

“Is It True that Some NT Documents Were First Written in Aramaic/Syriac and THEN in Greek?”

I have been asked what is wrong with this bible by George Lamsa which is a translation from the Aramaic of the Peshitta. It claims greater accuracy than KJV since it is based on the eastern texts, which they claim are older than the OT Hebrew texts and that the NT texts were written originally in Aramaic since the common language of that area was and is in some areas still Aramaic. The differences that this bible translation points out between KJV and Aramaic have no major change in doctrine. How reliable are the eastern texts? And why are they not mentioned or discounted in textual criticism works?

Thank you for your e-mail requesting information on your question about the Bible translation of George Lamsa based on ancient Syriac Texts, and in particular, the *Syriac Peshitta*.

While I am not personally familiar with this work, or what it claims for itself, I am somewhat knowledgeable in textual criticism. So I will give you a quick response to your questions.

Syriac is the language which was spoken in the general area of modern Syria and Iraq, extending on the west (just east of the coastal area then known as Phoenicia—modern Lebanon) to the Euphrates River on the east. The two major cities were Antioch and Damascus. As you know, early on the first Christian expansion from Jerusalem was into this area with the Church at Antioch where Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and others ministered and at which the name “Christians” was first used historically (to

our knowledge-Acts 11:26).

It was because of this growth of the Christian Church that there developed a need for a translation of the Bible into the Syriac language, an Aramaic dialect. It, along with Hebrew and Arabic, are all related Semitic languages. Merrill Unger notes that the *Peshitta* is the product of many hands, and the exact date of its origin is unknown. He also says that it came into existence after 150 A.D., an accepted date when the Syriac Church became a visible presence in the region. It is generally accepted that most of its Old Testament Books were translated from the Hebrew by around 200 A.D. Most scholars believe that the origin of this tradition came from the hands of Christian Jews.

The *Peshitta's* Pentateuch follows very closely the Massoretic Text (tenth century A.D.) of our Old Testament while other portions are clearly translated from the Greek Septuagint, the accepted translation of the Old Testament for Greek-speaking Jews and Christians of the time.

I would have to see your sources which claim the Syriac translations are earlier, and therefore have greater accuracy than the texts underwriting the King James Bible, before I feel I can fully answer your question. What *are* the sources? All of my sources clearly point to the fact that the *Peshitta*, in the form we have come to know it, developed (at least for the New Testament) a good bit later than their Greek originals. That is not to say that there is no manuscript evidence prior to the Massoretic era.

Further, both the *Syriac Peshitta* and the KJV are based most strongly upon the Eastern Family of (Greek-speaking) texts (*Textus Receptus*). The KJV is based primarily on this text Family because the bulk of manuscript evidence available in 1607 in England and Holland for scholars to work with was constituted mainly of this Eastern body of texts.

Additional, more recent manuscript evidence, such as *Siniaticus* (Aleph) and *Codex Vaticanus* (B), along with other Western Texts, have brought additional light to textual criticism of the N.T., and convinced most scholars (Westcott, Hort, Nestle, and most others) that the Nestle's (critical) text is based on earlier and a more accurate rendering of the text than the *Textus Receptus* (though, as you point out, none of the variables—be it *Textus Receptus*, Nestle's Text, or the *Peshitta*—affect any major doctrinal teaching of the eastern text.

Now apart from Matthew, which some scholars believe was originally translated into Aramaic and only second into our Greek version, I know of no higher critical scholarship which can substantiate that all of the New Testament Texts were written in Aramaic first. It would not make sense for the Epistles to first have been written into Syriac because Paul was not writing any of his letters to people who spoke Syriac (Aramaic).

It might make sense for the four gospels, but I am not aware of any textual critical sources which try to document Aramaic origins for them, with the exception of a persistent tradition spoken of by two early church fathers, Papias and Irenaeus, that Matthew did in fact write something in Aramaic first which may be embodied within his Greek gospel. There is little doubt that prior to the writing of the four Gospels, there was an oral or spoken tradition circulating as the Apostles fanned out and began to speak of Jesus. Most scholars point to this oral tradition as the best explanation for the overlapping of material in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

The two primary languages spoken in Palestine during Jesus' time were Aramaic and Greek, and, with the coming of the Romans to that area, some Latin. Formal Hebrew was still read in the synagogues, but everyday communication was expressed in Aramaic. It is not likely that Jesus taught or conversed in Greek (though He and the Apostles appear to be familiar with

the Greek Septuagint). Therefore, there *is* an Aramaic base to the Gospel material, since this was the language of Jesus and the Apostles.

