“You Should Improve Your Article ‘A Short Look at Six World Religions'”

My name is _____ and I am a born again Christian. I have a BA in Pastoral Theology and a MA in Philosophical Theology. I believe that there could be improvements to your article A Short Look at Six World Religions.

I do believe that “snapshot” looks at our neighbors’ faiths are valuable but they do have limitations. It can be difficult to convey the rich diversity of their sects, denominations, and teachings. This being the case, and given that adherents of any faith often do not align strictly to orthodox doctrine, it may be worth noting in your piece in the sections that deal with “relating with folks from these faiths” that on top of prayer and Biblical knowledge they should listen closely to the others’ perspectives. Listening at first will give more clarity to the type or specific tradition the person is a part of.

Islam has been called a religion of works, but I have found this to not be true upon both study and speaking to Muslims. They are fully dependent on Allah’s mercy and the grace of God. They will often say that even if they were perfect and without sin, God could cast them into hell if he wanted because God owes no one anything—it is His grace and mercy alone that allows salvation. This is an important facet of Islam that I feel should be included. The six tenets of faith are of course much more flexible in many Muslims’ eyes than the five pillars and this could be emphasized. I also would say that Islam is no more fatalistic than many expressions of Christian faith. As many Christians would say, God is sovereign and everything that happens is in His purview and is because He allows it. Even Satan’s and hell’s existence is

only because of His allowing it to be so. I do not think of Christianity is fatalistic because of this teaching. One Christian tradition that may deviate from this is Process Theologies of Christianity, which in my reading give more a 'participant' role to God than 'sovereign'. You write that Allah is a distant spiritual being, but again this is not how I have heard Muslims describe God. They will often as Christians do also balance transcendence and immanence. I have read of Allah being the center of all things, not 'out there'. It is we who may feel like we're 'out there' when we are distanced by sin.

I appreciate that you note Hinduism's diversity. *Star Wars*, however, I would argue is closer to Taoism.

There are some forms of Buddhism that pray, and worship divine beings. I would disagree with C.S. Lewis—Buddhism may be said more properly to be a 'reformation' of Hinduism, not a heresy. Buddha wanted to bring a more 'democratic' and less austere faith. The 'I don't exist' is the ego. A Buddhist would recognize a pinch hurts and that a pinch hurts any living creature. Buddhists would say that Nirvana is not a goal, and is not something that is sought. There is no inconsistency of no-self and karma continuing the ripple effects. Karma is just cause-effect. A Buddhist would seek to absolve all action, cause-effect. Though a person dies, the consequences of their actions will still effect the next generation and their environment.

It may be worth noting the Messianic Jewish movement—I worshipped alongside these folks in a St. Paul Minnesota Temple and they are really Jews for Jesus!

It may be more appropriate to refer to Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses as 'sects' rather than cults as this is the trend in writing, commentary, and popular usage.

I hope that some of this may be useful to you, even if to a

small degree. I do thank you for your ministry at Probe and am grateful that you write on these other religions with great love in your writing voice. My best wishes to you!

Thank you, _____.

It may be helpful for you to understand that the article on our website is the radio transcript of a week of programs I was asked to do for Moody Radio some years ago, giving a 35,000-foot overview of major religions to their radio audience in a very restricted time parameter. And that's why it's called a "Short" look at world religions.

Your excellent observations are about fine-tuning the details of an article that was intentionally written with broad brush strokes. So I'm going to add it to our website from a link at the bottom of the article, highlighted in a "See Also" box.

Thank you, thank you for "hearing" the love in my heart and in my fingertips as I wrote this article! You have greatly blessed me today!

Warmly,
Sue

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"Another Story of a Couple's Heartbreaking Experience with an Abusive Church"

For the second time since joining a church which I now realize is abusive, our twenty six year old son has had what we term

as a nervous breakdown. This time he spent three weeks in hospital. Our daughter who is twenty four has also been a member of this same church for three years. Neither of our children are married.

