

Orthodoxy & Catholicism

DOGMA & THEOLOGY

Comparative theology, rightly practiced, is not a contest. It is the work of knowing our own faith well enough to recognize what others hold, to honor what is true in them, and to name, with charity and precision, where they have departed from the Apostolic Tradition. This lesson begins with the nearest of our separated brethren — the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman communion preserves many treasures: the Scriptures, Trinitarian baptism, the creedal faith, the veneration of the Mother of God, the monastic heritage, and a profound witness to the dignity of the human person. The differences that separate us are real, however, and the servant must be able to identify them clearly. This is not for the purpose of polemic satisfaction; it is for the protection of the flock and the clarity of our witness. A servant should be able to explain the filioque, the Immaculate Conception, papal infallibility, purgatory, mandatory priestly celibacy, or the theory of doctrinal development to serve his people in an age of easy confusion.

The Creedal Frame

The Creed we pray every day places us within the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. "We believe in one God, the Father, the Pantocrator... And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life... And in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins." This is the measuring line by which every ecclesial claim must be tested.

Contemporary Christianity divides into four broad families: the Orthodox Church (itself comprising the Oriental Orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox), the Roman Catholic Church (including the many Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with Rome — Greek Catholic, Coptic Catholic, Maronite, and others), the Protestant communions that emerged from the Reformation, and the various sects and cults that have grown up outside historic Christianity altogether.

Our particular sorrow, as Orthodox, is that the Orthodox Church is itself divided between the Oriental Orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox families — a division rooted in the misunderstandings that surrounded the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. This lesson treats chiefly the separation between the Apostolic Orthodox Churches taken together and the Roman Catholic Church, a separation marked by the Great Schism of 1054 and by the doctrinal developments that followed.

The Great Schism of 1054

For the first few hundred years of Christian history, the great sees of the Church — Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem — shared the same faith, celebrated the same sacraments, and held one another in communion. After Chalcedon, Rome and Constantinople grew in tensions over the next few centuries. Latin-speaking Rome and Greek-speaking Constantinople drifted linguistically and culturally apart. The Western Empire fell; the Eastern Empire continued. Theological disputes that had been discussed as open questions began to harden into fixed positions. The Bishop

of Rome's pastoral authority over the West gradually became an insistence on authority over the whole Christian world.

Matters came to a head in 1053, when Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople ordered the closure of the Latin-rite churches in his city after Greek-rite churches in southern Italy had been forcibly Latinized. In 1054, legates from Rome entered Constantinople, excommunicated the Patriarch at the altar of Hagia Sophia, and were themselves excommunicated in return. The exchange was local; its consequences were catastrophic. The Schism settled slowly into the whole body of the Church. The Fourth Crusade in 1204, in which Latin Christians sacked Constantinople and defiled her churches, made reconciliation nearly impossible. Attempts at reunion over the following centuries — the Council of Lyons in 1274, the Council of Florence in 1439 — did not heal the wound.

The servant should know this history because the divisions of the Church are never only administrative. They issue, at last, in different accounts of the faith, and those differences affect the life of the faithful.

The Filioque

The most important of the doctrinal differences concerns the procession of the Holy Spirit. The original Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, composed by the first two Ecumenical Councils and received by the whole Church, confesses that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father." The Western Church, from the sixth century onward in certain regions and universally by the eleventh century, added the phrase "and from the Son" — in Latin, filioque. The addition was made without a council and without the consent of the Eastern patriarchates.

The Orthodox objection is twofold. The first is procedural. The Creed was the conciliar possession of the whole Church; no local church, however venerable, may alter it by its own authority. The second is theological. The Lord Himself testifies:

"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me" (John 15:26).

Christ speaks of Himself as the one who sends the Spirit in time, but attributes the Spirit's eternal procession to the Father alone.

Orthodox Triadology safeguards the delicate order of unity and distinction within the Trinity. The Persons share everything in the one divine essence — Godhead, eternity, uncreatedness, goodness, omnipotence — with only three exceptions. The Father alone is unbegotten; the Son alone is eternally begotten; the Holy Spirit alone proceeds. The Father is the one fountain ("monarchy") from whom the Son is begotten and from whom the Spirit proceeds. The filioque blurs this, giving two Persons a shared role that belongs to one, and by implication subordinating the Spirit to the Father and the Son as if He were a joint product of Their common action.