How reliable are the eastern texts? If by "Eastern" we mean the Greek Texts and the Syriac Texts (but we could also add Coptic and Armenian, though they come later), we find that they all flow from common sources: either the Hebrew (and the little bit of Aramaic we find in the Old Testament), or the Koine Greek of the New Testament world (which produced both the (1) Greek Translation [Septuagint] of the Old Testament, (2) the original New Testament Documents themselves, and (3) those writings of the earliest Church Fathers (who all wrote in either Greek (Eastern) or Latin (Western)). We find precedent for this in the New Testament writers themselves who, with the possible exception of Luke, most assuredly all spoke Aramaic but wrote their letters in Greek. Another factor pointing to an original Greek text is the presence throughout the Gospels of explanations for Aramaic words/expressions. These would not be necessary if the original text had been rendered in Aramaic.

And so we could say that the Eastern Family corpus is highly reliable and true to the text 95% of the time. But the same could be said of the Latin Texts. AND the King James Bible. The KJV is a very good translation, but we have gleaned additional, earlier textual evidence since 1607 which has made us reconsider how the KJV translators rendered certain portions of the text. Its framers could only translate from the manuscript evidence available to them.

Textually speaking, there is little manuscript evidence to substantiate an Aramaic precedent over the Greek. There are however, ten different Syriac manuscript sources which have survived, dating from the fifth to the tenth centuries A.D. The earliest, a palimpsest written in the 4th or 5th century, is the oldest extant manuscript which is a representative of the Old Syriac translation (which probably originated around

200 A.D). All of these manuscripts give evidence of having borrowed from pre-existing sources—the Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint, or the Massoretic tradition.

By far the best Aramaic specimen of the *Syriac Peshitta* is found in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, and dates from the sixth or seventh century A.D. Close behind is one in the British Museum in London which dates from the ninth or tenth century A.D. I have looked at this codex and taken pictures of it.

Finally, in answer to your question about the silence of “Eastern” texts, this is not a good designation, since “Eastern” includes both Syriac and Greek manuscript traditions. They are essentially the same. You are mistaken in stating that the eastern texts are not mentioned, or they are discounted in textual critical apparatus. As you can see from my summary above, they *are* there. All extant manuscript sources relating to the Syriac family of texts are noted. Thus, to my knowledge, the Syriac family of texts are not ignored in the literature.

My recommendation is that you should find in your area a good theological seminary (with a strong commitment and high regard for the scriptures themselves), and check out the section of the library which deals with Old and New Testament Criticism, and sources which refer to the *Syriac Peshitta*.

I hope this gives a satisfactory response to your questions.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

“I Don’t Know How to Answer this Biblical Argument Against Eternal Security”

I have been debating a Christian online about whether salvation is permanent, which I believe it is. This person brought up two verses to which I don’t know how to respond, 2 Peter 2:20-21:

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

I looked in a couple of commentaries as well as in *When Critics Ask* (by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe) and they either said nothing about it or they didn’t address the issue at hand.

You have brought up a great question! The security of every believer is a critical issue in the Christian life. John 10:28-30 assures us that if we are given eternal life by God through Jesus Christ, no one can snatch us from the Father’s hand. Romans 8:28-39 also guarantees that nothing in all of reality can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

With that said, there is the issue of the “apparent” problem passages. Of them, 2 Peter 2:20-21 seems a real nasty one. But upon reading the entire epistle from Peter, one can see that the people in question are false teachers. Peter’s perspective, as that of Jude in Jude 19, is that these false teachers were not truly Christian. As Jude puts it, they are

“worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.” Most likely these teachers publicly professed Christ as their Lord, but their subsequent rejection verified their unchanged spiritual condition.

The Bible as a whole teaches that believers are securely held in God’s hand. But let us be careful not to judge others because of what we see or don’t see. Challenge one another in perseverance to bear fruit, but leave the final judgment to the word of God that is “able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Thanks so much for your insightful question. God gives understanding to those who seek it as if searching for buried treasure and precious silver. (Proverbs 2:3-5}

Kris Samons

Probe Ministries

“Do Hindus Believe in Our Jesus?”

I have a question about Hinduism. I just had a conversation with someone who claims to be Hindu, yet believe in Christianity as well. He said that salvation in Hinduism is not only by karma (or karm, as he called it), but also by dharm, which he referred to as the acknowledgment of God being God. He also said karm was what good you have done, and didn’t talk about consequences of it. He said that wasn’t as much doctrine as mis-interpretation. He was saying that they believe in the same Jesus, but there’s no way this could be true. I wish we could have talked longer, but this wasn’t

possible. My question is this: are any of these claims found in their scripture?

