers have shown that the data that enters the eye is sometimes delayed for a microsecond on its way to the brain. This leads one to think that they have seen the data before.

Xenoglossy is the sudden ability to speak a language one has never learned. Reincarnation advocates attribute this as the language one spoke in a previous life. However, cryptoamnesia can account for this phenomenon. In cryptoamnesia, an individual forgets information that was learned earlier and recalls it at a later time, not knowing its source. It is

possible that one can hear foreign terms through the media or as a child and recall these when prompted.

The fourth proof is the appearance of unique birthmarks that are similar to those possessed by a deceased individual. However, it is difficult to show any connection to reincarnation. Similarity does not prove sameness.

These alternative explanations can explain most of the evidences for reincarnation. However where they fall short, we must entertain the possibility of demonic possession where a foreign spirit takes control of the person as demonstrated several times throughout the New Testament. Demonic spirits have existed for thousands of years and are not limited by time and space. The information they possess can be injected into a person's mind during possession. Eastern meditation techniques allow for this possibility. Dr. Bro writes of Edgar Cayce, the father of the New Age movement, "Cayce's power came without equipment, in quiet. He appeared to empty himself, to hollow out his consciousness as a receptacle, a conduit." [\[6\]](#)

Even reincarnation advocates believe that many cases of past life recall can be attributed to possession. They confess that it is difficult to determine whether a past life recall is the result of reincarnation or possession. William de Arteaga states, "In reference to the demonic counterfeit hypothesis, we can safely say that for many past life visions it is the most solidly verified hypothesis of all." [\[7\]](#)

Edgar Cayce stated, "That's what I always thought, and against this I put the idea that the Devil might be tempting me to do his work by operating through me when I was conceited enough to think God had given me special power. . . ." [\[8\]](#)

Although the evidence can be interpreted to support reincarnation, it cannot conclusively prove it.

# **Biblical Evidence for Reincarnation**

Although reincarnation proponents cite the Bible as proof of their claim, the Bible refutes the idea. It teaches that we live once, die once, and then enter our eternal state. Hebrews 9:26b-27 states, "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. . . ." The focus here is on the sacrificial work of Christ. Instead of the continual animal sacrifices needed to atone for sins under the old covenant, under the new covenant Christ paid for sins once and for all.

In the same way as Christ, who appeared only once, man is destined to die once. Just as there is finality in Christ's sacrifice, there is finality in man's physical death. After that, the soul faces the judgment before God to determine one's eternal destiny. Once judgment is delivered, Scripture gives no evidence that sins can be atoned for in another time of living on earth (Rev. 20:11-15; Luke 16:19-31; Matt. 25:31-46).

The passage often appealed to by those who support reincarnation is John 9:1-3, which states, "As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" Reincarnation proponents claim that in this passage the disciples are attributing the man's blindness as the result of bad karma from a previous existence.

However, Jewish theology attributed birth defects to two factors. Prenatal sin committed by the baby after conception, but before birth, or sin committed by the parents. Genesis 25:22, the struggle of Jacob and Esau in Rachel's womb, was interpreted as a conflict that resulted from prenatal sin. Exodus 20:5 states that the parents' sin often had repercussions on their offspring. However, in the passage in

John 9:1-3, Jesus refutes any connection between the man's defects and any previous sins, thus putting an end to any concept of karma.

Another passage is Matthew 11 where Jesus states that John the Baptist is Elijah. Reincarnation proponents interpret John as being the reincarnated Elijah from the Old Testament. This cannot be true for the following reasons. First, in 2 Kings 2, Elijah never died, but was taken to heaven. In the reincarnation model one must die before one can take on a new form. Second, in Matthew 17 Elijah appears with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. John the Baptist had lived and died by this time. If he had been the reincarnation of Elijah, John would have appeared instead. John came not as the reincarnation of Elijah, but in a metaphorical sense as Elijah in that he was filled with the same spirit and power as Elijah. So the Bible does not affirm reincarnation.

## **Reincarnation and Resurrection**

The Bible teaches that what happens after death is a resurrection, not reincarnation. First Corinthians 15 is one of the clearest passages on what happens to the human soul after death. Like the reincarnation proponents, we agree that the immaterial component of man separates from the body at death and survives eternally. We both agree that the soul inhabits another bodily form.

The major difference is this: reincarnation proponents believe that the soul inhabits many bodily forms in an evolutionary progress toward union with the divine. This can happen over millions of years or in a shorter period. The Bible teaches in Hebrews 9:26b-27, as previously discussed, that we live once, die once and then enter into an eternal state.

