

# kyria

CHOSEN IN CHRIST  
CALLED TO INFLUENCE

## Religions of the World

Here's what you  
need to know about  
other faiths.



## Religions of the World

Here's what you need to know about other faiths.



Click on an article you'd like to read:

### **3 INTRODUCTION**

Bridges and Barriers

*By Dana Wilkerson*

### **6 LEADER'S GUIDE**

How to use this resource for a group study.

### **7 THE TRUTH ABOUT SPIRITUALITY**

Can You Tell What's Christian From What's Not?

*By Ruth E. Van Reken*

### **15 MAZEL TOV! YOU'VE FOUND JESUS!**

You don't have to stop being Jewish to accept Jesus.

*By Sheryl Young*

### **22 ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALS**

Christians have a responsibility to understand our Muslim neighbors and their beliefs.

*By Wendy Murray Zoba*

### **32 HOLLYWOOD'S IDOL**

Meet Buddhism's Spiritual Guru, the Dalai Lama.

*By James A. Beverley*

### **46 MORMONS ON THE RISE**

Mormonism is gaining popularity around the world.

*By John W. Kennedy*

### **64 WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NEW AGE BELIEFS**

Christianity's response to New Age spirituality.

*By Jan Brown*

### **69 THE PROBLEM WITH SCIENTOLOGY**

A crash course on the basics of its beliefs.

*By Jody Veenker*

### **73 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**



Introduction

## Bridges and Barriers

By *Dana Wilkerson*



I once took a class called Chronological Bible Storytelling (CBS). When using CBS, you share the Gospel with people by starting with creation and moving through key Bible stories, showing the story of redemption throughout history. Then by the time you get to the story of Jesus, the listeners understand exactly why He came to earth, died for them, and rose from the dead.



## Religions of the World

### Bridges and Barriers

Interestingly, only a small portion of this class was dedicated to actually learning how to present the Bible stories. Instead, the most important aspect was learning how to choose Bible stories based on bridges or barriers to the Gospel for a certain people group. A bridge is something that would have a positive effect on a person's openness to hearing the Gospel, while a barrier is something that would have a negative effect.

For instance, the Bible story of Ishmael and Isaac might prove to be a barrier for Muslims because they believe that through Ishmael, they are the true heirs of God's promise to Abraham. If this story is told, it must be treated carefully so as to not shut down communication prematurely. On the other hand, if you're working with a group of people who have been treated very unjustly, the story of Joseph would be a good bridge, because they could relate to his story.

In order to determine how best to share the Gospel with different groups of people, we need to learn about the people, their religion, their history, and so on. If we don't know these things, we might inadvertently close down our lines of communication, or conversely we might not be able to take advantage of sharing the story of redemption in a way that would best resonate with the people.





## Religions of the World

### Bridges and Barriers

Proverbs 23:23 says, "Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline, and understanding." In the following collection of articles, you'll find information about the religions of the world to help you better understand the people around you. As you study these, pray that God will give you the wisdom to discern the bridges from the barriers so that you can be prepared to share the Gospel with people of other religions—even the ones who live next door.

Blessings,

*Dana Wilkerson*

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads,  
Christianity Today International



# kyria

Leader's Guide

## How to use "Religions of the World" for a group study.



**"R**eligions of the World" can be used for individual or group study, but if you intend to lead a group study on this, some simple suggestions follow.

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the "Thought Provokers," be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**





## The Truth About Spirituality



Can You Tell What's Christian  
From What's Not?

*By Ruth E. Van Reken*

Several years ago, I was excited that the topic of spirituality kept cropping up on talk shows, in books and magazines, in politics, even in health food stores. *What a refreshing change from the "God is dead" philosophy so prevalent during my college years in the sixties*, I thought. In my naïveté, I believed this spiritual awakening represented a trend toward a search for a biblically based relationship with God. I accepted what I heard and read with little critical thought.



## Religions of the World

### The Truth About Spirituality

Then, my nursing supervisor praised me one day for my "deep spirituality." I thanked her, secretly thrilled my Christian witness had been showing through. My excitement dissolved, though, when I read a book she gave me called *A Course in Miracles*. Although it used Christian lingo like *atonement* and *sanctification*, the concepts were far from Christian. I was puzzled. Weren't we speaking the same language? What had my supervisor meant by *spirituality*?

After that interchange, I began listening more closely to all the discussions of spirituality going on. Since then, I've been learning how to discern whether the things I hear and read are truly Christian. Here are some guidelines I now use to tell the difference.

**Logically examine the claims being made.** Many statements about spirituality being passed off as "truth" today are not only lies, they're logically impossible. I discovered this when my daughter's public high school class planned a field trip to a meditation center known for its psychic readings. I objected, but the teacher justified the trip by saying this center taught *spirituality*—not religion. He claimed spirituality doesn't endorse one set of beliefs. That's simply not true. The basic (though flawed) belief system behind the whole concept of spirituality is that each person has a right to his or her own "truth," that there's no such thing as objective, absolute truth. This view essentially makes each person responsible for deciding what's right or wrong, good or bad, truth or lie. The result: There is *no* truth; people do what's right in their own eyes.







## Religions of the World

### The Truth About Spirituality

Another popular notion is that all religions and spiritual quests lead to God. Yet, that belief denies the claim of Jesus Christ, who boldly declared He alone is the way, the truth, and the life, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Period.

**Compare popular spiritual concepts with what the Bible says.** Our human reasoning alone isn't enough to discern truth from error. Just like the bank teller who knows the feel of counterfeit money after years of handling the real thing, our best protection against deception is to study and know God's revealed truth, the Bible.

This seemed more crucial as I began seeing angel pins, books, and stories in every checkout lane, bookstore, and on TV. At first I took this as another sign of people becoming more interested in spiritual (to me, meaning biblical) things. After all, the Bible teaches that angels are "ministering spirits," assigned by God to help us in many ways. But when I began comparing the media's portrayal of angels with the Bible's account of angels, I quickly discovered major differences. In popular culture, an angel is often portrayed as a beloved family member who dies and then gets his wings. The parents or children left on earth then seek guidance and help from their departed relative-turned-angel. So what's the problem with that?

For one thing, the Bible is very clear that angels are *not* repackaged souls of people but spiritual beings created by God to serve His purposes. By portraying them as reincarnated humans, the horrible reality of death as the dreadful consequence of sin is blunted. There is no judgment or hell to consider if we all turn into cute angels when we die.





## Religions of the World

### The Truth About Spirituality

The truth is, everyone will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, who was sacrificed for sinners and promises salvation to those who are waiting for Him. And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for Him. (Hebrews 9:27-28). Jesus is the only mediator between God and man—not angels.

In today's world, biblical discernment is crucial even when listening to the nightly news. A few years ago, Nancy Reagan reportedly contacted a psychic to decide when, where, and how her husband should make decisions. More recently, news reports tell us Hillary Clinton has "spoken" to Eleanor Roosevelt through a New Age "sacred psychologist." The media scoffed at Mrs. Reagan for her silliness. But they generally excused Mrs. Clinton's actions because, as one reporter said, "We all have our imaginary friends." It's interesting to me that in a few short years people have become more open to spiritual experimentation. Yet both reactions missed the point: It's dangerous and completely outside of God's plan for us to try and make contact with the spirits of the dead through psychics or sorcery (Deuteronomy 18:10-13).

**Remember, "Christian" words or songs aren't necessarily Christian.** One day I heard the glorious strains of "Amazing Grace" coming from my TV set in the den. I ran to see who sang with such power, certain only a Christian could so magnificently sing those wonderful words "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." After the song ended, the show's host





## Religions of the World

### The Truth About Spirituality

complimented the soloist, a well-known recording artist, on her performance. She thanked him and explained how meaningful the song had been to her.

"So does that mean you've got religion in your life now?" the host asked. I waited, eager to hear a wonderful story of conversion to Jesus Christ.

Instead the singer replied, "Of course not. Religion is what you get when you're afraid of hell. Spirituality is what you get when you've been there and back." I couldn't believe it! Although she'd sung the whole story of Christ's atoning work for her, the fact that she needed a Savior from sin seemed the furthest thing from her mind. To her, being saved meant she'd been rescued from the lostness of "not knowing who I am." Being "born again" meant getting in touch with her "inner self."

In the past, I'd occasionally examined supposedly spiritual claims by comparing them to Scripture. But I'd never thought to see what the Bible said about the whole idea of spirituality.

Oddly enough, when I did a word search through my online Bible, looking for verses on "spirituality," the answer flashed back "word not found." That surprised me. Then I tried "spiritual" and all sorts of verses popped up. My friend, Barb, pointed out that throughout Scripture spiritual is used to describe something else (e.g., a spiritual man, spiritual gifts, spiritual truths). *Spirituality* on the other hand, is something all by itself. Why is that an important distinction?

The Bible tells us our spiritual nature is dead in sin until we're born again by the Spirit of God who gives us spiritual birth through faith in Jesus Christ (John 3;





## Religions of the World

### The Truth About Spirituality

Ephesians 2:1-9). Any discussion of what it means to be "spiritual" must relate to that diagnosis of our condition. To become a Christian means we receive a *person*—Jesus, not a *thing*—spirituality.

**When someone speaks of spirituality, ask her to explain who Jesus is.** One day I met a former high school friend for lunch. I was surprised when he began describing his spiritual quest, which included visiting gurus in India. As we talked back and forth about our views of God, I became increasingly frustrated and confused. No matter what I said, he seemed to agree, yet I knew we were miles apart in our beliefs. Why couldn't I pinpoint the difference?

The next morning I woke up and realized my mistake from the day before. Although my friend and I had talked extensively about God, I'd never asked him one simple question: Who is Jesus Christ? It's fairly easy to agree about God in some vague sense, "Well, that's how you see your God. I see mine a bit differently." When we discuss Jesus Christ, however, we must deal with the specific claims Jesus made about Himself—including His assertion that He is God—and face the question, "Are they true or not?"