Thanks for your question about Hinduism. Hinduism is a very diverse collection of religious/philosophical beliefs. It's very common to meet two Hindus who completely contradict one another. That being said, it's not a surprise to hear some of the things that you heard from your Hindu friend.

One of the yogas (ways to reach human potential) of Hindu thought is called bhakti. This type of yoga is the personal devotion a person can have in any given form of the Deity. Many Hindus think Christianity is a great means by which to devote oneself to God. It already has a rigorous set of beliefs and practices in place that can be used as a road to ultimate liberation. Huston Smith says, "Many Hindus acknowledge Christ as a God-man, while believing that there have been others, such as Rama, Krishna, and the Buddha."

Allow me to make some observations. First of all, if you meet a Hindu who believes in Jesus, consider this a great place to find common ground. Don't be discouraged. The next step is to find out just what he or she believes about Him. It's possible that this person may be a true believer in Christ. Remember, God is not just the God of "western" thought. But it's also possible that he or she believes in a different Jesus, influenced by a pantheistic worldview. Does he think Jesus is just one of many ishtas (forms of the divine)? If so, then why would Jesus claim to be the only way to God in John 14:6? If the Scriptures are called to question, then what other resources do they use to believe that Jesus was even an ishta in the first place? If his Jesus is not the Jesus of the Bible, then it might be a great idea to find out just where he's getting his concepts of Him. Also you might bone up on why there's warrant for belief in the inspiration of the Bible and the person of Jesus in the Bible. See our Web site for all sorts of information and helps ([Theology and Philosophy Topics](#))

I would also suggest you read up on Hindu thought a bit. I'd say the best bet is to form a relationship with this Hindu and talk to him. There may or may not be any textual source for his beliefs. Unlike the religions of the West, Hinduism doesn't have an authoritative text to refer to for all their beliefs. They have some helpful texts, such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita. These are the most well known and accessible texts for understanding the religion and philosophy of Hindus. But neither of them will talk about Jesus, per se (being written before His time). I suggest Huston Smith's book *The World's Religions* or S.A. Nigosian's *World Religions: A Historical Approach*. I pray that you'll have plenty of discussions with this person and that God would use you to sharpen one another (you to be a better disciple, him to be a disciple of the one true God).

Kris Samons
Probe Ministries

“I Am a Wiccan—Are You Saying I’m Going to Hell?”

I am a 16. I was searching through the web when I found your web site on the Occult, naturally I was interested so I read through it. I found all of the information to me quiet intriguing. I am a practioner of Wicca. I am a wiccan. I have been for the past year. I am not a worshiper of satan nor do I inflict bodily harm upon myself through rituals. I do not believe in one all mighty god, rather I believe in many gods and goddesses. I am a believer of faith, I worship all things, the dead, trees, inanimate or not. I do not use rituals to gain, or hinder others. I simply use them to help or support

things I love, like a protection spell while a loved one is on a trip and away from the family. I also ask the Lord and Lady to look over a loved one as they make there last journey. I do not believe in Heaven or Hell. I believe in personal "heavens" and personal "hells."

Your site has given me the impression that your view is that if you are not a pure christian you are going to "hell." You must worship a certain way and do certain things to be "saved?" Am I right in saying this? I was just wondering on your personal views on Wiccanism. I am curious about your opinions. Please feel free to e-nail me back. I would greatly appreciate it.

Blessed be,

Hello _____,

Thank you for taking the time to write us.

Yes, you read our views correctly. What we believe is definitely not politically correct. We believe that there is one God, that He has interacted with our world (which He created), and that He communicated true truth to us. Part of that truth is that there is only one way to be reconciled to Him, and that is by trusting in His Son Jesus to save us from our sin problem and to equip us for life as He intended it in this world, and for heaven when we die.

We do realize that it is far more appealing to believe that there are many ways to God or god, however one defines him/her/it, all equally valid. However, just as you can't live in the real world under that type of "all preferences are equally valid, all truths are equally true" misbeliefs, we believe that spiritual reality doesn't abide by those lies either. For instance, many people say they believe that physical reality is mere illusion, but you don't find them meditating on railroad tracks. And many people say they create

their own truth, but they all seem to agree that “red means stop,” or they don’t live too long!

Let me try to reframe a common misunderstanding of hell. When Jesus was on earth, He claimed to be God. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” One of the implications of that statement is that life is found in a relationship with Him. Apart from Jesus, there is no life, only death, which means separation from the source of life. Heaven isn’t so much a place as it the fullness of *relationship* with a real Person—God. So being “saved” is not about jumping through religious hoops; it is about being rescued from an eternity of destruction and death where people are separated from life, which is only found in Jesus.