I could not believe what I was reading in your article Abusive Churches. It described to a tee, the church that our children attend. This church is called the _____ Christian Center and is in _____, BC. A year ago, the Lord answered a mother's prayer and standing on Ps 37:4, my husband and I were transferred to British Columbia from Ontario, Canada. We have seen such a pulling away from parents and during my son's recent hospitalization, I went to be near him and stayed in his apartment which is below and owned by people from their church. I was shunned by the whole church and most especially by our daughter. My husband joined me there until our son was well enough to come home from the hospital.

I made many attempts to meet with the church ministry and most attempts were futile. I have never felt so alone in my whole life. Praise God that when we have Jesus, we are never alone. My husband and I eventually met with one of the pastors and the senior pastor's wife and were able to voice all our fears. Of course they had answers for all our questions. As an example, I voiced my concern about a phone call from our daughter where she told us that the pastor's wife called her in for a "counseling appointment." During this appointment the pastor's wife told my daughter that she was not flirting enough and should change her hair and the way she wore her clothes to appear more sexy to the young men in the church. She went on to say that the Lord showed her that our daughter and a young man named Peter would make a wonderful couple and that she could see them as missionaries in Germany (which seems to be a country of great focus in this church. Our son took a year of German at college). The pastor's wife said she did not remember a man named Peter (he has since left the church) however she did have a vague memory of telling our

daughter that she should do something with her hair (our daughter is a senior at SFU and has been working part time at a bank for the past three years). She was somewhat taken back when I pardoned myself and asked who she thought she was to think to tell our daughter how to do her hair.

This is just an example of what is going on there. Our son who was an outstanding student five years ago, is now an impoverished basket case. The police can do nothing even though our son was drugged and sexually molested (praise God our son was able to get away before he was actually raped) by a older man from the church, who is still there. Our son refuses to go to the police as he says the whole matter should be handled through prayer and forgiveness. This has been done but still our son recounted the experience in detail during his recent hospitalization.

Our children refuse to listen to us, so we are holding the whole situation up in prayer. Can you offer any pointers? Is there anything we can do to prevent this church from damaging other young people? We need help but we don't know where to turn.

Thank you for sharing your story with us. We pray others will learn from your pain, and that God will show your children the truth.

"How Can Masons Be Prominent Leaders in the Church?"

My husband read a book that referred to how many Masons are actually serving with the Southern Baptist Convention and other churches. I know as a child I knew of pastors who were

Masons and that didn't seem to be a bad thing, but now with all that I've learned, why are these people still prominent leaders in the body of Christ?

Thank you for your inquiry. I appreciate your reading and responding to my article on Freemasonry. Regarding your question concerning the continued "ministry" of men who embrace Freemasonry within the larger church (Baptist) I would suggest the the primary reason is the compartmentalism of one's faith and their involvement in a fraternal organization.

In my view, the problem lies in their inability to allow their faith to influence their lives in its totality. In other words, they separate their Sunday experience (faith life) from the balance of their week (secular life). They are unable or unwilling to assimilate their faith life/walk with their life in general. They do so at their peril—spiritually and relationally with their God.

I also think they do not fully understand scriptural teaching regarding the believers' need to fear God. That is, to have a reverential fear of the Creator. I would suggest a word study of the term "fear God." It is extremely enlightening to the believer and offers one a sobering perspective. Those who embrace such organizations as Freemasonry do not have such an inclination because they do not want to expose themselves to biblical Truth that would subsequently call them to restructure their thought life/beliefs.

Another key that we cannot over look is the fact that many within the church are ignorant of the spiritual disconnect between Christianity and fraternal organizations such as Freemasonry. The result of this disconnect renders the church body impotent where biblical orthodoxy is concerned and its application in the church at large.

I trust you will find my thoughts beneficial in your attempt to understand the incongruence of those who embrace occult

teachings and their continued leadership within the church.

May our Lord bless your study and enrich your faith!

Russ Wise

See Also *Probe Answers Our Email*:

"How Do I Talk to Family Members About Freemasonry and Edgar Cayce?"

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"Is Clairvoyance Wrong?"