The answer to who Jesus is marks the ultimate dividing line between who or what is and isn't Christian. In 1 John 4, we're told to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." 1 John 2:22 says, "And who is a liar? Anyone who says that Jesus is not the Christ. Anyone who denies the Father and the Son is an antichrist."

Many religions and various forms of spirituality accept Jesus as a historical figure, but reject Him as the Christ, the one whom God sent to be "an atoning sacrifice for our





## Religions of the World

### The Truth About Spirituality

sins" (1 John 2:2). Others talk of a "Christ-consciousness" in some mystical, global sense but refuse to tie that down to the flesh-and-blood person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The fact is, if a person has strong morals and values but doesn't embrace Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God, Savior, and resurrected Lord, his spirituality isn't Christian and cannot save.

Some days I feel intimidated as I realize how "narrow" others may see me because I believe the claims Christ made for Himself. But the words of the apostle Paul are true, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

But I'm also encouraged. When we stand in the truth of God's Word, we need not fear the spiritual confusion all around. God's promised the gates of hell will not prevail against the church of Jesus Christ. As the darkness of false spirituality grows deeper, the light of His truth can only shine brighter—pointing the way to those who still seek Him.

*Ruth Van Reken is a speaker and author of several books and Bible studies, including Who Is Jesus? (Shaw). She lives in Indiana.*

*This article first appeared in the November/December 1996 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Reflect

- *How have you noticed popular spirituality in today's culture?*
- *How do you respond to people who ask about your spirituality?*
- *The author says, "Some days I feel intimidated as I realize how 'narrow' others may see me because I believe the claims Christ made for himself." Do you deal with similar feelings?*







## Mazel Tov! You've Found Jesus!

You don't have to stop being  
Jewish to accept Jesus.

*By Sheryl Young*

“**M**ommy, why don't we believe in Jesus?”

My question startled my Jewish family. We'd recently watched *Ben Hur* and *Spartacus*, and the movies had kindled my desire to know more about Jesus. The people at my temple acknowledged Jesus as some sort of radical rabbi, but my mom didn't know if she believed in His existence. My dad wasn't even sure God existed, let alone Jesus! The answer I received from my relatives and the rabbi was always the same: "That's just the way it is. You'll understand when you're older."



## Religions of the World

Mazel Tov! You've Found Jesus!

It's not that I didn't want to be Jewish; I just felt that accepting Jesus as more than a long-ago teacher or rabbi could somehow fit into the picture of being Jewish. We were the only Jewish family in a predominantly Irish-Catholic neighborhood, and my two best friends were Laurie, who had twelve brothers, and Kathy, whose mother insisted on serving milk with meat during my dinner visits—a Jewish taboo. One time, I traded Laurie my diamond-studded Star of David necklace and came home wearing her gold cross. I'll never forget seeing our two mothers rush across the street to exchange them!

Kathy's parents always had a big, thick Bible on their table, showing me there was more to the Bible than the traditional Jewish Old Testament, or Torah. The thought that I might be able to read the whole thing intrigued me.

But then we moved away from that primarily *goyesh* (gentile) neighborhood, and I attended Hebrew school, which took place a couple of days a week, in the late afternoon. There I learned to speak Hebrew phonetically and heard the main "stories" of the Hebrew tradition—Abraham and Isaac, Moses leading the people out of Egypt, David and Goliath, Esther and the evil Haman. When I was bat mitzvahed at age thirteen (a Jewish girl's confirmation), I dutifully stood in front of two hundred people and read the appropriate portion of the Torah for the season of my birthday. But after that, I dropped out of Hebrew school.

My parents, Jewish by birth and tradition, only attended worship services out of respect for my grandparents. My grandfather was the glue that held the true Jewish faith in my family together. When he died, my father





## Religions of the World

Mazel Tov! You've Found Jesus!

finally admitted he was an atheist. We only went to temple services on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, and for weddings and bar mitzvahs. Holidays such as Hanukkah and Passover were celebrated as traditional—not spiritual—observances. There was no knowledge of having "a relationship with God."

After starting high school in a Jewish neighborhood, I soon forgot about wanting to know more of Jesus. There, the attitude was, *If Jesus were a mighty Savior, He would have gotten Himself down off the cross and ridden into town on a white steed right then and there.* Thoughts of Jesus never crossed my mind again until I was thirty-six. What happened in between is another story.

I met my wonderful husband, Jerry, in 1978 after a disappointing brief marriage to "a nice Jewish boy." Jerry was from a Baptist family who hadn't gone to church much, but his mom had started going back some time before we met. By the time we were together, Jerry had seen a change in his mother. Their conversations had a great influence on Jerry, and one day, he went to a church near our house. Soon after, he accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior on his knees alone one night.

For the next few months, I thought Jerry was pulling a holier-than-thou act. Although he was a wonderful man, Jerry had used some foul language. Well, that was gone almost at once. He started telling me I shouldn't take the Lord's name in vain by swearing. Jerry had always been self-assured, not overly concerned with material wealth, but now he had a strange appearance of even more peace and tranquility. Jerry developed a voracious appetite for the Bible and went to church every chance he got. He asked me to go with him, but didn't bother me about it





## Religions of the World

Mazel Tov! You've Found Jesus!

when I said no. I thought this was going to be the end of my second marriage. Me, a Jewish girl, married to some Christian fanatic!

Soon, though, I longed for the contentment Jerry had found. I was thirty-six years old, didn't have a set career, and had never had a baby, which made me feel guilty that I'd never given my mom any grandchildren. I'd always thought I was going to do extraordinary things with my life—win an academy award, write a best-selling romance novel. When the acting career I'd pursued since childhood fizzled after college, and the writing didn't get published, I became an ordinary person, a nobody in the world's eyes and my own. It got to the point I almost hated myself. One day, when I had ruined a whole weekend throwing a tantrum because I was angry with myself, I asked Jerry about this God of his. I don't really remember what Jerry said—I only know my curiosity was piqued and I decided to go to church with him. Little did I know, his mother had been praying for both of us for years, and the people at his church had been praying for me for several months!

First, I had to get past the feeling that if God didn't strike me dead for sitting in front of a cross, the sight would surely kill my mother! But the people at Jerry's church made me feel comfortable. Over the next few months, through the pastor's sermons and Sunday school, I learned that Jesus came for Gentiles *and* Jews (Acts 26:23), and that we worship the same God.

I learned there was freedom from the some five hundred rules and regulations our Jewish forefathers had imposed upon themselves to help them keep the Ten Commandments—that freedom came through the blood of





## Religions of the World

Mazel Tov! You've Found Jesus!

Jesus, just as there was freedom through the blood of the lamb on the Jewish doorposts at the exodus from Egypt. The pastor taught about the prophets who had God-given visions of how the Messiah would humbly come first on the donkey (Zech. 9:9) and then mightily on the white horse! And I learned from David and Isaiah the prophecies regarding the pain and suffering of Jesus' crucifixion (Ps. 22; Isa. 52-53). For the first time, I realized how the Old Testament related to the New Testament.

All the feelings of my childhood came rushing back. Yes, Jesus was more than just a man, a teacher, a radical—He was the Son of God, the Risen Savior! And I knew Jesus could fit in with being Jewish. How much more I appreciated my Jewish roots and those old stories—they were true, they weren't just legends I'd learned as a child. Somehow, very quickly, the Lord bestowed upon me the assurance of knowing the Scriptures were inspired by His own hand—that all the events were by Him, for Him, and to His glory!

I was "born again" in February 1987, about three months after walking through the church doors the first time. My plans are no longer mine, but are given over to the Lord's will for my life, in conjunction with my husband's, who was recently ordained as a minister. God had other plans for my college degree in theatre. He has allowed me to be used first as a children's choir leader and now as music leader at our current church. The church we attend even celebrates Passover—after all, that's Jesus was doing at the Last Supper.

As for my family, they still can't comprehend my accepting Jesus as the Messiah. At first a lot of hurt and anger existed between my mom and me, but we've since





## Religions of the World

Mazel Tov! You've Found Jesus!

discussed how my believing in Jesus can go hand in hand with believing in the God of the Jews. Although Mom doesn't accept it for herself, she knows it's a part of me, not some stage I'm going through. God has restored our relationship.

Over the years, my dad has become more of a staunch atheist than ever. My sister, ever the "women's libber," still doesn't believe God is real. All I can do is illustrate a changed life, pray they see "the peace that passes all understanding" in me, and continue to plant seeds. God is able to graft His original chosen people back into the kingdom (Rom. 11:23), so there's hope for them.

I'm currently praying the Lord will give me the right words and timing in leading another Jewish person to salvation. But I may be the planter only. Someone else may water the seeds. The greatest thing would be to say to a Jewish person: "*Mazel Tov!* (Congratulations!) You've found Jesus!"

*Sheryl Young is a freelance writer who lives with her husband in Florida.*

*This article first appeared in the March/April 1997 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*







## Religions of the World

Mazel Tov! You've Found Jesus!

### Reflect

- *How acquainted are you with the Old Testament prophecies and how they are fulfilled in the New Testament? Make a commitment to discover these prophecies and fulfillments.*
- *If a Jewish person asked you why you believe Jesus is the Messiah, what would you say?*
- *How would you counsel a person who balked at becoming a Christian because her family would not approve?*





## Islamic Fundamentals

Christians have a responsibility to understand our Muslim neighbors and their beliefs.

*By Wendy Murray Zoba*

**G**od-fearing Muslims from every corner of the earth are moving into American neighborhoods. Are we ready to welcome them and tell them the truth about Jesus? Let's take a look at the basics of Islam and how Muslims view Christianity, helpful models for relating to Muslims, and how to engage our Muslim neighbors boldly and lovingly.

Despite Islam's diversity throughout its history, the role of the Prophet Muhammad and the place of the Qur'an have remained unchallenged.



#### The role of Muhammad

For Muslims, Muhammad is the last and greatest of the Prophets, surpassing Jesus. He was born in A.D. 570 in Mecca (in what is today Saudi Arabia). Mecca's heart of worship at the time was the local Ka'bah (shrine), or the Black Stone with its numerous idols.