This is not a trivial difference. It changes the inner portrait of the living God. For the Orthodox, it is also an instance of the larger problem: the doctrine was added unilaterally, and once such additions are permitted, others — the Immaculate Conception, papal infallibility, and others — follow.

The Immaculate Conception

Both Orthodox and Catholic Christians honor the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos — the Mother of God — and confess her perpetual virginity before, during, and after the birth of Christ. Both ask her for her intercession. Both keep feasts in her honor. On these great matters we are together.

The division comes at the doctrine defined by Pope Pius IX on 8 December 1854 in the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*: "We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful." This is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

The Orthodox Church does not accept this definition. Several reasons stand together. First, the doctrine has no explicit patristic consensus. It was developed in the Latin West, debated for centuries by Catholic theologians (with Thomas Aquinas himself rejecting it), and only defined in 1854. Second, St. Athanasius explains that when Adam and Eve sinned 'They came under the law of death and could no longer live in paradise, but outside of it, to remain in a state of death and corruption.' Since God is just, He is the Father of Truth, He would not go back upon His word regarding death. However, God in His ultimate mercy had no choice but to send His Only Begotten Son to save us. The Son incarnated and became man, surrendering His body to the curse of death in place of ALL, offering it to the Father. Because of His ultimate justice, God would not make ANY exception; otherwise He would be breaching His justice. If there was another way for salvation while keeping justice and truth, why go through all this predicament and hassle. Was this all a show?

Third, the doctrine, however well intended, obscures the Virgin's own witness. St. Mary herself says in the Magnificat: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). Christ is her Savior as He is ours. She was purified and sanctified by the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation, as the Fathers confess, but she was not of another lineage than the rest of Adam's children. Her holiness is the crown of what grace can do within a faithful human life — which is why she is properly the model of every Christian.

The Role of the Pope

The Roman Catholic Church holds that the Bishop of Rome, as the successor of St. Peter, is the visible head of the whole Church on earth and the Vicar of Christ. Rome appeals to the Lord's words to Peter: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18). On the basis of that passage, refined over many centuries, Rome has defined the doctrine of Papal Infallibility. The definition of the First Vatican Council (1870) teaches that when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra* — from the chair of Peter — on matters of faith and morals, his definitions are protected by the Holy Spirit from error.

The Orthodox Church honors St. Peter and acknowledges his unique place among the Apostles. But Orthodoxy reads the Lord's words in their wider New Testament context. The "rock" upon which Christ builds His Church is most often read by the Fathers as Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), a confession that is the faith of every true bishop, not the private

possession of one successor. St. Peter himself refers to Christ as the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4) and to all elders as fellow shepherds.

Orthodoxy teaches that every canonical bishop, when he speaks within the consensus of the Church and in communion with his brother bishops, stands as a "living icon of Christ" to his own people. St. Ignatius of Antioch gave the early form of this: "Wherever the bishop is, there let the people be, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church." The bishops together, gathered in council, have preserved the faith. No single bishop, not even the bishop of the first and most honored see, may legislate infallibly for all of Christendom.

The practical difference is large. In the Roman system, development and definition can come from the chair of Peter. In the Orthodox system, the fullness of truth is preserved by the whole body and expressed through the conciliar action of the bishops in union with their clergy and laity. Both systems claim to preserve the apostolic faith; the Orthodox claim rests on the conviction that the faith was once delivered and must not be added to, not even by the holiest patriarch.

Purgatory

The Roman Catholic Church teaches the doctrine of Purgatory:

"All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but, after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned" (Catechism of the Catholic Church §1030-1031).

Support is drawn from 2 Maccabees 12:44-46, in which Judas Maccabeus prays for the dead, and from Matthew 12:32, which speaks of a sin that will not be forgiven "either in this age or in the age to come."

The Orthodox Church does pray for the departed, believes that the prayers of the living benefit the departed, and teaches that the soul after death undergoes a particular examination and preparation. But the Orthodox tradition has never received Purgatory as a discrete third place with its specific sufferings, durations, and conditions. H.H. Pope Shenouda III raised a decisive pastoral question against the doctrine from 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: "The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." Are the faithful who are alive on the Last Day, Pope Shenouda asks, exempt from Purgatory? Or does God show favoritism to the generation that happens to be alive at the Second Coming? The passage points us past a purgatorial mechanism to an eschatological encounter.