A lady popped into one of our meetings recently who said she is clairvoyant and has worked with tarot cards in the past. Someone in another church had told her it was wrong so she got rid of her tarot cards but wants to know if her gift of clairvoyance is also wrong and what to do about it. She said she has had dreams of disasters, etc. before they have happened and they have been reported as she "saw" them. We are a church who operates in the prophetic but I was at a loss how to explain the difference in "layman's" terms. I know one is in the occult but have never met anyone who said they had correct predictions before as I always believed Satan could not predict the future and now I am a little confused as to how to explain it.

Clairvoyance is indeed a manifestation of the occult. Satan has all kinds of supernatural knowledge (although he is not omniscient) so we shouldn't be surprised when he feeds people

knowledge of some future events. Particularly since this lady has worked with tarot cards, which is another open door to the occult, someone needs to explain to her how important it is to renounce her openness to the enemy's power and secret knowledge because if power and knowledge don't come from God, they are coming from an evil source which will prove to be harmful eventually.

The biblical standard for prophets, either fore-telling or forth-telling, is 100% accuracy (Deut. 18:22). Clairvoyance is a demonic counterfeit to the way the Holy Spirit gives knowledge supernaturally, and this lady can probably identify at least one dream or vision or thought that did not come to pass or in which she got a detail wrong because unholy and UN-omniscient Satan cannot perfectly mimic the actions of our perfectly holy God.

Concerning what to do about it, the way to slam shut the open door to the kingdom of darkness is to repent of participating in occult activities which God has forbidden for our own protection, and to "renounce the deeds of darkness" (Rom. 13:12) in Jesus' name. For further information, check out Neil Anderson's book *Victory Over the Darkness*.

So glad you wrote! I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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See Also:
"What's the Difference Between a Prophet and a Clairvoyant?"

“I Am Offended by Your Biased Article About Islam”

I have just read your article titled “Islam and the Sword.” What is very obvious is that there is A LOT of bias and misinformation in your article about Islam, Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), etc. It is very offending and I want you to neutralize your article completely. Objectivity is important if you want to be considered a credible writer and it is clear you are not at all.

You wrote, “Although considered only human, one Muslim writer describes Muhammad as “[T]he best model for man in piety and perfection. He is a living proof of what man can be and of what he can accomplish in the realm of excellence and virtue. . . .”{4} So it is important to note that Muhammad believed that violence is a natural part of Islam.” Where is the logic in this??? Especially in the last sentence. How did you move from saying that Prophet Mohammad, the best of all human beings, embodies perfection and virtue and then say he believed violence was an integral part of Islam? Where are your references? The verses that you took out of context? Any decent person is aware that no religion condones violence or bloodshed and I am telling you Islam is not an exception.

The Badr incident did not occur the way you wrongfully relate it. What you say about jihad and the Holy Prophet’s life is ridiculous and immature. I should not and will not justify that Islam is a peaceful religion and loves the other monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam). Rather, I am asking you to thoroughly research your ideas before publishing them on the web site, which needs to be cleaned from bias and misinformation.

Thank you for taking the time to express your views regarding my essay on Islam and the sword. I am sorry that you believe

my information to be in error. I would be interested in your description of the Badr incident. The Oxford History of Islam describes it as one of a number of raids launched against Meccan caravans in order to seize booty and hostages. I would assume that this was accomplished violently rather than peacefully. I am under the impression that Muhammad's depiction as a warrior and political leader is not very controversial.

My point regarding the life of Muhammad and the model he represents is simple. If Muhammad is to be considered the ultimate model within Islam for human behavior, and if he used violence as a tool to further Islam, then violence is a natural part of Islam.

The idea that no religion condones violence is just not the case. The Norse gods of Germania and Scandinavia worshipped Odin, the god of war. Human sacrifice was a central feature of the Aztec religion in Central America. Religion has been used to condone warfare and violence.

I doubt that anyone writes on history or religion without a bias. But, I do feel that accuracy is important.

Sincerely,

Don Closson

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"Can't God Use Reiki to

Heal?”

Hi Michael,

I am a Christian and I love Jesus with all my heart and believe in His healing power provided for us at the cross. I believe the provision is there, in the spiritual realm and it is up to us to connect with it and receive healing through prayer and taking authority in Jesus’ name. I believe He works through us and doesn’t refuse any prayer for healing, but does need us to connect with the healing and bring it into the physical realm.