According to Islamic tradition, Abraham's firstborn son Ishmael and Ishmael's mother Hagar, after being banished by Sarah, ended up in the desert surrounding Mecca, where they were miraculously rescued.

Abraham—or Ibrahim, as he is known in Arabic—visited them there and he and Ishmael built the *Ka'bah*. Muslims believe they are the true heirs, through Ishmael, to the promise God made to Abraham.

Jesus and Mary were among the many images—in addition to the goddesses of fertility and power—worshiped at the Ka'bah during Muhammad's day. Muhammad learned about "the People of the Book"—Jews and Christians—in his youth. He felt troubled that his own people, the Arabs, did not have a book of their own. As he reflected despondently on this one day in a cave on Mount Hira (in A.D. 609 or 610), Muhammad said, the angel Gabriel appeared to him: "Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created Man of a blood-clot. Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught Man that he knew not" (Surah 96:1-4).

The injunction to "recite" meant "make vocal what is already written," says Islamicist Kenneth Cragg, which means it was the "sending down" of a preexistent book. (*Qur'an* is Arabic for "recitation.") At first Muhammad feared he had been overtaken by a jinn, a troubling spirit. But Muhammad's wife Khadijah encouraged him that





## Religions of the World

### Islamic Fundamentals

his visions were indeed from God and that he had been chosen as his special messenger. Muhammad's fear gave way to acquiescence and the visions recurred with greater frequency. His recitations denounced idol worship and proclaimed the total sovereignty of the One True God. Because the People of the Book also claimed allegiance to this god, his early recitations about Christianity and Judaism in the Qur'an were irenic: "O believers, be you God's helpers, as Jesus, Mary's son, said to the Apostles. 'Who will be my helpers unto God?' The Apostles said, 'We will be helpers of God'" (Surah 61:14).

Muhammad's small circle of followers, composed mostly of family members and domestic help, became increasingly assertive in their belief that Muhammad was a prophet, and this aroused the consternation of the people of Mecca, many of whom felt their vested interests in idol worship and commerce were threatened. The deaths of his beloved wife Khadijah (15 years his senior) and his uncle Abu Talib (who also served as a protector) in 619 precipitated a crisis for Muhammad. He and his followers could stay in Mecca in perpetual jeopardy as a despised minority, or he could move to a new location where the fledgling faith could gain a foothold and grow.

Some of his disciples had succeeded in their missionary undertakings to the north, in a place called Yathrib, later called Medina. So in 622, Muhammad migrated to that city to form a new base of activity. The famous *hijrah* (emigration) occurred in September of that year and became the historical fulcrum of Islam. Several things happened with this move that solidified and redefined Islam. First, despite the previous missionary successes in Medina, Muhammad's new religion hardly received





## Religions of the World

### Islamic Fundamentals

unanimous affirmation upon his arrival. Some resisted his presumption and others eschewed the notion of converting. Second, Muhammad had anticipated a warm reception from the People of the Book—primarily the Jews—in Medina, since they too were "Scripture people." Instead they treated him with "amused disdain," says Cragg, and rejected his claims as "pretentious."

These difficulties triggered a shift in Muhammad's message. The portions of the Qur'an "sent down" during this period took on a more aggressive political and legal tone, in contrast to its previous poetic and mystical reflections. During the Medinan years (622-630) Muhammad consolidated Islam into a functioning, overarching political and religious community—the umma—and built a mosque. He also fashioned his revelations into principles, and administered the social, political, economic, and religious affairs of the Medinans. Recitations regarding the People of the Book (both Jews and Christians) became more belligerent: "God fight them, what liars they are" (Surah 9:30); and "O believers, take not Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends of each other. Whoso of you makes them his friends is one of them. God guides not the people of the evildoers" (Surah 5:56).

At the same time, hostilities with the Meccans continued as Muhammad raided their caravans traveling north. The Battle of Badr (624) proved decisive for establishing Islam as an aggressive force. "[T]he sword was unleashed and the scabbard cast away. The *jihad*, or appeal to battle, had been irrevocably invoked," Cragg says. Jihad also has a spiritual sense in Islam: the struggle of the self against veering from the truth.





## Religions of the World

### Islamic Fundamentals

A contentious debate continues today in Muslim circles about whether this aggression should be considered "defensive," since the future of Islam was at stake. The Qur'an maintains that war is an evil, but the extinction of Islam is a greater evil (Surah 2:217). But for all intents and purposes, the victory at Badr marked a critical stage in the evolution of Islam from defensive to offensive.

By 630 Muhammad returned to Mecca in victory. He claimed the city for Islam and destroyed the idols being worshiped at the *Ka'bah*. This action introduced the notion of "manifest success"—geographical dominance—as a validating sign of Islam.

Muhammad "combined the good and the bad qualities of an Oriental chief," notes Christian historian Philip Schaff. He despised ostentation and lived in small mud-brick cottages with his many wives. He mended his own clothes, cobbled his shoes, milked goats, and was accessible, gracious, and hospitable to visitors. Muhammad died in 632, two years after the conquest of Mecca. The recitations were complete—the canon, so to speak, was closed.

#### The Qur'an

The Qur'an to the Muslim is not what the Bible is to the Christian. Rather, the Qur'an is to the Muslim what *Jesus* is to the Christian. Jesus is the Word made flesh and the Qur'an, for the Muslim, is the Word made text. The Book preexisted in heaven before Muhammad received the command to recite; he simply brought into physical being what already existed in completeness.

To borrow Christian vocabulary, one might say he incarnated the Book. Muhammad was illiterate, according to Islamic tradition, ensuring the purity of the revelation (though some, including Cragg, dispute that view). When







## Religions of the World

### Islamic Fundamentals

the recitations ended with Muhammad's death in 632, points in the Qur'an required further clarification for long-term communal guidance. This clarification gave rise to Tradition (*hadith sharif*): the collected sayings, thoughts, and deeds of Muhammad. Muslims looked to how Muhammad lived for guidance in practical living. For example, Al-Ghazali, an eleventh-century Muslim legal scholar and equivalent of Thomas Aquinas, wrote:

Know that the key of happiness is ... imitating God's Apostle in all his goings out and comings in, in his movements and times of quiescence, even in the manner of his eating, his deportment, his sleep and his speech. ... So you must sit while putting on trousers and stand while putting on a turban: You must begin with the right foot when putting on your sandals, and eat with your right hand: When cutting your nails you must begin with the forefinger of the right hand and finish with the thumb: in the foot you must begin with the little toe of the right foot and finish with the little toe of the left.

"God does not speak in a vacuum," says Dr. Mahmoud Ayoub, a Muslim and professor of Islamic studies and comparative religion at Temple University. "God speaks to people in their own situation. So there is a human dimension of the Qur'an." Even so, Muslims do not regard the Qur'an as a historical document to be reinterpreted in new contexts and eras. "It's a miracle of speech," Ayoub says. "But we cannot apply the principles of biblical criticism to the Qur'an. There is no evolution of the text."

#### **Consequences of their faith**

This notion of an immutable text has been put to the test as Islam has moved West. An example of how the Qur'an has collided with Western sensibilities is in its statements





## Religions of the World

### Islamic Fundamentals

about women. In Muhammad's time, women's roles were notably inferior to men's. One of the most difficult verses reads: "Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God's guarding. And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them" (Surah 4:34). In matters of inheritance, women are to receive half of what men receive (Surah 4:11). Men are the "managers" of women (Surah 4:35) and can "come unto [their] tillage as they wish" (meaning sexually) (Surah 2:223); can divorce their wives by stating "I divorce you" three times (2:229-230); and may take more than one wife (4:29)."

What is happening now is that a lot of Islamic scholars are trying to extricate Islam from that culture," says Jane Smith, professor of Islamic studies at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut and author of *Islam in America*. "Many are increasingly saying we must look to the particular time and to the particular context."

Many feminist scholars look to Muhammad's example—he affirmed and empowered women—as a means of interpreting these troubling passages. From this vantage, many see these verses as strangely empowering for women. Inheritance, these scholars argue, is not earned and so is not a right. Given that men are responsible for the well-being of the families and women are not, that they receive anything at all is a reflection of their esteemed status. The division of roles, wherein men "manage" the affairs of women, is actually liberating. One noted feminist scholar, a western convert to Islam, says that this arrangement "accords with the God-given natures of men and women."





## Religions of the World

### Islamic Fundamentals

The surahs (chapters) regarding polygamy and divorce are trickier, but also not without merit, some would argue. Many contemporary Muslim scholars say polygamy ensures that men will not take on mistresses and bear illegitimate children, and grants these other women legal protection. A woman without a husband in a Muslim community is in an insecure position, and since there are usually more women than men, polygamy ensures companionship to them all. "To share a husband is better than having none," Napoleon John writes in *Partners or Prisoners*, citing Hammudah Abdalati, author of *Islam in Focus*. "If [the husband] is bound to be monogamous, this may lead to hypocrisy, adultery, illegitimacy, abortion, and many other troubles."

The triple pronouncement of divorce offers the needed restraints to prevent a proclamation in a heated moment. The same principle applies to the stages of discipline before a beating. A verbal reprimand must precede a wife's banishment from her husband's bed, which must precede being beaten. In other words, beating is a last resort. Both Jane Smith and *The New York Times Book Review* (in reviewing Smith's *Islam in America*) are surprisingly uncritical of such interpretations, given the outrage the Southern Baptists' "submission statement" elicited. "[N]o reputable Muslim interpreters would suggest it should involve anything more than the lightest of taps as a reminder to the wife of conjugal responsibilities," Smith writes.

There are many happy Muslim marriages and loving husbands who do not beat their wives. But this discussion highlights the difficulties Muslims encounter in bringing their view of the Qur'an to the West. Many women view marriage the same way Muslims view their relationship with God, says "Kay," an American missionary in a Muslim





## Religions of the World

### Islamic Fundamentals

country who does not want to be identified. A Muslim woman "sees marriage as a contract, and they're trying to work out their part of the contract to get to paradise. Sometimes they see being beaten as part of the contract." Muslims tend to look upon every relationship as a contract, says Kay, "including their relationship to God."