The Orthodox teaching is rather that the soul after death rests in the Lord, is assisted by the prayers and offerings of the Church, and awaits the final resurrection and the general judgment. The distinction between a purgatorial state that must be traversed and the rest of the saints in Christ is significant. The first is a doctrine requiring addition to revelation; the second is a confession of what has always been believed.

Mandatory Celibacy of the Priesthood

The Latin Church, since the eleventh and twelfth centuries and definitively since the Council of Trent, requires that its priests remain celibate. Celibate devotion has real theological beauty. A priest without the cares of family is, in certain measures, more free for pastoral availability, for prayer, and for counsel. St. Paul himself writes, "He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord — how he may please the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:32), and the Church has always honored celibacy as a high calling.

The Orthodox Church, however, does not regard celibacy as a requirement for the presbyterate. Orthodoxy preserves the apostolic pattern: bishops are chosen from among the celibate monastics, but priests and deacons may be either celibate (usually monks) or married before ordination. This is the pattern of the apostolic Church. Many of the Apostles themselves were married (1 Corinthians 9:5 — "Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?"). St. Peter had a wife whose mother the Lord healed (Matthew 8:14-15). St. Paul writes to Titus that a presbyter should be "the husband of one wife, having faithful children" (Titus 1:6), a direction that assumes a married clergy.

Married priests carry a distinctive pastoral gift. They have lived the realities their parishioners live — marriage, the raising of children, the pressures of household finance, the joys and sorrows of daily family life. Their counsel speaks from shared experience. Celibate priest-monks carry another gift — the witness of an undivided love for God and the flock. The Orthodox Church treasures both forms. What she does not do is make celibacy a universal requirement, because Scripture and the apostolic Tradition do not.

The Theory of Doctrinal Development

Perhaps the deepest difference underlying all the others is the Roman Catholic theory of doctrinal development. Popularized in the nineteenth century by John Henry Newman in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, and assumed in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, this theory holds that Christ left His Church an original deposit of faith — a "seed" — which grows, matures, and unfolds new dogmas over time under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. On this view, later doctrines such as Papal Infallibility and the Immaculate Conception are not departures from the apostolic faith but its ripened fruit.

This framework explains much of modern Catholic theology. It provides the justification for defining new dogmas and for regarding scholastic and post-scholastic refinements as improvements upon the Fathers rather than as commentaries beneath them.

The Orthodox Church rejects this framework. The faith, St. Jude writes, was "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The Apostolic deposit is complete. The Church grows in her understanding and articulation of the faith — answering new questions, refuting new heresies, producing new hymns and liturgies, canonizing new saints — but she does not acquire new dogmas. The Fathers are not a stage to be superseded. They are the enduring witnesses of the faith once given.

Everything external may change: vestments, languages, feasts, canons, and architectural styles. These are ways of carrying a single unchanging faith through new centuries. But the faith itself is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). A Christian in the twenty-first century should, when he prays the Creed, be confessing the same faith that St. Athanasius confessed in the fourth and St. Ignatius in the first.

Lesser but Telling Differences

Several smaller differences are worth noting, because they reveal the shape of the larger division.

Orthodox Christians pray facing East. The direction is not ornamental. It is tied to the birth of Christ in the East (Matthew 2:1-2), to the Garden in the East (Genesis 2:8), to the prophecy that the Son of Righteousness will come from the East at the end of the age (Matthew 24:27), and to the vision of Ezekiel of the gate facing East through which the Lord enters (Ezekiel 44:1-2). To face East is to orient the body toward Paradise and toward the returning Christ. Roman Catholic practice varies; Orthodox practice does not.

Orthodox baptism is, properly, by threefold immersion. The Greek word baptizō means "to immerse," and the New Testament descriptions — Christ coming "up from the water" (Matthew 3:16); Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch going "down both into the water" and coming "up out of the water" (Acts 8:38-39) — assume the practice. Immersion also preaches the sacrament: the Christian is buried with Christ in the water and rises with Him (Romans 6:4). Roman Catholic practice has increasingly relied on the sprinkling or pouring of water, which preserves the form but not the full image.