Many Christians go to the doctors, take medication, have operations and none of these practices are frowned upon as “not being dependent on God for healing,” but many do not glorify Jesus in their healing, they usually give the glory to the doctor or hospital who treated them.

I pray for healing and the power to receive and have had healing on many occasions and if I haven’t immediately received, I do not for one minute think God hasn’t healed me, I know it’s my connection or the connection of whoever is praying for my healing that is not quite right.

Yesterday I went for a massage. The therapist asked me about any problem areas. I told her I had had problems with my back on and off for many years, but believed God had healed me. She began the massage, then she suddenly said, “I found the problem spot,”—which she had, she was right on it—”My hand has gone really hot, I’m doing reiki on it.” She didn’t ask me, she just did it. I didn’t mind, didn’t know much about it. The next morning I woke up and for the first time in years got out of bed without any pain or stiffness and my back has been great all day, despite lifting and carrying as is the nature of my job. I know it has been healed and I thanked God for the healing and texted the lady to tell her my back was healed. I

don’t for one minute think she healed me, no more than Benny Hinn heals anyone, he is just a channel like the massage lady was. I gave the glory to God and always will.

I wanted to know more about reiki; that’s why I looked on the internet for information and read your article with interest. I must say I am confused and must look into this further, I only want to do the right thing and I will of course speak with my pastor and other Christians, but my main point is that it seems instead of using man-made drugs and procedures for healing, we used natural energy that I believe was created by God for our use.

I’m glad to hear that your back is feeling better! At the same time, I must honestly say that some of the views expressed in your letter strike me as biblically and theologically unsound. Allow me to explain.

I think your first paragraph is a fairly good example. I personally don’t believe that what you’re describing here is actually biblical Christianity. After all, where does the Bible teach that God needs us “to connect with the healing and bring it into the physical realm”? What does this even mean? I’ve read such things in books by Wiccans (I’m being totally serious here), but I don’t believe that this is a Christian notion. After all, is God not sovereign and omnipotent? Can He not heal anyone He wants—and at any time He wants?

And if God does not refuse a request for healing, then what do you say to all the truly godly Christian people who (along with their churches and families) have urgently pleaded with God for healing—and not received it? Please think very carefully about this, because you could unintentionally end up causing a great deal of spiritual and emotional pain by insisting that such people do not have enough faith to be healed. Let me offer a bit of biblical support for this contention.

Many evangelical biblical scholars believe that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was some kind of physical malady. But the Lord refused to heal him of it (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Now did Paul really not have enough faith to be healed? Was it not actually God's will that he NOT be healed? Similarly, in Galatians 4:13-14 he mentions preaching the gospel to the Galatians while he was ill, an illness which was a trial to them. But if Paul could have been instantly healed, then why did he put the Galatians (and himself) through such an unneccessary trial? Finally, Elisha was a very great prophet of the Lord. And yet, in 2 Kings 13:14 we read that he was suffering from the illness from which he died (2 Kings 13:20). But such a state of affairs seems totally unnecessary (indeed, virtually impossible for a great prophet like Elisha) on the view which you have presented. It thus seems to me that we need to adopt a more nuanced, biblical view of prayer. To see what I mean, please carefully read my article on petitionary prayer here: www.probe.org/problems-and-promises-of-petitionary-prayer/.

In addition, please carefully re-read the last section of my article on Reiki entitled, "Does All Healing Come from God?" at www.probe.org/reiki/.

Of course, I certainly agree that modern Western medicine is not perfect. But its reliance on quality control, reproducible results, the scientific method, extensive training, education, and licensing, etc., clearly distinguish it from much of energy medicine. In addition, since those who practice it are not typically calling upon spirit guides and other questionable entities, it is much less likely to entangle those making use of it with possible demonic involvement.

At any rate, I'm sincerely glad that you're feeling better—and I hope that that continues to be the case. But I would caution you against getting any more deeply involved in Reiki energy medicine.

This is maybe not what you were hoping to hear, but I must

give you my honest opinion before the Lord.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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"How Do I Talk To My Brother About Taoism?"