Islam is a religion of duty and submission in which human effort leads to salvation rather than proceeds out of it. "There is no view of redemption, as such, for the Muslim," says Mahmoud Ayoub. "Adam is the first sinner, but also the first prophet. He missed the mark by disobeying the divine command, and he asked God's forgiveness. Every human is born like Adam, capable of knowing God and having pure faith. There is no original sin in Islam, only original purity."

In other words, we, like Adam, may miss the mark now and then. But we, also like Adam, have the capability to right ourselves and rehabilitate our standing before God, through submission and through the five pillars. The characteristic description for human status before God is servant or slave. God, in his mercy, revealed himself through the Qur'an and his final prophet, but Islam nevertheless remains a religion driven by ongoing human efforts to earn God's favor.

*Wendy Murray Zoba is Associate Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.*

*This article first appeared on **March 1, 2000** on [ChristianityToday.com](http://ChristianityToday.com).*





## Reflect

- *What is your response to Muhammad's role in starting the religion of Islam?*
- *How could you use Jesus' attitude toward women as a bridge to the Gospel for Muslim women?*
- *If you invited your Muslim neighbor over for dinner, how would you incorporate your faith into your interaction with her?*



## Hollywood's Idol



Meet Buddhism's Spiritual Guru,  
the Dalai Lama.

*By James A. Beverley*

**H**is official titles are "Jetsun Jamphel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso," meaning "Holy Lord, Gentle Glory, Eloquent, Compassionate, Learned Defender of the Faith, Ocean of Wisdom."

After Pope John Paul II and Billy Graham, he is probably the most recognized religious figure on earth. He is the voice of Buddhism to the nations and is often called the "god-king" of Tibet. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. His recent books, *Ethics for a New Millennium* and *The Art of Happiness* became best-sellers. He is treated with immense respect by secular media and draws crowds up to 300,000 at his public talks.





## Religions of the World

### Hollywood's Idol

These titles and accolades belong to Buddhism's leading apostle, the Dalai Lama. Born as Lhamo Thondup in 1935 in northeast Tibet, he was chosen as the 14th Dalai Lama at age 2. He was enthroned in 1940 and became political leader of Tibet at age 15, just after Mao's armies began their takeover. In exile since 1959, the Dalai Lama has become a world leader in ethics, politics, and religion.

He has also become the de facto leader of millions of spiritual seekers in the West. Christians who want to evangelize our culture do well to understand the extent of his influence, especially in pop culture, as well as the nature of his beliefs. To this end, *Christianity Today* sent me to the Dalai Lama's home-in-exile in Dharamsala, India, to ask him about the popularity of Buddhism, his faith's relation to other faiths, and, most of all, what he thinks about Jesus.

### Hollywood's Guru

Veteran journalist and Asia scholar Orville Schell explored the Dalai Lama's influence, and the romance of Tibet, in Hollywood and pop culture in his 2000 book *Virtual Tibet*. Schell notes that by the mid-1990s, Hollywood's "unparalleled engine of invention had alighted on Tibet as one of its chosen subjects." The Dalai Lama became the unseen star of two large-budget films, Jean-Jacques Annaud's *Seven Years in Tibet* and Martin Scorsese's *Kundun*.

Scorsese told one interviewer about his meeting with the Dalai Lama: "Something happened. I became totally aware of existing in the moment. It was like you could feel your heartbeat; and as I left, he looked at me. I don't know, but there was something about the look, something sweet. ... I just knew I had to make the movie."





## Religions of the World

### Hollywood's Idol

Hollywood actor Richard Gere is probably his most famous devotee. After an initial foray into Zen, Gere was drawn to the Dalai Lama. He told *Shambhala Sun* magazine, "It completely changed my life the first time I was in the presence of His Holiness. No question about it." Gere introduced the Dalai Lama to New Yorkers in 1999, when the Buddhist leader spoke in Central Park. Gere also led a protest rally for a free Tibet when the Dalai Lama visited Washington in the summer of 2000.

The Dalai Lama is also a major spiritual influence on actress Sharon Stone, composer Philip Glass, Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys, and martial-arts star Steven Seagal. "The Dalai Lama's been a great friend to me, and I don't want to use that for anything but my personal spiritual sustenance," Seagal told Schell. "He is the great mother of everything nurturing and loving. He accepts all who come without judgment. He has a very serious impact on the degenerate times in which we live and on bringing us back to a more pure realm."

The Dalai Lama's international image, in fact, is virtually shatterproof. There was a minor ripple about his credibility when explorer Heinrich Harrer's Nazi past was exposed just before the movie *Seven Years in Tibet* was released. On that, the Dalai Lama does not claim omniscience, and he says his friend Harrer simply kept the truth from him. Likewise, the Dalai Lama had endorsed Shoko Asahara, the guru of the Aum Shinryko movement in Japan, but withdrew his support after that movement's poison-gas attacks on Tokyo subways. Again, his sympathetic comment about Saddam Hussein in a *New York Times* interview drew only passing criticism. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, a famous Tibetan guru who now lives in





## Religions of the World

### Hollywood's Idol

England, led a brief international campaign against the Dalai Lama, accusing him of dictatorship and hypocrisy, but nothing has come of it.

One consequence of Hollywood attention is that Buddhism, especially the Tibetan strain, has entered mainstream America. Madison Avenue uses Buddhist lingo to sell goods, and Buddhist terminology crops up on *The Simpsons* and other high-profile television shows. Ads for Tibetan root beer proffer a "gently invigorating cardamom and coriander in a Tibetan adaptation of Ayurvedic herbs." Washington's Smithsonian Institution featured Tibetan culture in its folklife festival last summer. On the National Mall visitors could hear Buddhists monks chanting, watch a sand mandala being created, buy Tibetan medicines, and even join in prayer before an image of Avalokitesvara, the protector deity of Tibet.

Westerners can even be chosen as incarnations of high lamas, as has been claimed of Jewish-born Catharine Burroughs, Vancouver native Elijah Ary, and Seagal himself. Penor Rinpoche, head of the Nyingma lineage in Tibetan Buddhism, declared that Seagal was the current manifestation of Chungdrag Dorge, a renowned 17th-century teacher. Ary, born in 1972, now goes by Tenzin Sherab and is said to be the incarnation of Geshe Jatse, a sage who died in a Tibetan cave over 30 years ago. Burroughs, titled as Jetsunma Ahkon Lhamo, heads a large Tibetan monastery in Poolesville, Maryland. Her story is told in Martha Sherrill's *The Buddha from Brooklyn*.

### Conversing with the Dalai Lama

I interviewed the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India, the site of the Tibet Government in Exile and the home of the Dalai Lama since 1960. Situated in the state of Himachal





## Religions of the World

### Hollywood's Idol

Pradesh, the town is nestled on the side of one of the mountains that forms part of the Outer Himalayas. The Dalai Lama himself lives in a modest setting in Upper Dharamsala or McLeod Gang, 1,800 meters above the fertile plains of the Kangra Valley.

Dharamsala is not a high-class tourist haven. The best hotels are mediocre by western standards. Tourist guides warn about the lack of sanitary conditions in many of the restaurants. Cows wander the narrow, unpaved streets at will, in competition with an amazing number of taxis. Goods are sold in small booths along both sides of the streets. Most prices are set, though you can barter with Kashmir merchants selling carpets, Buddhist icons, and precious gems. There are several good secondhand bookstores, and a lot of travel agencies. Buddhist prayer flags dominate the buildings, as do pictures of the Dalai Lama.

Pilgrims usually get to Dharamsala by bus, train, or taxi from New Delhi, an arduous journey of up to 12 hours. A two-hour flight from Delhi to Amritsar or Jammu will leave a traveler with only a five-hour cab ride to Dharamsala.

Despite the difficulty of the journey, visitors from all over the world flock to what is called "little Lhasa." The Dalai Lama often holds public audiences and gives public teachings at least once a year in the Buddhist temple opposite his residence. Private sessions with the Dalai Lama are arranged through Taklha, his deputy secretary, who receives 50 to 100 interview requests daily. Soldiers of the Indian army guard the Dalai Lama. Visitors who enter the residence area have to walk through metal detectors and are searched by a member of the Dalai Lama's security team.





Two days before the interview, I was briefed by the Dalai Lama's personal secretary, who, along with the Dalai Lama's personal translator, was present for the interview. There were no rules on protocol, and when the Dalai Lama was ushered into the interview room, he was introduced without any fanfare. After an exchange of greetings, the Dalai Lama expressed concern about the health of Billy Graham.

We ranged back and forth over a variety of topics. What follows is a topical summary of our conversation.

#### **Sinless? Nonsense**

Nicholas Vreeland, director of the Tibet Center in Manhattan, told me at the Central Park event that he regards the Dalai Lama as sinless, a view shared by many practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism. When the Dalai Lama arrived at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1993, under heavy police guard, his Buddhist devotees greeted him with tears, shouts of joy, and an adulation that bordered on worship. The Dalai Lama's charisma is legendary.

When I reviewed such incidents, as well as some people's claims that he is a god-king, sinless and perfect, the Dalai Lama answered with one word: "Nonsense." Then he laughed.

He does believe that he is a reincarnation of a previous Dalai Lama, but he is not sure of the details. "According to some of my dreams, I have some very close connection with the 13th Dalai Lama as well as the 5th Dalai Lama." He said that he must not focus on his fame. "It does not matter whether people regard me as a very high being, almost like Buddha, or a counterrevolutionary. What matters is whether I remain a genuine Buddhist monk and accordingly make some contribution for the betterment of other sentient beings."





## Religions of the World

### Hollywood's Idol

The Dalai Lama is remarkably candid about his personal failings. His struggles to control his temper are recounted in *Freedom in Exile*, his second autobiographical work. Taklha said he has seen his boss lose his temper on more than one occasion, though only once did he feel he was out of control. In several interviews the Dalai Lama has admitted that he struggles with lust. He told *Tricycle*, a leading Buddhist magazine, that when he thinks about beautiful women, he has to remember classical Buddhist teaching that the human body will one day be a rotting corpse.