Orthodox Eucharistic bread is leavened; Roman Catholic bread is unleavened. The Orthodox see in the leaven a sign of the living, risen Christ and of the Church's continuity with the Passover of Israel and the new creation; the Latin West has preferred the unleavened wafer on the analogy of the Passover itself. The difference is not the decisive one, but it is one of the visible markers of different liturgical sensibilities.

These smaller points stand as reminders that the Orthodox faith is embodied in gesture, direction, substance, and word. The ecumenical instinct that says "we are almost the same" is only half-true. Where we are the same, we rejoice together. Where we differ, the differences are not trivialities to be dismissed, but testimonies to the fullness that the Orthodox Church has been given to preserve.

Communion and Ecumenical Relations

One practical question will arise often in the servant's ministry. May an Orthodox Christian receive Holy Communion at a Roman Catholic altar, or invite a Roman Catholic friend to receive at an Orthodox altar? The answer of the Church is no. Communion is the sign and the seal of full ecclesial unity in faith, sacraments, and governance, and that unity does not at present exist between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. Shared communion would proclaim a unity that is not there; it would be a lie expressed at the altar.

This does not mean coldness. The Orthodox Christian honors his Roman Catholic neighbor, respects the tradition that has shaped him, and prays earnestly for the day when all the baptized are gathered

to one Lord's Table in one confessed faith. Dialogue has continued in recent decades through official commissions and local friendships. These conversations are valuable. They do not yet permit intercommunion.

The servant must know how to explain this to his people with both firmness and love. The firmness is the truth about sacramental communion; the love is for every sincere Christian reaching for Christ. A servant who treats the Roman Catholic Church as simply "another denomination" has underestimated her; a servant who treats her as enemy has underestimated Christ. The right posture is neither naive nor hostile.

Summary

The Roman Catholic Church preserves the Scriptures, Trinitarian baptism, the creedal faith in its essentials, the seven sacraments, a profound tradition of veneration for the Mother of God, a rich monastic and intellectual heritage, and a moral witness on many important questions of the age. We share much with her, and we mourn every point at which the shared inheritance has been obscured by later addition or by mutual alienation.

We differ from her on the filioque, on the Immaculate Conception, on the office of the Pope, on Purgatory, on the requirement of priestly celibacy, on the theory of doctrinal development, and on the practical consequences of these differences for communion and discipline. The servant must be able to name these differences clearly, explain them charitably, and defend the Orthodox position from Scripture and the Fathers.

The Lord prayed "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You" (John 17:21). This is the prayer of Christ, and the Church does not contradict her Head. But unity in the Lord's sense is unity in the truth, not the papering over of difference. The servant's work is to hold the truth in love, preserve the flock in the faith of the Apostles, and pray the Lord's prayer for unity with the humility of one who has first repented of his own uncharitable words and second insisted on the integrity of the faith once delivered.



Review Questions

1. What is a lesser difference between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches? (A: The method by which baptism is conducted)
2. What are three differences between the two churches, regarding doctrine? (Sample A: Role of pope, celibacy of priests, and purgatory belief.)
3. True or false? We can have communion within the Catholic Church. (A: false)
4. When did the Great Schism take place? (A: 1054)
5. What major event occurred in 1053? (A: Michael Cerularius ordered the closure of all Latin churches in Constantinople.)
6. What dangerous belief do Catholics hold about St Mary, the mother of Christ? (A:

They believe she was born without original sin.)

7. What did the Church of Rome add to the Creed, upon which we disagreed? (A: Filioque)
8. What is 'filioque,' and what is its origin? (A: It is a Latin word meaning "and the Son,")
9. True or false? We, as Orthodox Christians, reject Purgatory. (A: true)
10. What kind of bread did the Catholic church promote? (A: Unleavened bread.)

Mormonism/Latter Day Saints

DOGMA & THEOLOGY

Of all the groups that present themselves as Christian in the public square, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — popularly called the Mormon Church — has cultivated one of the most public faces. Clean living, strong families, weekly family nights, principled abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, and many other modern indulgences, volunteerism, tithing, and a missionary presence on nearly every street in the developed world. Many a Christian family would do well to imitate their discipline. Behind the attractive face, however, lies a theological system that differs from Orthodox Christianity at nearly every decisive point — on the nature of God, on the Person of Christ, on the source of Scripture, on the means of salvation, and on the destiny of the human soul. The servant must be able to recognize Mormonism not as an eccentric variety of Christianity but as a distinct religious system, and to speak about it with truthful charity. This lesson sets out the history, the sources, the beliefs, and the Christian response, so that the servant can guard his flock without slandering his neighbor.