Greetings Mr. Gleghorn.

I recently read your article "Philosophical Taoism: A Christian Appraisal."

Recently my older brother confessed to me, "I am not the most religious person in the world, but I do believe in God, a universal consciousness from which all things were created. And I do consider myself to be a spiritual person, though more in alignment with nature and the universe that falls outside the confines of organized religion. I have studied the eastern traditions of Taoism and Buddhism, and while they are separate and distinct from Christianity, the precepts found in the commandments and in western religion, including the concept of forgiveness, are all found there."

I want to help him very much but I don't want to preach to him. But I believe that God has placed this burden on my heart to help bring my brother into a right relationship with him or at least to use me for some part of this purpose. I would like to know if you could help me with any thoughts or resources that might help me to witness to him or to help him to see that he is on the wrong path for salvation. I do not believe

that he is saved at this point in time.

Thanks for your letter. I think you are wise to avoid *preaching* to your brother. As I'm sure you know, however, it is extremely important that you be *praying* for him. Also, it would probably be good for you to familiarize yourself with a few important religious texts which your brother might be reading. Here I'm thinking of, for example, the Tao Te Ching (the classic text of Taoism). Finally, I would highly recommend reading the chapter on Taoism (and whatever other chapters may be relevant) in Dean Halverson's book, The Compact Guide to World Religions. You can find it here: www.amazon.com/Compact-Guide-World-Religions-Halverson/dp/1556617046/.

Finally, be patient. It may take time (e.g. many years) for your brother to come to Christ. Keep praying for him, keep engaging him in conversation, and keep pointing him back to Jesus. Although Taoism does speak of the greatness of forgiveness, it really doesn't have any genuine means of providing it. The Tao is generally understood to be impersonal—not personal—and hence, incapable of extending forgiveness (which, after all, only a personal being can do). Furthermore, Taoism has no atonement for sin. Only Christianity offers a personal God, who loves us, and who sent His Son to be an atonement for our sins. This is often overlooked. But it is the only hope for man—and the only real "good news" there is (at least in an ultimate sense).

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“Is Reiki Just Another Means to Medicine?”

I have a daughter who is 8 and [whose health] is very compromised. We have been to doctors, etc. who have yet to come up with an answer. I have had several people recommend Reiki. I have hesitated because I am very leery of “energy” based healings. I am a believing, Bible reading Christian. There is a woman in our church who suggested Reiki and is trained in it. In “testing” her [words against Scripture] I catch a lot of New Age phrases that I am not comfortable with and [it has] become clear she is not actually reading the Word of God…(vs. just attending services).

Your answer supplying a Christian Perspective on Reiki was the best in terms of guiding me that this is wrong. I think that the reason Reiki is more questionable is because it is reaching out to the “spiritual realm” that does not glorify God. Yet, I am wondering, given that conventional medicine does not glorify God (more so it glorifies the doctor) is Reiki just another means to medicine? Or is it not considered viable because it is so spiritually based?

I just do not understand energy healing and many people (including Christians) suggest we explore energy healing. Given my faith…I know that God is sovereign and can use ALL things…but He also warns us. Do you mind if I ask you to further elaborate? Given modern medicine is simply a tool of God, it does also violate some scriptural things if you look at Old Testament teachings (i.e. vaccines contain animal DNA and we are not to mix this, etc.)

I just want to put this to rest once and for all and know if I am not neglecting an avenue of potential healing for my child. Thank you.

Thanks for your letter. I'm truly sorry to hear about the health difficulties your daughter is struggling with! However, I could not, in good conscience, recommend Reiki energy medicine as a possible solution. You mentioned an email response which I wrote on a Christian perspective on Reiki, but I'm wondering if you read the article I wrote on Reiki? If not, you can find it here.

In the article I go into much more depth than I can do over email. I offer an overview of Reiki energy medicine, look into the question of whether or not there is any legitimate scientific support for such energy, ask about Reiki's alleged success stories, and discuss some reasons why I believe that Christians should be concerned about Reiki.