His aides in Dharamsala tell the Dalai Lama that he works too hard, but he joked in the interview about his laziness when it comes to things he hates to do. He did admit that the demands of being a teacher and politician have forced him to give up hobbies like gardening and repairing watches. He follows a regular routine of early-morning prayers and meditation and midmorning administrative work, and then gives his afternoons to interviews and public forums. Though his schedule is tight, he is flexible. At one point in the interview, when his attention was drawn to the time, he said, "This is not New York or Washington. Let's keep talking."

### **Buddhism and Other Religions**

Though Boston University professor Stephen Prothero has warned about a shallow and banal American "Boomer Buddhism," the Dalai Lama said he is generally not discouraged about the type of Buddhism he sees when he visits the West. He believes that people from different areas should keep their own faith. "Changing religion is not easy," he said. "Sometimes it creates more confusion." If someone in the West finds Buddhism more suitable, "It is their individual right, but it is extremely important to keep their respect towards their own traditional religion."





## Religions of the World

### Hollywood's Idol

He expressed appreciation for Gere's efforts as a celebrity to spread Buddhist *dharma* (teaching). He did not seem concerned about the depth or style of Buddhist devotion in America, except to make a point against what he called New Age Buddhists who take concepts from every religion. "If they do that and make clear this is something new, that is all right. If they claim that such a mixture is traditional Tibetan Buddhism, then this is not right."

The Dalai Lama is no advocate of one world religion. He has consistently spoken against this in his public speeches. "So if one is always trying to look at things in terms of similarities and parallels, there is a danger of rolling everything up into one big entity," he writes in *The Good Heart*, his book about the teachings of Jesus. "I do not personally advocate seeking a universal religion; I don't think it advisable to do so. And if we proceed too far in drawing these parallels and ignoring the differences, we might end up doing exactly that!"

But if not a universal religion, what about a universal following of Buddha? Why does he not simply urge people to follow the path of Buddha as the only truth?

He replied by citing India's pluralistic past and said that contradictions in Buddha's own philosophical teaching have forced Buddhists to realize that "one teaching or one view will not satisfy."

"To some people Christianity is much more effective, in some other case, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, or Zoroastrianism," he said. "Even if I say that Buddhism is the best, that everybody should follow Buddhism, everybody is not going to become a Buddhist."

He laughed.







"But you do believe Buddhism is the best, don't you?"

"Yes," he replied, "I can say that for me personally, Buddhism is best because the Buddhist approach is most effective to me."

"This does not mean Buddhism is best for everyone. No," he said when pushed further. "Now, for my Christian brother or sister, Christianity is best for him or for her." But Christianity, he said, is not the best for him.

"Here, the concept of one religion, one truth, is very relevant for the individual," he said, qualifying his other statements about one religion. "But for the community it must be several truths, several religions."

He believes this solves the contradiction between religions, though he said that there is a unity of all major religions on "the message of compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment, simplicity, then self-discipline."

In terms of his own faith, the Dalai Lama drew a parallel between emotional love for Buddha and Christian love for Jesus. He said that his reflection on Buddha's teaching and sacrifice has led him to tears at times.

Does he thank Buddha for the good things in his life?

"Frankly speaking, my own happiness is mainly due to my own good karma," he said. "It is a fundamental Buddhist belief that my own suffering is due to my mistakes. If some good things happen, that is mainly due to my own good actions, not something related to a direct connection with Buddha."

In our interview, we devoted considerable time to the identity and integrity of Jesus. The Dalai Lama seemed at ease with the questioning, even while admitting that this





## Religions of the World

### Hollywood's Idol

was possibly the toughest area for exploration between evangelical Christians and Buddhists.

I reminded him of his belief that Jesus is "a fully enlightened being" and asked, "If Jesus is fully enlightened, wouldn't he be teaching the truth about Himself? Therefore, if He is teaching the truth, then He is the Son of God, and there is a God, and Jesus is the Savior. If He is fully enlightened, He should teach the truth. If He is not teaching the truth, He is not that enlightened."

As the Dalai Lama felt the momentum of the question, he laughed more than at any other time in the interview. He obviously understood the argument, borrowed from C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*.

"This is a very good question," he said. "This is very, very important, very important." Even in Buddha's case, he said, a distinction must always be made between teachings that "always remain valid" and others that "we have the liberty to reject."

He argued that Buddha knew people were not always ready for the higher truth because it "wouldn't suit, wouldn't help." Therefore, lesser truths are sometimes taught because of the person's ignorance or condition. This is known in Buddhist dharma as the doctrine of *uppayah*, or skillful means. The Dalai Lama then applied this to the question about Jesus.

"Jesus Christ also lived previous lives," he said. "So, you see, he reached a high state, either as a *Bodhisattva*, or an enlightened person, through Buddhist practice or something like that. Then, at a certain period, certain era, he appeared as a new master, and then because of circumstances, he taught certain views different from





Buddhism, but he also taught the same religious values as I mentioned earlier: Be patient, tolerant, compassionate. This is, you see, the real message in order to become a better human being." He said that there was absolutely no lying involved since Jesus' motivation was to help people.

### **The True Light**

I came away from the interview impressed by the Dalai Lama's charisma, intelligence, and kindness but also with deep concerns about key aspects of Buddhism and especially about the Dalai Lama's views on Jesus. Here is the core of what separates Buddhists and Christians, and thus must remain a key element in conversations with Buddhists. Karl Barth noted, "Only one thing is really decisive for the distinction of truth and error. ... Jesus Christ."

While the Dalai Lama's claim that Jesus is a fully enlightened being offers some common ground with Christian faith, he does not seem to grasp the difficulties inherent in his position.

In the four Gospels, the integrity of Jesus' moral teaching is intimately linked with the accuracy of His self-identity, not only by the opponents and disciples of Jesus, but also by Jesus Himself. It is impossible to picture an enlightened Jesus once a Buddhist perspective is used to evaluate His truth claims. For example, Jesus praised Peter for his belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus said God revealed this to the disciple. From a Buddhist perspective, there is no God to reveal anything. If there is no God, then Jesus is not the Son of God, and Peter's confession is false. What does this suggest about the integrity of Jesus as a teacher?





## Religions of the World

### Hollywood's Idol

Furthermore, why is it that humans in Jesus' day could not be given the same Buddhist message delivered by Gautama just a few centuries earlier in India? The Dalai Lama rightly recognizes that good teaching modifies itself to the audience to some degree. Was the karma so bad in Israel to require withholding the Buddha's teachings on reincarnation, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the nature of enlightenment?

Finally, claims that Jesus is really a Buddha in disguise is no compliment to Jesus or Buddha. How would Buddhists feel if Christians claimed that Gautama was really a Christian figure ahead of his time?

Still, it is no small matter that the most famous Buddhist on earth has a high regard for Jesus Christ. When he was asked to compare himself with Jesus in an interview with *The New York Times* in 1993, the Dalai Lama refused to do so. His recognition of the greatness of Jesus provides a hope for further engagement with what it really means that Jesus is a great master and a fully enlightened being. "Perhaps," one might suggest on another occasion, "Jesus is so enlightened that He is truly the light of the world."

#### **Plus: Basic Buddhism**

What the Dalai Lama and his followers believe about God, Buddha, and other teachings:

- The current universe has evolved through natural law.
- Truth has been given through countless ages by various Buddhas or enlightened beings.
- Gautama Buddha, who lived 2,500 years ago, is the teacher for our era.
- While salvation depends on individual effort, the Buddhist is to take refuge in the Buddha, his teaching (dharma) and the Buddhist community (sangha).





## Religions of the World

### Hollywood's Idol

- The Buddha taught Four Noble Truths: (1) suffering is real; (2) suffering is caused by selfish desire; (3) suffering will cease when selfish desire is eliminated; and (4) selfish desire will cease through following the Noble Eightfold Path.
- The Noble Eightfold Path that leads to nirvana involves (1) Right View, (2) Right Resolve, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness, and (8) Right Concentration.
- All living things are subject to the law of karma, the principle of cause and effect, which controls the cycle of reincarnation.
- The Buddhist is to abstain from killing, stealing, forbidden sex, lying, and the use of illicit drugs and liquor.
- There is no God or Supreme Creator.
- Buddhism is not irrational, pessimistic, or nihilistic.

*James A. Beverley is Professor of Theology and Ethics at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto. "Hollywood's Idol" and "Plus: Basic Buddhism" first appeared in the June 11, 2001 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY magazine.*





## Reflect

- *What was your previous impression of the Dalai Lama and his teachings? How has it changed since reading this article?*
- *What's your response to the Dalai Lama's explanation of who Jesus is?*
- *If a Buddhist initiated a religious conversation with you, what would be your plan of action for how to interact with them?*



## Mormons on the Rise

Mormonism is gaining popularity  
around the world.

*By John W. Kennedy*



**M**ichael B. Bennett has heard the accusations many times: Mormons are not Christians. But to Bennett, who converted at age 18, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) has provided answers he did not find as a Southern Baptist.

Bennett grew up in a heavily Baptist region of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. His parents and grandparents had been active Baptists and he was baptized at age 12. He attended youth rallies and Billy Graham crusades. "I was about as active a Baptist as you can be," recalls Bennett, now 39.





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

Yet he found the behavior of some churchgoers inconsistent. His friends at youth group fervently testified about Christ one week, and then smoked dope the next. An adulterous deacon continued to hold office after a hasty confession. Gossip and backbiting preoccupied many churchgoers.

Bennett was ripe for a change. When a high-school friend told him that his church had unpaid leaders, it sparked Bennett's interest. After attending several weekly LDS sacrament meetings and seeing a community that seemed genuinely to care and love, Bennett, now a lawyer in Salt Lake City, felt "compelled by the spirit" to be re-baptized as a Mormon. As a counselor to his congregation's bishop, Bennett devotes 20 hours a week to church activities.

While LDS theology is what separates Mormonism from orthodox Christianity, it had little to do with Bennett's attraction to America's most successful homegrown religion. Sandra Tanner, codirector of Utah Lighthouse Ministry in Salt Lake City—a Christian organization—says, "You join Mormonism because of friendship ties, a sense of belonging, a hope for your deceased family. It is a religion that gives the best of both worlds."