The Appeal and the Task

A young Orthodox mother meets a pair of Mormon missionaries at her door. They are polite, well-dressed, clean-cut, and articulate about Christ. They invite her to study the Book of Mormon. Her instinct, trained in a culture that mistakes civility for doctrinal agreement, may be to think of these young men as fellow Christians of a slightly different flavor. The servant's task is to help her see that the difference is larger than flavor.

The proper response to Mormonism is neither mockery nor paranoia. We do not caricature. We do not demonize. Neither do we soften what the Mormon Church actually teaches in order to be sociable. What we do is set Mormon doctrine against the apostolic faith, clearly and honestly, so that the faithful are not carried away by the attractive packaging of something fundamentally other.

It is worth noting at the outset that many Mormons sincerely believe themselves to be Christians, and the Church of Latter-day Saints has, in recent decades, emphasized its commitment to Jesus Christ in its public identity. The measure of whether a group is Christian, however, is not whether it uses Christ's name but whether it confesses the apostolic faith about Him. By that measure, Mormonism is not Christian.

History: Joseph Smith and the Founding

Mormonism was founded in the early nineteenth century in upstate New York by Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844). Smith claimed, at the age of fourteen, to have been visited in a vision by "two personages" whom he identified as God the Father and Jesus Christ. According to his account, these beings informed him that all existing Christian denominations were "wrong and corrupt" and that he had been chosen to restore the true Gospel.

Three years later, Smith reported a second supernatural experience. An angel named Moroni, he said, led him to a set of golden plates buried in a hill near his home, inscribed in "reformed Egyptian." Smith claimed to translate these plates, producing the Book of Mormon. On completion of the translation, Moroni reportedly took the plates away. No plates have ever been produced for independent examination, and no language called "reformed Egyptian" is known to the linguistic and archaeological professions.

Smith continued to receive what he called revelations throughout his life, guiding his growing community westward from New York to Ohio, Missouri, and finally Illinois. In 1844, Smith and his brother Hyrum were killed by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, during a period of violent controversy over his practices, particularly polygamy. Leadership of the movement then passed to Brigham Young, who led the community to the Utah Territory in 1847 and there exercised a theocratic authority while publicly defending polygamy as a commandment of God. Polygamy was officially abandoned by the LDS Church in 1890 under United States federal pressure, a matter we shall return to under the doctrine of "continuous revelation."

The Four Sources of Mormon Scripture

The LDS canon rests on four texts: the Bible (accepted "insofar as it is correctly translated" — the Eighth Article of Faith); the Book of Mormon; the Doctrine and Covenants; and the Pearl of Great Price. The phrase "insofar as it is correctly translated" effectively subordinates the Bible to the three later texts: wherever the Bible conflicts with them, Mormon theology judges the Bible to be mistranslated. This inverts the classical Christian doctrine of Scripture as the supreme written witness.

The Book of Mormon purports to narrate the history of two ancient civilizations, the Nephites and the Lamanites, who are said to have migrated from the Middle East to the Americas around 600 B.C. and to have received visits from the risen Christ before dying out in a great battle. More than two centuries after Smith's translation, there remains no archaeological, linguistic, genetic, or textual evidence to support the existence of these peoples as he described them, their script, or the golden plates from which the book is said to have come. The faith rests on the testimony of one man.

The Doctrine and Covenants is a collection of revelations Smith claimed to receive, introducing the most distinctive Mormon doctrines: a plurality of gods, God as an exalted man, the capacity of human beings to become gods, three degrees of heaven, polygamy, eternal progression, and baptism for the dead. Also included are prophecies that did not come to pass — a fact which, by the plain rule of Deuteronomy 18:22 ("when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously"), marks their author as a false prophet.

The Pearl of Great Price includes the Book of Abraham, which Smith claimed to have translated from Egyptian papyri he purchased. The papyri were thought to have been lost in the 1871 Chicago Fire, but portions were rediscovered in 1966. Both Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists have since examined them and determined that they are standard Egyptian funerary texts — instructions for

mummification — not the writings of the patriarch Abraham. The discovery has been an abiding embarrassment for the claim that Smith could translate unknown ancient languages.