Our eternal state is described in 1 Corinthians 15. Verse 20 states, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." By "firstfruits"



Paul was drawing on the imagery found in the Old Testament. The firstfruits were prior to the main harvest and served as an example and an assurance of the harvest that was coming. So Christ's resurrection is a precursor and a guarantee of the believer's resurrection. His resurrection greatly differs from the reincarnation model.

First, Christ's resurrected body physically resembled His earthly body. It had physical properties displayed by the fact that He could be touched, He communicated, and He ate. His glorified body also possessed supernatural attributes. He was able to walk through walls, appear and disappear, and ascend to heaven.

Paul describes the glorified body as having a different kind of flesh from the earthly body. He states, "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. . . ." The new body will be imperishable and immortal. It will be a spiritual body that is designed for life in heaven. The glorified body will not suffer the effects of sin or the effects of time, sickness, or pain.

The unrighteous, however, enter a state of eternal torment immediately after death. Luke 16:19-31 demonstrates this point. In this example the unrighteous wealthy man enters hell immediately at death. In Matthew 25 the goats enter a state of eternal punishment with no hope of escape.

In summary, these are the differences. First, reincarnation teaches that the migration of the soul occurs over many lifetimes while resurrection occurs once. Second, reincarnation teaches we inhabit many different bodies while resurrection teaches we inhabit only one body on earth and a glorified immortal body in heaven that resembles our earthly one. Third, reincarnation teaches we are in an evolutionary progress to union with God while resurrection teaches we arrive at our ultimate state immediately at death. The Bible

does not support reincarnation and it must not be confused with the doctrine of the resurrection, which is very different.

## Notes

1. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Dictionary of Non-Christian Religions* (Philadelphia; Westminster Press, 1971), 286.
2. John Noss, *Man's Religions*, New York: MacMillan Press, 1980, 90.
3. Elizabeth Stark, "Hypnosis on Trial," *Psychology Today*, February 1984, p. 35, as cited by Geisler and Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 67.
4. Hans Holzer, *Life Beyond*, Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1994, 176.
5. Dr. Ian Stephenson, quoted in *Life Beyond* by Hans Holzer, Chicago: Contemporary Press, 1994, 167.
6. Harmon Bro, *A Seer Out of Season: the Life of Edgar Cayce*, (New York: New American Library, 1989), 13.
7. William de Arteaga, *Past Life Visions: A Christian Exploration* (New York: Seabury, 1983), p. 174, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 80.
8. Thomas Sugue, *The Story of Edgar Cayce: There is a River*, (Virginia Beach: Association for Research and Enlightenment, 1973), 219, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 79.

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# Taoism and Christianity

*The Chinese translation of John 1:1 reads, 'In the beginning was the Tao...' Are Taoism and Christianity compatible? Dr.*

Michael Gleghorn says that even though there are some similarities, Christianity's uniqueness remains separate from all philosophies, including Taoism.

## Historical Background

The philosophy of Taoism is traditionally held to have originated in China with a man named Lao Tzu. Although some scholars doubt whether he was an actual historical figure, tradition dates his life from 604-517 B.C. The story goes that Lao Tzu, "saddened by his people's disinclination to cultivate the natural goodness he advocated",<sup>{1}</sup> decided to head west and abandon civilization. As he was leaving, the gatekeeper asked if he would write down his teachings for the benefit of society. Lao Tzu consented, retired for a few days, and returned with a brief work called *Tao Te Ching*, "The Classic of the Way and its Power."<sup>{2}</sup> It "contains 81 short chapters describing the meaning of Tao and how one should live according to the Tao."<sup>{3}</sup>

The term *Tao* is typically translated into English as "way", but it can also be translated as "path," "road," or "course." Interestingly, however, one scholar cites James Legge as stating that the term might even be understood "in a triple sense as at once 'being', 'reason', and 'speech'."<sup>{4}</sup>

After Lao Tzu, probably the most important Taoist philosopher has been Chuang Tzu, who is generally believed to have lived sometime between 399-295 B.C.<sup>{5}</sup> Like the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, Chuang Tzu viewed all of reality as "dynamic and ever-changing."<sup>{6}</sup> Also like Heraclitus, he embraced a sort of moral relativism, believing that there is no ultimate difference between what men call good and evil for all opposites are reconciled in the Tao.<sup>{7}</sup>