You said you don’t believe in one almighty God, but various gods and goddesses. Are they real? What evidence do you have that they exist? If you are trusting in imaginary friends, wouldn’t you want to know that? On the other hand, Jesus was a real, historical Person who made astounding claims that are ridiculous if they are not true, and the only way to be reconciled to God if they are. (He also said He was the only way to the Father. Again, that is an arrogant and presumptuous thing to say—unless it’s true.)

So hell is not a place where an angry, vengeful God laughs as he sends people who wouldn’t jump through his hoops. Hell exists because God made us to be in a love relationship with Him, and He will not, cannot, force us to love Him. It has to be freely chosen. Since life is only found in God, hell is the place for people who would not accept His offer of love and friendship. And since there is no life apart from God, hell is a place of everlasting death and destruction because there is no life where there is no relationship with God.

You asked about our view of Wicca: it is not the same as Satanism, but it is another false religion based on lies and misbeliefs that are designed to draw people away from the true

God. We believe that Wicca ultimately comes from the mind of the literal, evil being called Satan who hates God and hates people and lies to them so that they will suffer like he does. And while you may well be a gentle, kind and wonderful person, the kind of person that all of us at Probe would love to have as our next-door neighbor, we believe that without a personal relationship with the one true God through His Son Jesus Christ, you cannot experience life as He intended for you to live in this life, your sins will separate you from a holy God forever, and you cannot go to heaven when you die.

I do pray that because God loves you as much as He does, He will do whatever it takes to show Himself to you in a way that is sufficiently intimate to your heart that you will KNOW that it is Him pursuing you with a strong but gentle divine love.

And I pray you will experience His blessing on your life.

Most sincerely,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Is Islam a Religion of Peace or of Violence?”

I'm hearing people (like the president) say that Islam is actually a religion of peace. Others are warning us that the terrorists who attacked the U.S. on 9/11 represent the true Islam of anger and violence. Which is it? And why would they want to attack us anyway?

To get a better grasp on this apparent contradiction I had a very enlightening conversation with a missionary to Muslims

for many years who also has a Ph.D. in Islamics. He provided perspective I have never heard:

We have to back up to 610 A.D. and look at the big picture of Muhammad and the Qur'an.

Muhammad was frustrated at the heathen polytheism of the Arabian culture, and wanted people to return to the one true God, the God of the Bible. In fact, he called Jews and Christians "the people of the Book." In the beginning, he said he was preaching the same message, just in a different language. And if people had doubts about what he was saying, they should check with the people of the Book.

The Qur'an, which is a compilation of the teachings of Muhammad after his death, is not in chronological order. When Islamic scholars rearrange the chapters, or suras, into chronological order, they are comprised of the Mecca (early, middle and late) suras, the city where Muhammad started out, and the Medina suras, where he ended up. Something very important happened in between those two sections. As Muhammad rose in prominence and influence, accumulating followers, some of them wanted to verify that he was actually a prophet of God. He said, "Go check with the Jewish tribes." So they did. . . and the Jews said, "No, Muhammad is not a prophet of God." This made him very angry, and it changed the way he thought about Jews. The anti-semitism of Islam began here. The hostility, violence, controlling nature, and forceful missionary zeal of Islam ("accept Islam or suffer") developed in Muhammad's later teachings.

So there are two very different aspects to Islam. Earlier suras are more about peace. Later suras are more about violence. In addition, where Muslims are in the minority (such as North America and Europe), they tend to follow the earlier Mecca suras. Where they are in the majority (such as the middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc.), they tend to follow the later Medina suras.

Add to this the fact that in the culture of Islam, people learn differently. We are taught to think critically, to analyze and compare and contrast literature. Muslims are taught NOT to think critically, only to memorize the Qur'an and parrot back what they are taught about Islam. So it is not surprising to learn that some Muslims say that Islam is a religion of peace, since that is their perception and experience, and other Muslims say that Islam is a religion of conquering and judgment, since that is their perception and experience.

The Qur'an contradicts itself from the early Mecca suras to the Medina suras. This is different from the progressive revelation we find in the Bible, where God reveals more and more information as history unfolds, and He reveals what had earlier been mysteries. This makes sense in view of the fact that the Qur'an is a human invention and the Bible is divinely inspired.