Though evangelicals generally concede that Mormons are good neighbors who promote family values, the theological chasm is wide. Mormons profoundly distance themselves from orthodox Christianity in the following ways:

1. They do not interpret canonical Scripture as being solely the Old Testament and New Testament. They add the Book of Mormon and founder Joseph Smith's other works, *The Pearl of Great Price and Doctrine and Covenants*.





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

2. They do not believe in the Trinity. Mormons believe God the Father and God the Son have fleshly bodies and that the Holy Ghost is a spirit man.
3. They teach that God was once a finite being who achieved his exalted rank by "progressing."

Based on supernatural visitations in the 1820s, Smith believed he was called to restore the true Christian church that had been lost 16 centuries earlier. According to this great apostasy, God told Smith that all churches—with specific reference to Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians—were wrong, and he shouldn't join one.

While evangelical and Catholic theologians have been able to agree on such unofficial initiatives as "The Gift of Salvation" (CHRISTIANITY TODAY, 1997), it is unlikely there will be an equivalent Mormon-evangelical document anytime soon. "Their theology has declared us to be an abomination," says Mike Gray, pastor of Salt Lake City's Southeast Baptist Church. "It's hard to do joint projects when they claim to be the only true church."

"On every major doctrine, the fundamental teachings of evangelical Christianity and Mormon doctrine are diametrically opposed," says Norman Geisler, dean of Southern Evangelical Seminary.

Protestant leaders have limited official contact with the LDS church. The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. is typical, calling for openness to *interfaith* dialogue with Mormons and telling members they "should not hesitate to share the gospel with people of Mormon background."





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

In February in Salt Lake City, the first formal discussions on theology, polity, and sacramental practice occurred between Mormons and United Methodists. "The two have historically looked upon each other with suspicion, or, at best, disinterest," says Doug Slaughter, a United Methodist minister in Ogden, Illinois. "With the growth of the LDS community into a world religious influence there has come more interest to understand this faith."

Tanner, who left Mormonism at age 19 and has written more than 40 books on the religion, says, "All Christians should be concerned about the growth of Mormonism. The Jesus of the Bible is different from the Jesus of the Mormons."

**THE BAPTISTS ARE COMING:** Few denominations are eager to hold a national convention outside the comfort zone of their membership. But Southern Baptists—who have one of the largest career missionary forces with 5,000 workers in 147 countries—are gathering June 9-11 for an annual convention on the Mormons' home turf of Salt Lake City. The state of Utah is about 2 percent Baptist and nearly 70 percent Mormon.

In Utah, the SBC will be using pages out of the LDS playbook for mass evangelism. Around 2,500 Baptists—including 1,000 college and seminary students—are expected to knock on 150,000 doors. Starting for a week on June 3, Southern Baptists will run 500 radio commercials, 150 television spots, a dozen newspaper advertisements, and six billboard advertisements urging residents to rethink their commitment to Mormonism. "In the end, salvation is not a marketing issue," says SBC president Tom Elliff. "It depends on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ."





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

Direct mailings containing testimonies of local Southern Baptists are also being sent to 390,000 households in the region. All the media and mail efforts carry a toll-free number offering a hand-delivered free copy of the *Jesus* video produced by Campus Crusade for Christ. The total cost of the one-week blitz is \$260,000.

An estimated 9,500 messengers, or delegates, are expected to attend the convention. With spouses and children in tow, there could be more than 30,000 Southern Baptists visiting the state where only 6,000 Baptists live.

Every four or five years the convention meets in a pioneer area where the membership is comparatively small. The purpose is to encourage SBC churches in such areas and to let others in the region know the SBC is not just a Southern phenomenon. For example, in Las Vegas, several hundred Southern Baptists marched down the city's strip of casinos and hotels handing out Bibles and tracts (CHRISTIANITY TODAY, July 14, 1989).

Utah Baptists have had significant success with Mormon-focused outreach. At least once a year, Southeast's pastor, Gray, hosts a local conference on understanding Mormonism. Southeast's membership has grown from 120 to 1,000 in Gray's 14 years there, making it the largest Southern Baptist church in the state. About one in five members is a former Mormon.

**READY TO TANGLE:** However, Southern Baptists are not likely to win converts simply by knocking on doors and leaving tracts in Salt Lake City. "It's like going to minister among Muslims," says Tanner, now a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. She says former Mormons are often isolated from their cultural heritage and families.





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

Southern Baptists have prepared their pastors and lay leaders for outreach to Mormons with a 75-minute video, *The Mormon Puzzle*. In all, more than 50,000 videos and accompanying study guides have been distributed. In addition, during the week of June 1, the six SBC seminaries are jointly sponsoring workshops on Mormon theology and effective witnessing to Mormons. Jim Harding, the top SBC executive in Utah, sees the convention visit as a "divine appointment."

"For Southern Baptists, Utah is a mission field," Harding says. He is recommending that messengers not engage in a doctrinal shouting match, but simply "share the truth of Jesus Christ."

R. Philip Roberts, director of the SBC North American Mission Board's interfaith witness evangelism team, says, "Accountability before God is the most important issue. Before you have a harvest you need to plant the seed of the biblical gospel. It's our duty to do all that we can to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them."

If the SBC evangelism blitz becomes too overwhelming, LDS headquarters may issue advice to local church leaders, according to M. Russell Ballard, a member since 1985 of the Council of the Twelve, the church's ruling body. Ballard says, "We won't get into bashing over doctrine."

Likewise, SBC president Elliff is gracious. "There's no reason for any of us to be caustic and uncharitable in our speech," He says. "But we won't compromise our beliefs." Ballard, a car dealer before being called as a full-time ecclesiastical leader, says *The Mormon Puzzle* is "relatively positive" because it introduces essential LDS teachings such as restoration of priesthood authority. Ballard says he traces his authority as an ordained apostle directly





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

to Christ: Jesus ordained Peter, James, and John, who, Mormons believe, transferred authority directly to Joseph Smith by laying hands on his head in an 1830 appearance. The authority has been transferred in an earthly manner to LDS apostles since then.

**NEXT WORLD RELIGION?** Mormons, who were much maligned and persecuted in nineteenth-century America, are in some ways unrivaled in spiritual seed-planting. Worldwide, there are 56,530 LDS missionaries, three-fourths of them young males, knocking on doors in 162 countries. Last year, 318,000 people converted to Mormonism, primarily from Christian groups.

The LDS church is experiencing rapid growth, with 10,070,500 Mormons worldwide. Seven out of ten Mormons live in North, Central, or South America. "At any given moment, the majority of Mormons are first-generation converts," says Rodney Stark, author and University of Washington sociologist. Most have significant attachments to non-Mormon relatives and friends, who then are ripe for conversion themselves. Stark projects that Mormonism will become the next world religion, with a membership of 267 million by 2080.

This month, the fifty-second LDS temple in the world will open. Another 46 are under construction or on the drawing board, including one in Nashville, headquarters of the SBC.

LDS missionaries have had the greatest success in countries with sizable Christian populations, where Christian missionaries have blazed the trail. The key LDS doctrine of restoration of the church is more easily grasped by people who have already been introduced to Christianity.





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

LDS missions efforts are well-financed, in part because all but 85 top church leaders are volunteers. Also, Mormons are the most generous donors of all American church members, giving on average nearly 7.5 percent of their incomes.

While 95 percent of Mormons in the United States are white, the church is growing elsewhere by appealing to a multitude of racial and ethnic groups, aided by the acceptance of blacks into the priesthood in 1978. Latin America is the fastest-growing region, with 3.4 million members, 2 million more than a decade ago.

The Book of Mormon has a strong American appeal with its narrative about an early American civilization and the appearance of the risen Christ to the ancient Americans. Stark predicts there will be 60 million Mormons in Latin America alone by 2010.

Tanner notes that LDS membership does not necessarily translate into lifelong commitment. Weekly sacrament meeting attendance is between 40 and 50 percent in the United States, and only around 25 percent in Latin America. Infants are counted as members as soon as they start attending, and adults who stop attending may still be counted.

**INTENSE MISSIONS FOCUS:** From the moment of their children's birth, many LDS parents hope to send them out as missionaries. In a world of shifting values, a fresh-faced, well-attired, neatly groomed, smiling, confident teenager can be a persuasive advertisement for the church.

Two years ago, Matthew R. Tate, then 19, reached the age where tens of thousands of Mormons radically alter their lives. Although raised in an LDS family in Salt Lake City, he did not fully commit to the church's teachings until







## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

just before his mission trip. "I had to decide whether this church was real or not," Tate explains. "Deep in my heart I felt it was true." Mormons cite Moroni 10:3-5 in the Book of Mormon as evidence. In that passage, a resurrected angel, Moroni, exhorts seekers to ponder in their hearts and ask God whether the claims are true, then the power of the Holy Ghost will make it clear.

LDS prophet and president Gordon B. Hinckley and his two counselors pray about where to send each missionary. For Tate, the two-year assignment was New York City. Beforehand, he spent a month in preparation in Provo, site of the largest of 15 LDS missionary-training centers. Recruits live in a cloistered, dormlike atmosphere, where they learn LDS doctrine. Many learn a foreign language.

While the church paid Tate's airfares to New York and back, his family had to provide daily living expenses. Once on assignment, the schedule is arduous. Tate spent 12 hours a day, six days a week, trying to proselytize. Another two hours each day he prayed and studied the Book of Mormon and the Bible. Tate lived in an apartment with three to seven other missionaries, and he could telephone home only on Christmas and Mother's Day.

"All I've done for two years is eat, drink, and sleep religion," Tate says. "You don't worry about yourself. You worry about other people."

**A WIDE DIVIDE:** As LDS church growth has accelerated, orthodox Christian scholars have refocused on Mormon teaching and practice.

Last year's publication of *How Wide The Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (InterVarsity Press) has done more to raise the profile of Mormonism among





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

evangelical leaders than any other effort in the past decade.