Throughout history, Taoist ideas have been expressed in various ways. Huston Smith, in *The World's Religions*, divides Taoist thought into three different, yet related, camps—the

philosophical, “vitalizing”, and religious Taoisms.{8}

Historically, the two most prominent representatives of philosophical Taoism have been Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. The chief object of philosophical Taoism “is to live in a way that conserves life’s vitality by not expending it in useless, draining ways, the chief of which are friction and conflict.”{9} One does this by living in harmony with the Tao, or Way, of all things: the Way of nature, of society, and of oneself. Taoist philosophers have a particular concept characterizing action that is in harmony with the Tao. They call it *wu-wei*. Literally this means “non-action”, but practically speaking it means taking no action which is contrary to nature. Thus, “action in the mode of *wu-wei* is action in which friction—in interpersonal relationships, in intra-psychic conflict, and in relation to nature—is reduced to the minimum.”{10}

“Vitalizing” Taoists have a different approach to life. Rather than attempting to *conserve* vitality by taking no action contrary to nature, “vitalizing” Taoists desire to *increase* their available quota of vital energy, which they refer to as *ch’i*. “Vitalizing” Taoists have sought to maximize *ch’i*, or vital energy, through—among other things— nutrition, breathing exercises, and meditation.{11} The last variety, religious Taoism, did not take shape until the second century A.D.{12} Religious Taoists attempt to use magical rites to harness occult powers for humane ends in the physical world.{13} Sadly, this form of Taoism is filled with many harmful superstitions.

## The Taoism of Lao Tzu

Having briefly described the three dominant forms of Taoism, let us now turn our attention back to the thought of Lao Tzu in *Tao Te Ching*.

In the first place, what did Lao Tzu teach about Tao?

Interestingly, (and somewhat ironically), *Tao Te Ching* begins by asserting that words are not adequate for explaining Tao: "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao."[{14}](#)

Of course, just because words cannot adequately explain Tao does not mean that we can gain no conception of Tao whatsoever. Indeed, if that were so the first sentence should have also been the last. But it was not. Thus, chapter 25 reads in part:

There was something undifferentiated and yet complete,  
Which existed before heaven and earth.  
Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not  
change.  
It operates everywhere and is free from danger.  
It may be considered the mother of the universe.  
I do not know its name; I call it Tao.[{15}](#)

From this passage we learn a great deal about Tao: it existed prior to the physical world;[{16}](#) it is independent and immutable (i.e. does not change); its action is omnipresent; and finally, "it may be considered the mother of the universe." It is quite interesting that Tao, as described above, appears to share many attributes with the Christian conception of God. However, it is important to keep in mind that some of these similarities are more apparent than real—and there are also major differences. We will mention some of these later.

Another way to describe the indescribable is to say what Tao most closely resembles. The closest analogue to Tao in the physical world is water. Thus we read in chapter 8:

The best (man) is like water.  
Water is good; it benefits all things and does not compete  
with them.  
It dwells in (lowly) places that all disdain.  
This is why it is so near to Tao.[{17}](#)

According to Lao Tzu, man should model himself after Tao. Since water so closely resembles the workings of Tao, the Taoist sage could draw certain lessons for human behavior by carefully observing the behavior of water. Thus, the sage might observe the beneficial qualities of water, and that these qualities are combined with water's natural tendency to seek the lowest places. It may have been just such observations that led Lao Tzu to conclude his classic thus:

The Way of Heaven is to benefit others and not to injure.  
The Way of the sage is to act but not to compete. [{18}](#)

Such principles have application not only for the individual, but also for society. A proper application of Tao to the art of government requires the principle of *wu-wei* (i.e. taking no action contrary to nature). Taoism seeks a harmonious relationship with nature rather than one of domination or interference. Likewise, Lao Tzu believed the best government to be the one which interfered least with the governed (i.e. a *laissez-faire* approach). [{19}](#) So long as men live in harmony with Tao, both their private and public lives will be free from conflict. But when Tao is abandoned, conflict is inevitable—and with it misery, oppression, and war. [{20}](#)

## The Taoism of Chuang Tzu

In some respects the Taoism of Chuang Tzu represents a significant departure from that of Lao Tzu. Still, there are also important similarities that should not be overlooked. One of these concerns the relationship of Tao to the physical universe. In words reminiscent of *Tao Te Ching*, the *Chuang Tzu* declares:

Before heaven and earth came into being, Tao existed by itself from all time. . . . It created heaven and earth. . . . It is prior to heaven and earth. . . . [{21}](#)

The most interesting part of this statement is the assertion

that Tao “created heaven and earth.” How are we to understand this? Does Chuang Tzu view Tao as Creator in the same sense in which Christians apply this term to God? Probably not. In addressing such questions one commentator has written: “Any personal God . . . is clearly out of harmony with Chuang Tzu’s philosophy.”[{22}](#) Properly speaking, Taoists view Tao more as a *principle* than a *person*.