I also asked the missionary why Osama bin Laden wanted to attack us. He suggested three reasons:

- A personal grudge against the U.S. for pressuring Sudan and Saudi Arabia (bin Laden's home country) to kick him out.
- A resentment of America that he shares with many Muslims for exporting our immoral standards and examples to the world through TV, movies and music. They object to the way sexual immorality and impurity, women's provocative dress, pornography, drug and alcohol abuse, and homosexuality are presented as normal, desirable lifestyles. (And I have to say this is a completely legitimate complaint, although their way of showing frustration and displeasure is completely unacceptable!)
- The whole Palestinian-Israeli land fight. In the Arab mindset, the sons of Ishmael (Abraham's son) had the rights to the promised land, and they held it for thousands of

years. Then when Israel (sons of Isaac, Abraham's other son) came and took it away from them, that was heinously unfair, but the U.S. backed and supported Israel. What looks like righting a wrong to Israel is "wronging a right" to the Palestinians. This is an impossible situation that cannot be solved until the Lord Jesus returns and HE makes all things right.

One final comment which Pat asked me to be sure and stress: it is just as illogical to judge all Muslims as terrorists as it is for the rest of the world to condemn all American Christians as Timothy McVeighs.

This is a very complex situation and won't be solved easily or quickly. It shows the importance of worldview and the truth that ideas have consequences.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Christ Was Around Before Satan?"

In your [essay on angels](#) it states that Christ created the angels, wouldn't that mean that Christ would have to have been around before Satan? It states somewhere in the bible (can't remember at the moment where exactly) that he is a "fallen angel." Your statement confuses me at this point—please, if you can, explain. And I apologize if this shows naivete on my part, but like I said, it's just a question.

Yes, that's exactly right. Jesus Christ has existed eternally, in loving fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit; He

was not created, He has always existed. He didn't come to earth until 2000 years ago when He took on human flesh and became fully human as well as remaining fully God, but He DID exist before there was anything else. He created the universe, the earth, and the angels (John 1:3, Col. 1:16). He watched Satan choose to rebel and become a fallen angel, and He agreed to come to earth to redeem us and pay the penalty for our sin by dying on a cross for us, and then coming back to life three days later. Then, forty days after that, He went back to heaven, which is where He came from in the first place.

Does this help?

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“You Have Many Inaccuracies in Your Article on Islam”

Dear Rick Rood,

I stumbled upon your [“What is Islam”](#) article 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 monotheistic 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 worshipping 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, and 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.

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 montheistic religion. The message of Islam is that ‘There is no God, but God.’ How is it not? Please elaborate.

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.

“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.

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. Finally, 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.

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 worshipping Muhammad, just as some Roman Catholics come awfully close to worshipping the virgin Mary, even though church doctrine does not include Mary worship. 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?

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?

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, and to stick to Islam under difficult circumstances, such as when facing persecution and other problems.

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

“Your Comments About Mormonism Are Nonsense”

I have read your statements in your article [A Short Look at Six World Religions](#). I happen to be Mormon and have heard this nonsense before:

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

1. We never have denied the deity of Christ. Christ is

Jehovah, the great I am. This is within our doctrine.

2. We are saved by grace. No doubt about it. It's part of our doctrine.

3. We have always taught that Jesus took his body the third day the same as it is recorded in the Bible. I don't know where you received your info on that, but we never have denied the resurrection of Christ. In fact when serving my mission it was common for other Christian groups to say that Christ is only a spirit. We had to teach them that Christ in reality took his body the third day.

4. We believe that there is one Godhead. We believe in one Elohim.

5. "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly, we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God." Joseph Smith.

Christ taught that we should not judge. It seems to me that many so called "Christians" judge other Christians who don't believe as they do. Let the Lord do the judging.

Thank you for responding to my article. I don't know if you will be able to receive what I have to say, since the Mormon use of Biblical terms seems to differ from what the rest of us mean by it, but I will attempt to respond to your argument.

1. We never have denied the deity of Christ. Christ is Jehovah, the great I am. This is within our doctrine.

When orthodox Christians say "deity of Christ," we mean that He is one with the Father. There is one God of the Bible, although He exists as three persons, and Jesus is—and has always been—as fully God as the Father. As I understand it, Mormon doctrine is that Jesus was a created being, which would put Him on a different—inferior—level to the eternally-existing Father. So the Father existed before Jesus did, which

would make Him (Jesus) less than the eternally-existing Creator of the Universe. Which the Bible proclaims that He is:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8)

“In Him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9).

Of Jesus it was announced: “These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again” (Revelation 2:8); the same claim made by God Almighty: “This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6). Also, compare Revelation 22:13 with Isaiah 48:12.

Also as I understand it, Mormon doctrine is that Jesus is Jehovah, and the Father is Elohim, and they are different Gods. But in the Old Testament, these are two names for the same, one, God.

James Talmage, one of the Mormon authorities, states: “This [the Trinity] cannot rationally be construed to mean that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are one in substance and person” (*A Study of the Articles of Faith*, p.40).