In the book, Stephen E. Robinson, Brigham Young University (BYU) professor of ancient Scripture, and Craig L. Blomberg, professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary and also an ordained Baptist pastor, concluded the divide is not as wide as they once believed. But it still is significant. *How Wide the Divide?* did not attempt to discuss irreconcilable differences such as baptism for the dead, the premortal existence of souls, or the early history of the Americas. Rather, the book provides a forum to measure potential common ground.

Evangelical critics contend Blomberg showed too much respect for LDS beliefs, and that he should not have written a book with "the enemy." They also say Robinson is not representative of true LDS doctrine.

"Robinson mops up on Blomberg," says John L. Smith, whose ministry in Marlow, Oklahoma, was under the auspices of the SBC North American Mission Board until last year. "The book is a great evangelism tool—for Mormons."

Tyndale College and Seminary professor James Beverley says *How Wide the Divide?* provides a necessary first step for dialogue. But he says Blomberg failed adequately to rebut some of Robinson's charges. "The book suffers from a dialogue that doesn't lay all the cards on the table," Beverley says.

At an April conference, "Mormonism and Christianity: How Great the Divide!" Southern Evangelical Seminary's Geisler asserted, "Robinson said things that were definitely contrary to historic Mormon teaching."





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

Blomberg notes, however, that LDS authorities often lack academic theological training, so the church often turns to BYU leaders such as Robinson for official theological comment. Robinson and Robert L. Millet, dean of religious education at BYU, are key LDS spokespersons in *The Mormon Puzzle*.

Blomberg concedes he could have asked several more specific questions and that more articulate wording could have deflected some criticism, but he says overall he is pleased with the effort.

**EMBRACING THE MAINSTREAM:** Although Mormons have moved toward the cultural mainstream of American Christianity, they continue to insist the LDS faith represents the purified and true church. At the LDS semiannual general conference in April, LDS president Hinckley said, "There are some of other faiths who do not regard us as Christians. How we regard ourselves is what is important."

Mormons believe that spiritual darkness covered the earth for 16 centuries after the death of Jesus' apostles until the restoration through Joseph Smith. At the conference, Hinckley also stressed there would be no compromise on the idea that the LDS church is true—and others are not. "This is a restoration of that which was instituted by the Savior of the world," Hinckley proclaimed. "It is not a reformation of perceived false practice and doctrine that may have developed through the centuries."

Mormons are gaining respectability from some unlikely sources. Last November, former President Jimmy Carter, who still teaches Sunday school at his SBC church in Georgia, said Mormons do not need to be evangelized.





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

He criticized Southern Baptists for "trying to act as the Pharisees did" in defining who is "considered an acceptable person in the eyes of God."

The SBC's Roberts says, "Mormons want to be fully Mormon and fully Christian, but they can't be both." Ex-Mormon Tanner agrees. "Its theology is as close to Christianity as Hinduism," she says. "It's a totally different view of man and God and Creation."

LDS apostle Ballard told CHRISTIANITY TODAY, "We believe God, the eternal Father, is literally our father. He's a man glorified, exalted, perfected, resurrected."

Millet says, "Human spirits were born sons and daughters of God before this life, and if they will be born again now, they can be empowered and transformed by Jesus Christ, becoming eventually as he is. We believe in the ultimate deification of man."

**WHERE ARE THE ARTIFACTS?** One of the most persistent critiques of doctrine focuses on the teaching that ancient Hebrews immigrated to the Americas.

LDS doctrine says that in 1827 Moroni, a resurrected angel, instructed Smith to unearth golden plates buried in New York. For two years, Smith translated the "reformed Egyptian," which told of the migration of Israelites to this continent. Their descendants divided into Lamanites, the ancestors of today's Native Americans, and Nephites. Mormon, the last surviving Nephite leader, inscribed the race's history before their demise. Moroni, Mormon's son, whisked the plates back to heaven after Smith's translation.





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

Faith plays a large role in believing the accounts in the Book of Mormon, because Smith's version is the only written record of Israeli immigrants living in the Americas between 600 B.C. and A.D. 400. Tanner says no archaeological evidence supports the existence of such a culture.

"There may be some things we'll never find simply because the vast majority of human artifacts disappear," says Daniel C. Peterson, chair of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies at BYU, which, at 29,000 full-time students, is the largest privately owned campus in the United States.

While Smith's Book of Mormon is considered infallible, the Bible is not. "We accept the Bible as the Word of God as far as it is translated correctly," Ballard told *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*.

"The Bible has been through countless translations from the time its chapters were originally penned to the present," Ballard writes in *Our Search for Happiness*. "Along the way there have been changes and alterations that have diminished the purity of the doctrine." On the other hand, "the Book of Mormon offers pure, concise doctrine that hasn't been tampered with by religious philosophers, councils, panels, and kings."

But LDS scriptures are not so pristine, Tanner says. She cites Smith providing different versions of his visions in 1833 and 1835. "Revelations are suddenly twice as long as before, bringing in new concepts such as the priesthood," says Tanner. "Why would he have to rewrite it after only two years?"





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

**ONGOING REVELATION:** Among Mormons, the restoration of the true church means that their top leader is a living prophet, able to clarify, modify, or enhance existing doctrine.

And new revelations can reverse earlier LDS teaching, the most famous example being the 1890 discontinuance of polygamy, which 47 years earlier Joseph Smith declared had been commanded by the Lord. "Latter-day Saints believe the canon of Scripture is open, flexible, and expanding," Millet says.

"What God has said to apostles and prophets in the past is always secondary to what God is saying directly to his apostles and prophets now," Robinson writes in *How Wide the Divide?*

Subsequently, LDS revere their president as God's mouthpiece on earth, the "prophet, seer, and revelator." When the president of the church dies, the member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who has served the longest automatically succeeds him, usually leaving an aged leader to head the religion founded by a 24-year-old prophet. The last three presidents have started service at the average age of 86. Hinckley turns 88 this month.

In the LDS church, males confer everything required for a family to gain eternal exaltation. At 12, boys begin through the Aaronic priesthood offices of deacon, teacher, and priest. Males in the higher Melchizedek priesthood can advance through the offices of elder, high priest, patriarch, seventy, and apostle.





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

"The patriarchy—the loss of the priesthood—is one of the fears of people leaving Mormonism," Tanner says. "For instance, the husband is the one who can pray for a child if he gets sick. Men are the connection to make sure that, at whatever level, things are done the way God wants them to be done."

Advancement in church leadership is dependent on individual accomplishment, Tanner contends. "To reach the celestial kingdom you must go to the temple," she says. "In order to go to the temple, you have to be a full tithe payer and do everything the church asks you to do. There is control to get to that end reward."

Not only are there earthly incentives for faithful Mormons, but more importantly, there are many eternal bonuses, based on individual merit.

"We don't believe in a heaven and a hell," Ballard told *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*. "We believe in degrees of glory. People are not going to live into the eternities in misery."

The LDS doctrine that husbands and wives are married "for time and eternity" allows some high-achieving Mormon couples to have eternal offspring and create and populate their own world.

Those Mormons who aspire to the top of three tiers of heavenly paradise must be baptized according to the LDS priesthood and live a worthy life.

Among Mormon leaders, temple activities are focused, in part, on the controversial practice of vicarious baptisms and marriage in which living members stand in proxy for the deceased.







## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

"How do we know whether or not your great-great-grandfather, who never heard the gospel as it was restored, nor ever had the opportunity to be baptized by the priesthood, is going to accept?" Ballard asks. "We don't. But we do the work anyway." Under LDS doctrine, not just baptism, but salvation itself is available to the dead.

"The person may have heard the gospel a hundred times, but it never really clicked," Peterson says. "So maybe that hundredth time is the chance. That can happen in this life or the next."

LDS doctrines about baptism, salvation, and the afterlife place them at odds with centuries of Christian teaching in the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions.

**BEFRIEND, NOT ATTACK?** Despite vastly different theology, Mormon and evangelical leaders at times work together against common foes such as gambling, pornography, and abortion. A Baptist and a Mormon are congressional sponsors of legislation to protect churches from creditors seeking to confiscate donations made by members who went bankrupt (CHRISTIANITY TODAY)

The works of C. S. Lewis have emerged as another area of religious common ground. "He is so well received by Latter-day Saints because of his broad and inclusive vision of Christianity," says BYU dean Millet, who spoke about Lewis at an April theology conference at Wheaton College.

Blomberg, among others, holds out hope that projects such as *How Wide the Divide?* can be an initial step in Mormons moving to orthodoxy, as happened when the Worldwide Church of God founded by Herbert W. Armstrong altered





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

its unique teachings (CHRISTIANITY TODAY, July 15, 1996). "I still believe in respectful, courteous dialogue," Blomberg says. "As LDS church membership continues to increase, and friends and relatives convert to Mormonism, it will behoove evangelicals to befriend rather than attack."

Yet deep disagreements remain over bedrock truth. "We have a prophet that receives direction from the Lord Jesus Christ," Ballard says. "We simply say to the world, 'Keep everything you have that is true and add to it the fullness of the everlasting gospel as it's been restored.' "

Roberts counters, "The gospel does have a cutting edge. It can be offensive when you explain there's no such thing as celestial heaven." Roberts and Tanner are coauthors of the new Harvest House book *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*.

Recent rhetoric from Baptist leaders referring to Utah as a "stronghold of Satan" and a "spiritual cloud of oppressiveness" may motivate Baptists, but alienate Mormons.

In the meantime, Mormons persist in their own media outreach. In April, the LDS church bought a commercial on the Gospel Music Association's nationally televised Dove Awards program.

For Bennett, the former Southern Baptist, there is great eagerness to share his new faith. "I feel more dedicated and closer to the Lord than I've ever felt," Bennett says. "The confluence of cultures and religions will be good for both the Mormons and the Baptists."





## Religions of the World

### Mormons on the Rise

But for evangelicals, a faithful follower of LDS doctrine is at eternal peril. "Mormonism is either totally true or totally false," Utah Mission's leader John L. Smith says. "If it's true, every other religion in America is false."