This distinction is more clearly seen when one considers Chuang Tzu’s moral philosophy. Chuang Tzu embraced a doctrine of moral relativism; that is, he did not believe that there was really any ultimate distinction between what men call “right” and “wrong”, or “good” and “evil.” He writes:

In their own way things are all right . . . generosity, strangeness, deceit, and abnormality. The Tao identifies them all as one.[{23}](#)

This statement helps clarify why the notion of a personal God is inconsistent with Chuang Tzu’s philosophy. Persons make distinctions, have preferences, and choose one thing over another. However, according to Chuang Tzu, Tao makes no distinction between right and wrong, but identifies them as one.

This has serious implications for followers of Tao. Unless educated to suppress such notions, most people inherently recognize the validity of moral distinctions. Indeed, the *Chuang Tzu* confirms this, but belittles those who embrace such distinctions by saying that they “misunderstand . . . the reality of things” and “must be either stupid or wrong.”[{24}](#) Once the goal of the Taoist sage is to live all of life in harmony with Tao, it seems that Chuang Tzu would have his followers abandon genuine moral distinctions. This appears to be his intention when he writes, “...the sage harmonizes the right and wrong and rests in natural equalization. This is called following two courses at the same time.”[{25}](#) In my opinion, this represents somewhat of a departure from the

doctrines of Lao Tzu. True, slight strains of moral relativism can be found in *Tao Te Ching*, but Chuang Tzu elevates this doctrine to a place of central importance in his own philosophy.

Finally, something must be said of Chuang Tzu's belief that all reality is characterized by incessant change and transformation. Although Heraclitus had already taught a similar doctrine to the Greeks, one scholar points out the originality of this concept in China by calling it "a new note in Chinese philosophy."[{26}](#) According to Chuang Tzu:

Things are born and die . . . they are now empty and now full, and their physical form is not fixed . . . Time cannot be arrested. The succession of decline, growth, fullness, and emptiness go in a cycle, each end becoming a new beginning. This is the way to talk about the . . . principle of all things.[{27}](#)

With Chuang Tzu the doctrine of change assumed something of a permanent significance in Taoist thought.

## **Heraclitus, Chuang Tzu, and the Apostle John**

Heraclitus was a Greek philosopher who thrived around 500 B.C. Although there are differences, the similarities between his philosophy and that of Chuang Tzu are quite impressive. Both held the doctrine of monism, believing that all reality is essentially one, or of the same essence. Both emphasized that this reality is in a state of constant change and transformation. And both embraced a doctrine of moral relativism, the idea that there are no objective moral standards that are universally true for all people at all times. In light of these similarities, it is no wonder that Fritjof Capra referred to Heraclitus as the "Greek 'Taoist.'"[{28}](#)



But here a distinction emerges which is very important to the rest of this discussion. Heraclitus wrote in Greek; Chuang Tzu wrote in Chinese. Thus, Heraclitus never explicitly referred to *Tao*, for this is a Chinese term. He did, however, begin using a particular Greek word in a new, technical sense, to communicate concepts *similar* (though *not* identical) to that of *Tao*. The Greek word Heraclitus chose was *logos*.[{29}](#) Depending on its context, the word *logos* can have a variety of meanings; however, it is most commonly used in the sense of “word,” “message,” “speech,” and “reason.” It is the word John used of the pre-incarnate Christ in the prologue of his Gospel when he wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). In this verse it is the Greek term *logos* which is translated as “Word.” Now think back to the beginning of this discussion. It was mentioned that while *Tao* is generally translated “way” or “path,” at least one scholar has said the term might also be understood “in a triple sense as at once ‘being’, ‘reason’, and ‘speech.’”[{30}](#) This makes a conceptual comparison with the term *logos* possible.

But only a comparison. The terms do not mean exactly the same thing and would not be interchangeable in every context. Still, some translators have seen enough similarity to justify using one term in place of another in at least some contexts. Remember John’s prologue? The Chinese translation reads, “In the beginning was the *Tao*, and the *Tao* was with God, and the *Tao* was God.” What are we to make of this?