James Talmage states: “Jesus Christ was Jehovah...Jesus Christ, who is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In all of scripture, where God is mentioned and where he has appeared, it was Jehovah...The Father has never dealt with man directly and personally since the fall” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol.1, p.11,27).

Joseph F. Smith stated, “Among the spirit children of Elohim, the first-born was and is Jehovah, or Jesus Christ, to whom all others are juniors” (*Gospel Doctrine*, p.70).

In contrast, the Bible uses the names Elohim and Jehovah interchangeably for the one true God. The English form "Jehovah" was developed from four consonants (YHWH) from which we get the word "Yahweh," translated "LORD." The words "Yahweh" and "Elohim" are used together hundreds of times, as in: 'LORD our God', 'LORD my God', 'LORD his God', 'LORD your God'. For example: "The Lord [Jehovah] our God [Elohim] is one Lord [Jehovah]" (Deuteronomy 6:4). See also Genesis 2:4-22; Deuteronomy 4:1; Judges 5:3; 1 Samuel 2:30; Isaiah 44:6.

2. We are saved by grace. No doubt about it. It's part of our doctrine.

The Bible's definition of grace is undeserved, unearned favor. It's a gift from God with no strings attached and no way to earn it. Apparently the Mormon definition of grace is very different, including man's efforts:

The LDS Third Article of Faith states: "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, *by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel*" (*Pearl of Great Price: Articles of Faith*). (emphasis mine)

Joseph Fielding Smith explains what that last phrase means: "that which man merits through his own acts through life and by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, p.134).

James Talmage explains: "...redemption from personal sins can only be obtained through obedience to the requirement of the Gospel, and a life of good works" (James Talmage, in *A Study of the Articles of Faith*).

In the Bible 'salvation' means deliverance from the consequence (eternal separation from God) of our sin. As I understand it, Mormon leaders have redefined the word "salvation" to have a two-fold meaning: a) forgiveness of sins and b) universal resurrection:

"There will be a General Salvation for all in the sense in which that term is generally used, but salvation, meaning resurrection, is not exaltation" (Stephen L. Richards, *Contributions of Joseph Smith*, LDS tract, p.5).

"All men are saved by grace alone without any act on their part, meaning they are resurrected" (Bruce McConkie, *What Mormons Think of Christ*", LDS tract, p.28).

3. We have always taught that Jesus took his body the third day the same as it is recorded in the Bible. I don't know where you received your info on that, but we never have denied the resurrection of Christ. In fact when serving my mission it was common for other Christian groups to say that Christ is only a spirit. We had to teach them that Christ in reality took his body the third day.

Upon doing further research, I was able to ascertain that I was wrong in saying that Mormon doctrine denies the bodily resurrection of Christ. I apologize and I have removed that part of my article.

4. We believe that there is one Godhead. We believe in one Elohim.

Orthodox Christianity teaches that there is one God. Period. The Godhead consists of one God in three persons, not three Gods. Not a plurality of Gods.

Bruce McConkie states: "Three separate personages—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a God, it is evident from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of Gods exists. To us, *these three are the only Gods we worship*" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p.576-7). (emphasis mine)

5. "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly, we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God." Joseph Smith.

How do you know when the Bible has been translated correctly? There are thousands of manuscripts in existence that allow us to check the reliability of the Biblical documents. The Bible was written in human language, which we can easily check because of the existence of so much collateral literature in the same language, unlike the Book of Mormon, supposedly written on golden plates in angelic language. Where is the fallibility test for that book?

Christ taught that we should not judge. It seems to me that many so called "Christians" judge other Christians who don't believe as they do. Let the Lord do the judging.

In the very same chapter as the "Judge not" verse, the Lord also says, "Beware of false prophets." How else will we distinguish between true and false except by judging the words and behavior of what men say? Of course, we cannot judge another's heart, which explains His command not to judge; but in order to be discerning about truth and deception, we MUST judge their fruit by comparing it to the only absolute we have, the Bible.

The Bible's standard for a prophet is 100% accuracy. By that standard, Joseph Smith is a false prophet. If he were a true prophet,

- Jesus would have returned in 1891 (*Documentary History of the Church* (DHC) 2:182)
- The Civil War would have poured out upon all nations (D&C 87:1-3), the wicked of Smith's generation would have been "swept from off the face of the land" (DHC 1:315)
- A temple would have been built in Independence Missouri by the generation living in 1832 (D&C 84:4,5)

I'm sorry, but the differences between Mormonism and orthodox Christianity are not "nonsense." They are significant, and need to be explored.

Respectfully,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Do You Have Anything on Scientology?”

Would you have anything on Scientology?

To put it bluntly, Scientology is a cult, and one designed to fleece the flock at that.