First, and foremost, I think that we should be concerned about the spiritual aspects of Reiki. As my article spells out in much more detail, I think that we should be concerned about where the power of Reiki really comes from (provided that there is any real power there to begin with). This leads to my second main concern: if Reiki really has no power whatever to effect genuine (as opposed to merely psychosomatic) healing of the body, then we could end up endangering people's lives by sending them to a Reiki practitioner, instead of a properly credentialed medical doctor. I also explain my reasoning here in more detail in my article.

Of course, modern Western medicine is not perfect. But its reliance on quality control, reproducible results, the scientific method, extensive training, education, and licensing, etc., clearly distinguish it from much of energy medicine. In addition, since those who practice it are not typically calling upon spirit guides and other questionable entities, it is much less likely to entangle those making use of it with possible demonic involvement.

At any rate, as my article shows, it seems to me that there are sufficient reasons for Christians to be wary of Reiki and

to avoid it. Others may disagree, but this is definitely my opinion on the matter.

I hope this is helpful and, again, please check out my article on the subject (if you have not done so already).

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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"You've Got Islam Wrong"

Dear Rick Rood,

I stumbled upon your "What is Islam" web page and read it thoroughly. I would like to know how you got that information because it is inaccurate. I would just like to point them out to you so that you may correct them.

> ***"He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah, the chief god of the Arab pantheon of deities."***

Correction: Allah is not the chief god of the Arabs pantheon of dieties. Allah means "God" in Arabic. You are confusing the reader by associating Allah with other Arab deities as for example Zeus is the chief god in the Romans.

> ***"At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam. In doing so, it's important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system. "***

Correction: Islam is a pure monthestic religion. The message

of Islam is that "There is no God, but God." How is it not? Please elaborate.

> *"The Koran mentions numerous names of Allah, and these names are found frequently on the lips of devout Muslims who believe them to have a nearly magical power."*

Correction: Muslims do not believe that Allah's names hold magical powers. There are 99 names which is mentioned in the Quran (not Koran), for example: The Most Merciful, The Protector, The Creator, The All-Knowing, The Loving. These names identify the characteristics of God.

> *"Though Muhammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshiping him."*

Correction: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) always recognized that he was a human being. He was a human, and he made mistakes just like the other prophets who are human beings. It is very judgmental for you to add that Muslims appear to come close worshipping him when that is not the case at all. Muslims only worship God, and only God.

> *"Those who conclude that Islam is a fatalistic religion have good reason for doing so."*

Why is that?

> *"But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin."*

What kinds? For example?

> *"A sixth pillar, that of jihad, is often added. (The term means 'exertion' or 'struggle' in behalf of God.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of*

Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or 'holy war.' The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!"

You got the part right about how the Jihad means "struggle," but you got the rest of it completely false. It is a struggle to attain nearness to God, by struggling to overcome your bad desires, & to stick to Islam under difficult circumstances, such as when facing persecution and other problems.

There are MANY other mistakes that you have written about Islam. Not to mention that it sounds very bigoted. Please fix your mistakes. Thanks!

Thanks for your letter. Rick Rood is no longer with Probe Ministries. However, I'm afraid that you may have misunderstood certain aspects of Rick's article. Please allow me to try to briefly clarify.

"He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah, the chief god of the Arab pantheon of deities."

Correction: Allah is not the chief god of the Arabs pantheon of dieties. Allah means "God" in Arabic. You are confusing the reader by associating Allah with other Arab deities as for example Zeus is the chief god in the Romans.

1. Any good history of the Arab peoples that documents the religious climate immediately preceding the time of Muhammad will confirm that there was indeed a pantheon of deities. Muhammad instituted monotheism in place of a prior Arabic polytheism.

"At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam. In doing so, it's important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system. "

Correction: Islam is a pure monthestic religion. The message of Islam is that "There is no God, but God." How is it not? Please elaborate.

2. Mr. Rood uses the term "monolithic" – not "monotheistic." I believe that you simply misread him at this point. Islam is certainly monotheistic. He documents what he means by it not being monolithic in his article. [Note: Dictionary.com provides this meaning for *monolithic*: "characterized by massiveness, total uniformity, rigidity, invulnerability, etc."]