Probably the first issue we must consider is whether the Apostle John was influenced by pagan thought in his use of the term *logos*. Although there have been many scholars in the past who thought he was, the drift of contemporary scholarship has been away from such notions.[{31}](#) In fact, more recent scholarship contends that we need only look to the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, for the source of John’s *logos* doctrine. In the Hebrew Bible, the phrase “The

word of the Lord" is often used. And, often enough, the Hebrew term for *word* was translated into Greek as *logos*. Since John intends to communicate that Jesus is *the* Word of God *incarnate*, we need look no further than the Septuagint for the source of this doctrine. Thus, John was most likely influenced by the Jewish scriptures rather than pagan philosophy in his doctrine of the *logos*.

## Taoism and Christianity

Given that the Apostle John, in his doctrine of the *logos*, was likely influenced by the Septuagint, what would those Gentile readers, not familiar with the Septuagint, but quite familiar with Greek philosophy make of John's Gospel? A similar difficulty arises with the Chinese translation: might not the use of the term *Tao* affect their understanding of Christ?

Of course it might. Indeed, it seems that John's use of the term *logos* did influence some people to read ideas from Greek philosophy into their conception of Christ. Likewise, some Chinese readers might interpret Christ in a more Taoist manner due to the use of the term *Tao* in John's Gospel. We all approach every text with a certain *pre-understanding* that naturally influences our interpretation. Still, there would seem to be certain limits on how far this can *reasonably* influence our interpretation of Christ in John's Gospel. Consider a statement by D. H. Johnson:

. . . verbal similarities do not necessarily imply conceptual similarities. The use of similar words in seemingly similar ways can deceive us into thinking that two authors are discussing the same concept. Only when one document is understood in its own right can it be compared to another which must also be understood in its own right." [\[32\]](#)

We might say that every text will, to some extent, *impose* a particular meaning on the terms it uses. In the Chinese

translation of John's Gospel it soon becomes apparent that the term *Tao*, while retaining some of its original meaning, has been endowed with a remarkable new significance! How so?

First, although the *Chuang Tzu* credits Tao with creation, we should not understand Tao as a *personal Creator*. In contrast, as D. H. Johnson writes, "The meaning of *logos* in the Johannine prologue is clear. The Word is the person of the Godhead through whom the world was created." [\[33\]](#) *Personality* is thus a crucial difference between the *Tao* of Taoism and the *Tao* of Christianity. Second, John 1:14 declares that "the Tao became flesh." The incarnation of Tao, like the incarnation of the *logos*, is a significant development in the meaning of this term. A Taoist would instantly recognize that Tao has assumed new meaning in John's Gospel, making it difficult to read too much Taoism into his understanding of Christ.

Thus, even though the term *Tao* is used of Christ in the Chinese translation of John's Gospel, we should not infer that Taoism and Christianity are really about the same thing. They are not. Christianity proclaims a *personal* Creator who is morally outraged by man's sinfulness and will one day judge the world in righteousness (Rom. 1:18-2:6). Taoism proclaims an *impersonal* creative principle which makes no moral distinction between right and wrong and which judges no one. Christianity proclaims that Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25), and that eternal life is freely given to all who trust Him as Savior (John 1:12; Rom. 6:23). In contrast, the doctrine of moral relativism in Taoism clouds the need for a Savior from sin. Finally, and most shocking of all, is Jesus' claim to be the only true Tao—or Way—to the Father (John 14:6). If He is right, then Taoism, for all its admirable qualities, cannot have told *the eternal Tao*.

## Notes

1. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 197.

2. Ibid.
3. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions and the Occult* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 57.
4. James K. Feibleman, *Understanding Oriental Philosophy* (New York: Mentor, 1977), 108.
5. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 177.
6. Ibid., 178.
7. Ibid., 184.
8. Huston Smith, 199-218.
9. Ibid., 200.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 201.
12. Ibid., 205.
13. Ibid., 206.
14. *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), chap. 1.
15. *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 152.
16. However, in chap. 7 of Chan's translation we read, "Heaven is eternal and earth everlasting." There are some apparent inconsistencies in *Tao Te Ching*.
17. Ibid., 143.
18. Ibid., 176.
19. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, *Tao Te Ching*, chap. 48.
20. Ibid., chaps. 30 and 31.
21. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 194.
22. Ibid., 181.
23. Ibid., 184.
24. Ibid., 206.
25. Ibid., 184.
26. Ibid., 178.