Watchman Fellowship (www.watchman.org) has a lot of excellent information on Scientology, but let me give you an overview of the problems with this self-proclaimed “church” from Watchman Fellowship’s profile on Scientology (<http://www.watchman.org/profile/sientpro.htm>):

Problems with the Founder

Scientology was founded by L. Ron Hubbard after a career as a science fiction writer in the 1930s. His book *Dianetics* came out in 1950 and the religion of Scientology was established by 1953. Scientology publications have made grandiose claims about Hubbard such as earning a degree in nuclear physics and a doctorate, becoming a WWII hero who miraculously cured himself of nearly fatal combat wounds, and discovering the secret to curing various diseases—all of which have been shown to be false.

From the Watchman web page cited above:

Biographers have also uncovered Hubbard’s involvement with

the occult, which probably influenced his writings. Hubbard claimed to have had a near-death experience where he learned everything that ever puzzled the mind of man. The notorious Satanist, Aleister Crowley, was Hubbard's mentor and he lived with Crowley protegee John Parsons, engaging in sex magic at their black magic mansion hospice (*Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 1990, p. A1). Despite the inconsistencies in his history, Hubbard would become one of the wealthiest and most well known leaders of a religious movement in only a few years. As of 1986 over eight million copies of his book *Dianetics* had been sold (*Ibid.*, p. 299). Scientology's methodology and beliefs have led them into a long history of criminal and civil actions and convictions. Both the U.S. Federal and Canadian courts have found top Scientology officials, and the church, guilty of charges such as burglarizing, wiretapping, and conspiracy against government agencies (*Time*, 6 May 1991, p. 50).

Problems with Doctrine

Note the science-fiction terms that Hubbard coined to explain his new "religion." Mankind, at his core, is a *Thetan*. The Thetan is that part of each individual which is immortal and which has become contaminated or debased by the influences of *MEST* (matter, energy, space, time). These contaminating influences have created *engrams*. Engrams are mental recordings of past moments of pain and unconsciousness that need to be cleared out so people can return to their original immortal, god-like, powerful state.

Scientology provides expensive "spiritual counseling" in the form of *Auditing*, where the engrams are cleared out of peoples minds through the use of an *E-meter* (like a lie detector). How many auditing sessions it takes to reach the goal of *Clear* depends, frankly, on how much money one has, up to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Of course, no one successfully reaches this higher state of being because that would put an end to the flow of money.

Scientology claims to be compatible with all other religions. It doesn't have to be practiced in place of any other faith system. It attempts to combine eastern religions and biblical wisdom with western philosophies. Scientology claims not to contradict other religions, but this is not true. Hubbard attacked Christianity as an 'implant' and said Christ was fiction. (*A Piece of Blue Sky*, p. 383).

Scientology has had a rocky history with the U.S. government's financial institutions. Tax difficulties, fraud, and embezzlement have been constant sources for friction between the government and the leadership of the "church."

In addition to some of the obvious problems with Scientology, there are many apparent dangers. Despite calling itself a church (obviously for the tax benefits), it seems to be disinterested in the concept of God while preoccupied with the doctrine of Man. Since men are inherently good in this worldview, the Christian view of sin is treated with contempt. Men do not need salvation through Jesus Christ; they only need to be cleared of their painful memories through the expensive Auditing process.

Watchman Fellowship recommends these resources (most of which are now available on the Web; links are provided):

1) *Scientology: Cult of the Stars*. Various articles on Scientology written by Watchman Fellowship staff and previously published in the Expositor. Includes information on lawsuits filed against Watchman by Scientology, various doctrinal papers and Scientology President's claim to be a practicing Mormon. 23 pages.

2) [*A Piece of Blue Sky*](#), Jon Atack. This book was written by a former Scientologist who is one of the premiere experts on the subject. It traces the history and sordid details of the organization. Interesting quote from the book: "It was 1950, in the early, heady days of Dianetics, soon after L. Ron

Hubbard opened the doors of his first organization to the clamoring crowd. Up until then, Hubbard was known only to readers of pulp fiction, but now he had an instant best-seller with a book that promised to solve every problem of the human mind, and the cash was pouring in. Hubbard found it easy to create schemes to part his new following from their money. One of the first tasks was to arrange “grades” of membership, offering supposedly greater rewards, at increasingly higher prices. Over thirty years later, an associate wryly remembered Hubbard turning to him and confiding, no doubt with a smile, “Let’s sell these people a piece of blue sky.” 428 pages, Hardback.

3) [L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman?](#) Brent Corydon. Written by a former high ranking member with the help of L. Ron Hubbard, Jr. (the founder’s son), this book exposes the “corruption and mind-control” of Scientology. 402 pages.