"The Koran mentions numerous names of Allah, and these names are found frequently on the lips of devout Muslims who believe them to have a nearly magical power."

Correction: Muslims do not believe that Allah's names hold magical powers. There are 99 names which is mentioned in the Quran (not Koran), for example: The Most Merciful, The Protector, The Creator, The All-Knowing, The Loving. These names identify the characteristics of God.

3. Your third point is well-taken, provided we are speaking of theologically educated Muslims. However, many Muslims hold to what some scholars call "folk Islam." This sort of Islam, often influenced by animism, does often regard these names as having magical power. Similar aberrant beliefs can be found in Judaism, Christianity, and most other world religions. And sometimes Sufi mysticism can tend in this direction as well.

"Though Muhammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshiping him."
Correction: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) always recognized that he was a human being. He was a human, and he made mistakes just like the other prophets who are human beings. It is very judgmental for you to add that Muslims

appear to come close worshipping him when that is not the case at all. Muslims only worship God, and only God.

4. Again, your point is well-taken, provided we are speaking of theologically educated Muslims. However, as I mentioned above, some Muslims would come awfully close to worshiping Muhammad, just as some Roman Catholics come awfully close to worshiping the virgin Mary. I'm not saying this is what orthodox Islam teaches, it's simply what sometimes happens in practice.

"Those who conclude that Islam is a fatalistic religion have good reason for doing so."

Why is that?

5. Do you not believe that all things are dictated by the sovereign will of Allah? Does anything happen that is not willed by God? If you reject this doctrine, I think you would be taking a minority view within Islam.

"But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin."

What kinds? For example?

6. Casting stones at a stone pillar representing Satan. This was done by Arab pagans prior to the time of Muhammad.

"A sixth pillar, that of jihad, is often added. (The term means 'exertion' or 'struggle' in behalf of God.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or 'holy war.' The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!"

You got the part right about how the Jihad means "struggle,"

> *but you got the rest of it completely false. It is a struggle to attain nearness to God, by struggling to overcome your bad desires, & to stick to Islam under difficult circumstances, such as when facing persecution and other problems.*

7. As for Jihad, it has historically been understood by most Muslims (and still is today) as Holy War. It can be interpreted, as you say, to mean striving in the cause of Allah to live a pure and righteous life. But many passages in the Quran resist this interpretation (e.g. Suras 4:74-75; 9:5, 14, 29; 47:4; 61:4; etc.).

The New Encyclopedia of Islam (Altamira Press, rev. ed. 2001) documents many of these points.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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"What's the Difference Between a Prophet and a Clairvoyant?"

How can I show my friend biblically that clairvoyance, tarot cards, and such are wrong? She seems to think that there is no difference in a prophet and clairvoyant (psychic reading), seeing as they both can predict the future. Can you help me explain the differences?

You might try to get your friend to understand the importance

of making distinctions between prophecy and clairvoyance by pointing out the difference between poisonous mushrooms and safe mushrooms: they can both be eaten, but one kind will kill you! Those who claim to be clairvoyant are either fraudulent, making things up as they read the body-language responses of their customers, or they are being fed information from demons. [For an example of a fradulent psychic, see our answer to email "What About Crossing Over's John Edward?"] And Jesus told us that demons lie ("[W]hen he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." John 8:44).

The biblical standard of a prophet of God is 100% accuracy. This is because the information about future events is coming from God Himself, and He is powerful enough to overcome the limitation of speaking through a fallen, fallible human being. That is a long way from the fuzzy "information" from self-proclaimed psychics and clairvoyants! If anyone is receiving their "power" or information from anyone except God, which would be demonstrated by 100% accuracy in their predictions (and, I would suggest, the mark of Christlikeness in their character and life), it is coming from the dark side—the Evil One. There is no such thing as morally neutral supernatural information or power.

It is a dangerous thing to play around with the occult, as many can testify that this is how they opened the doors to demon oppression in their lives.

We have several articles you may find helpful in showing your friend God's warnings to stay away from the occult:

"What's a Biblical Description of Witchcraft?"

The World of the Occult

The Occult Connection

Hope you find this helpful.

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See Also:

- “Is Clairvoyance Wrong?”