*This article first appeared in the **June 15, 1998** issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.*

## Reflect

- *What did you learn about the differences between Christianity and Mormonism?*
- *What do you think is so appealing about Mormonism that so many of their converts come from Christian churches?*
- *If you had a Mormon neighbor, how would you show or tell her that truth is found in Christianity instead of Mormonism?*



## What You Need to Know About New Age Beliefs



Christianity's response to  
New Age spirituality.

*By Jan Brown*

**New Age spirituality says:** God is either in all things or He is all things.

**Christianity says:** "For by Him all things were created ... all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16-17). We worship the Creator, not what He's created (Rom. 1:25).



## Religions of the World

### What You Need to Know About New Age Beliefs

**Be wary of:** Panentheism, which says "God is in the tree," or pantheism, which says "God is the tree," as opposed to theism (Christianity), which says "God created the tree and holds it together by His power."

**New Age spirituality says:** We're on a continual journey to "know all" by achieving cosmic consciousness (also referred to as Nirvana, "going clear," Christ-consciousness, individual divinity, or fulfilling the dharma).

**Christianity says:** Satan tempted Eve with knowledge he claimed would make her like God (Gen. 3:4-5), but we can never know as much as God (Isa. 55:8-9, Job 38). While the God of Christianity doesn't require us to numb our mind, He compels us to love Him with all our heart and all our mind (Matt. 22:37).

**Be wary of:** Ideas or belief systems that promise you can become like God through acquiring knowledge. Ultimate spiritual truth can only be found through God's Word, the Bible, and in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who is the only "way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

**New Age spirituality says:** People work through their bad karma, or the overall effects of wrong actions, by being reincarnated, or physically reborn into a different body, until they achieve their divine destiny of becoming a god, or becoming one with the universe.

**Christianity says:** There's no second chance after this life: "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27). There's only one "divine destiny"—salvation—achieved only through Jesus Christ: "For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), and "For it is by grace you have





## Religions of the World

### What You Need to Know About New Age Beliefs

been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8).

**Be wary of:** Any teaching that includes reincarnation or encourages works to reach a higher level of spirituality or to earn salvation.

**New Age spirituality says:** You can shape reality by the power of your thoughts, or by speaking something into existence.

**Christianity says:** "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. ... Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:13-15). "Whatever is true ... think about such things" (Phil. 4:8).

**Be wary of:** Teachings that tell you you can project your thoughts or words into existence, rather than recognizing God is the source of all power to shape reality.

**New Age spirituality says:** One can separate consciousness from the body, or have an out-of-body experience in order to be connected with the "Universal Soul."

**Christianity says:** God didn't create our consciousness to be separate from our body. Rather, He created us to be conscious within our body (Gen. 2:7). Only through God's Holy Spirit dwelling in us can we be connected to the Creator (John 14:26).





## Religions of the World

### What You Need to Know About New Age Beliefs

**Be wary of:** Any teaching that includes leaving your body or allowing a "spirit guide" to enter it.

**New Age spirituality says:** The essential doctrines of the truth of life are within man.

**Christianity says:** "He who trusts in himself is a fool" (Prov. 28:26). The cause of the fall of man was our desire to become our own master, to determine for ourselves what's good and bad instead of relying on God's teachings found in the Bible, the only true source. Yoga and New Age teach the same lie Satan tempted Eve with in the Garden of Eden: "You will be as God" (Gen. 3:5), which was designed to keep her (and us) away from the one true God (John 17:3).

**Be wary of:** Basing your beliefs on what you sense is true, what you "hear" God saying in your mind, or any emotional experience without making sure your thought is in agreement with the Bible.

*This article first appeared in the September/October 2001 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*







## Religions of the World

What You Need to Know About New Age Beliefs

### Reflect

- *How have you seen some of these New Age beliefs being disguised as Christian beliefs?*
- *How would you respond to someone who said they believe you can shape reality by the power of your thoughts?*
- *How do you think the prevalent "self-help" mindset ties into New Age thinking?*





## The Problem with Scientology

A crash course on the basics of its beliefs.

*By Jody Veenker*

**C**raig Branch, director of the Apologetics Resource Center in Birmingham, Alabama, has been examining the teaching and practice of Scientology from a Christian perspective since 1989 and has studied new religious movements for more than 15 years. He has also worked with Watchman Fellowship, a ministry focusing on outreach to non-Christian religions. Branch says evangelical scholars criticize Scientology for these reasons:



## Religions of the World

### The Problem with Scientology

#### **Scientology's moral code is based on self-preservation.**

"Scientology subscribes to the idea that the end justifies the means," says Branch. "And their end is to overcome the world with Scientology."

Branch believes this contributes to a warped view of ethics in which anything that advances the goals of Scientology is permissible.

#### **Scientology attacks opponents and former members.**

One Scientology policy, Fair Game, says a "suppressive" person who is an enemy of the church "may be deprived of property or injured by any means by any Scientologist, without any discipline of the Scientologist. [A suppressive] may be tricked, sued or lied to or destroyed" (High Command Office Policy Letter, Oct. 18, 1967).

Although Scientologists deny that they still openly follow some of Hubbard's more punitive policies, such as Fair Game, many court cases have found that Scientologists still operate under Hubbard's principles of aggression, Branch says.

According to *The Daily Appellate Reporter*, the California Supreme Court found Scientology guilty of intentional and negligent infliction of severe emotional harm in the case of Larry Wollersheim (1989). The court wrote that Scientology's "policy of Fair Game by its nature was intended to punish the person who dared to leave the Church."

#### **Pre-Clears are intensely vulnerable to Scientology control.**

"Scientologists use techniques that can produce altered states in susceptible people," Branch says. "Often people dealing with forms of hypnosis and suggestion find





## Religions of the World

### The Problem with Scientology

that the line between reality [and fiction] blurs. In the auditing process your whole life is laid open to auditors: your relationships, your bank account, your insurance information. Your life is an open book. The process is full of potential for exploitation."

#### **Scientology is financially extremist.**

Branch also warns that the price for being cleared of painful memories, called engrams, is extraordinarily steep. Besides charging Scientologists for each auditing and training component that they must take to become "Clear" of this life's memories, Scientology auditors determine how many past-life engrams Scientologists need to free themselves from.

#### **Scientology teaches a nonbiblical theology.**

"At first you are urged to put all your energy and money into reaching the freeing state of 'Clear,'" Branch says, "but once you become a 'Clear' you are told that instead of achieving a state of constant happiness, safety and comfort, you are now extremely vulnerable, and you need to protect yourself by advancing through Operating Thetan [high-level Scientology] instruction." Former Scientologists often complain of the church's controlling nature, especially about the tight rein it keeps on information, doling out small doses of theology on a need-to-know basis. "Christians especially must be cautious about this aspect of Scientology because most Scientologists will say Scientology is compatible with Christianity at first. But as you progress in Scientology, it becomes clear that you cannot remain both a Christian and a Scientologist," Branch says.





## Religions of the World

### The Problem with Scientology

"Hubbard wrote that Christ was 'a shade above Clear,' which in Scientology terms means that He wasn't even an Operating Thetan," Branch adds. "He also wrote that the crucifixion was a legend that had been implanted in our psyches so that we were easily controlled by alien overlords."

*This article first appeared in the **September 4, 2000** issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.*

## Reflect

- *Based on the information in this article, how would you refute someone's claim that you can be both a Christian and a Scientologist?*
- *Why do you think Scientology has become popular?*
- *What would be a "bridge" to sharing the Gospel with someone who has become disillusioned by Scientology?*



## Additional Resources



**I Love Mormons: A New Way to Share Christ with Latter-day Saints** by David L. Rowe (Baker, 2005; 208 pages). With helpful illustrations and discussions of Mormon values and theology, Rowe calls Christians away from confrontational evangelism and instead suggests active listening and respect as a way to bridge Christian beliefs and Mormon culture.

**Pocket Guide to World Religions** by Winifred Corduan (InterVarsity, 2006; 144 pages). What does the red dot on an Indian woman's forehead mean? Do all Buddhist monks practice the martial arts? Is the emperor of Japan still considered a god? Corduan focuses his primary attention on 12 major world religions, but he also sketches in the beliefs of 16 "new" religions.



## Religions of the World

### Additional Resources

**The Spirit of Buddhism: A Christian Perspective on Buddhist Thought** by David Burnett (Monarch, 2007; 352 pages). This lucid introduction to a complex topic will prove essential to all Christians seeking to communicate with Buddhists. Only as Christians understand the fascination of this unique religion will they be able to communicate meaningfully with those of the Buddhist tradition.

**Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs** by Ergun Caner and Emir Caner (Kregel, 2002; 251 pages). Raised Muslim by a mosque leader, the Caner brothers—now Christian seminary professors—clarify the primary differences between Christianity and Islam, and they present practical strategies for opening productive dialogue with Muslims.

**What Do Our Neighbors Believe? Questions and Answers on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam** by Howard Greenstein (Westminster/John Knox, 2007; 168 pages). This book offers salient and reliable introductions to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, allowing readers the flexibility to compare and contrast as they read along or, if they prefer, concentrate on one religion at a time. Accessibly and engagingly, an expert on each faith clearly conveys the histories, theological understandings, practices, and contemporary challenges of these three great traditions.





A NEW DIGITAL WORLD FOR THOUGHTFUL,  
INFLUENTIAL WOMEN WHO WANT MORE  
FROM THEIR FAITH AND WHO WANT TO  
MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

# kyria

CHOSEN IN CHRIST  
—  
CALLED TO INFLUENCE

BECOME A MEMBER OF  
KYRIA.COM AND RECEIVE:

- FULL ACCESS TO **HUNDREDS OF THOUGHTFUL ARTICLES**
- THE **MONTHLY** KYRIA DIGIZINE
- CONNECTIONS WITH A COMMUNITY OF INFLUENTIAL CHRISTIAN WOMEN
- **20% DISCOUNT ON ALL OF THE DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES IN THE KYRIA STORE**

A ministry of  
**Leadership**

  
CHRISTIANITY TODAY  
INTERNATIONAL

**»Join Kyria.com today!**