4) [Understanding Scientology](#), Margery Wakefield and Bob Penny. Ex-Scientologists, now Christian, give detailed understanding of the inner workings, beliefs and front organizations of Scientology. 167 pages.

5) [The Road to Xenu](#) and [Social Control in Scientology](#). An autobiographical account revealing the methodology and unethical induction techniques in novel form. 169 pages.

Hope this helps.

Kris Samons and Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“You Don’t Really Understand Buddhism”

I read your article on [Buddhism](#). Interesting.

I am always glad to see one of a specific faith take the time to look into the historical and mythical backgrounds of another faith. It is heartening that men and women of learning still lend their efforts to religion.

I have no specific faith, so I am not “countering” your arguments. However, you say that Buddhism and Christianity “...are so different, they cannot both be right at the same time, nor can the two be blended together. “

Truly? Or can they not be tied together on dogma? Dogma, the rules of law which “make” a religion what it is, that is, what is distinct and different from another, are often the chains which bind its followers to religious stagnation.

I have studied many religious faiths. Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto, and a smattering of Judaism. Dogmas differ, the underlying quest for peace and self-knowledge are not.

You say, “When witnessing to a Buddhist, ask him this: ‘Do you have tangible proof of what occurs after death?’”

I will ask you a question, as in a way I am witnessing you: “If Buddha and Jesus had met, would they not have been the best and longest of friends?”

Religion has become another camp within which we hide. Go make a Buddhist friend. You might be greatly surprised what you will find there. Someone who looks much like you.

Thank you for your reply. I enjoy interacting with those who are honestly seeking to discover spiritual truths for their

lives.

Allow me to address some of your challenges. You stated, "Go make a Buddhist friend. You might greatly be surprised what you will find there. Someone who looks much like you." The Lotus Sutra states, "Whatever words are uttered should be chosen with care. The words we speak should always be words of sympathy and wisdom." The Bible states in the book of Proverbs, "The one who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame." Let us therefore not have many words of false presumptions pass between us. I come from an island that is 80% Buddhist. My entire family clan has held to Buddhist teachings for hundreds of years. My parents and cousins remain in the Buddhist faith. I grew up under the teachings of the Buddhist temples near my house. I have been a member of the Young Buddhist Association. Therefore, I have many Buddhist friends including my own family members. I realize they look a lot like me, thank you very much. I am not driven to argue with them, only to share with them the greatest truth given by God to mankind.

I am not sure what Buddhist tradition you are familiar with. You are correct that Christianity and Buddhism differ on dogma. What exactly you mean and how you are using the term dogma I am not sure. If you look at the two theologies, they both cannot be right at the same time since they are contradictory on the very basics. Most schools of Theravada Buddhism teach there is no God. Christianity is based totally on a relationship with God. According to Aristotle's law of non-contradiction, two opposites cannot be true in a relationship with one another at the same time. You cannot have a God and not have a God and say both are true. That is absurd. So the theologies go much farther than terms and definitions. In Mahayana Buddhism, there are hundreds of Buddha incarnations. The ultimate reality is impersonal, non-feeling, and non-being. In Christianity, the ultimate is a personal being. Once again applying Aristotle's law of non-

contradiction, the two in a relationship cannot be true at the same time.

Yes, both religions claim peace as a product. However, even in this they are very different. In Buddhism peace is the ultimate goal. It comes as the result of eliminating all desires. In Christianity, peace is one of the fruits but not the ultimate goal. The Christian's goal is a relationship with the God of the universe who loves and cares for his creation and He has reached out to us to make this possible. The Buddhist quest for peace is self-focused. One attains peace through meditation, good works, and pure knowledge. In Buddhism we are driven to discipline ourselves to think correctly, behave correctly, etc... with the ultimate goal to rid ourselves of all desires. Although Buddhism teaches to not harm others and do good, salvation is found by the individual as he focuses on himself and one's attaining enlightenment and elimination of all desire. In Christianity, one focuses on Jesus Christ, being filled and empowered by His Spirit. Yes, we do work of self discipline, and becoming a godly person, but it comes as a result of a personal relationship with God and a desire to honor God. Christianity never seeks to eliminate all desire, the ultimate goal in Buddhism; Christianity seeks to build within each believer, pure desires that honor God. So even in our understanding of peace we differ in the definition and the quest for peace in significant ways.

Thank you for your response. I look forward to hearing from you.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

See Also Probe Answers Our E-mail:

- [I Would Become A Christian Except that It's Based on Lies and Deception](#)
- [I Want to Know More About Buddhism, but Your Christianity is Garbage](#)