The Mormon Doctrine of God

Here the decisive break with Christianity becomes unmistakable. Mormonism is not monotheistic. It teaches a plurality of gods. In the words of Joseph Smith himself: "I will preach on the plurality of Gods. I have always declared God to be a distinct personage. The Lord Jesus Christ is a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost is a distinct personage and a Spirit. And these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods." This is not the Christian Trinity. This is tritheism at best, and the Mormon doctrine goes further.

The Mormon God the Father is not eternal in the Christian sense. He was once a man living on another planet, who progressed through good works and obedience to divine laws until he attained godhood. He has a wife, a "Heavenly Mother." Together they begot countless spirit children in a pre-mortal existence. The first and greatest of these spirit children was Jesus. The second was Lucifer. All other human beings were also their spirit children, and all are therefore literal "spirit brothers and sisters" of Jesus and of Satan alike.

Beyond this God the Father stands another god who made him; beyond that, another; and so on without end. The Mormon cosmos is a spiritual pyramid scheme. Each god was once a man on a previous world. Each faithful Mormon man may, with sufficient obedience, attain his own godhood in a future universe — the doctrine called "eternal progression" or "exaltation." Lorenzo Snow, the fifth LDS president, summarized it in the couplet Mormons have long known by heart: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."

Against this the Church confesses the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). We confess the eternal God who was not made, who has never been other than God, and who alone is God: "I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6). There is no hidden council of gods above Him. There is no earlier god who made Him. The Christian God is not a man who made good; He is God eternally, and by His grace we are made His children, not His fellow gods.

The Mormon Jesus

Because Mormon theology denies the historic doctrine of God, it also denies the historic doctrine of Christ. The Mormon Jesus is not the eternal Son, consubstantial with the Father, begotten of the Father before all worlds. He is one of the Heavenly Father's countless spirit children, the eldest brother of humanity, and the spirit brother of Lucifer.

The Mormon account of the Lord's conception is gravely offensive to Christian reverence. Mormon teaching holds that Jesus was conceived through literal sexual relations between the Heavenly Father, who has a body of flesh and bone, and the Virgin Mary. This contradicts the Gospel's own witness: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that

Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The Incarnation is a miracle; Mormon doctrine reduces it to biology.

In the classical apostolic faith, the Son of God is eternally God, "true God of true God, begotten not made, of one essence with the Father" (as the Nicene Creed confesses). He took flesh by the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary. He lived without sin, died for our sins, rose bodily, and reigns. He is not a created being, not a spirit brother of Lucifer, not the elder child of a mother goddess. The Mormon Christ and the Christian Christ share a name. They do not share an identity.

The Mormon Doctrine of Salvation

Mormonism teaches that Christ's atonement secured general immortality for all human beings — everyone will be resurrected — but not personal salvation. Salvation from sin and exaltation to godhood must be earned. The requirements are faith in the Mormon Christ, repentance of all sins, baptism by immersion in the LDS Church, reception of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands of an LDS priesthood holder, and ongoing obedience to the commandments of the Mormon Church, including tithing, temple ordinances, celestial marriage, and continuing good works.

Three "degrees of glory" await the dead.

- The Celestial Kingdom is the highest — reserved for faithful Mormons who have received all temple ordinances and overcome sin in this life. These become gods on their own worlds in eternity.
- The Terrestrial Kingdom is intermediate — for good-hearted people, including non-Mormon Christians, who have lived decently without the fullness of Mormon teaching.
- The Telestial Kingdom is the lowest — for the wicked. Only a very small number — "sons of perdition," who have committed the unpardonable sin — go to hell in the traditional sense.

Against this scheme the apostolic Gospel is plain. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Christian is not saved by his performance of religious ordinances in a system designed to produce gods. He is saved by the once-for-all sacrifice of the Son of God on the Cross, received in faith, sealed in baptism, nourished by the Eucharist, lived out in repentance and love. The end of the Christian hope is not to become a god on a future world. It is to behold God and to be made like Him by participation in His life — a far greater gift than the private divinity Mormonism offers.

Baptism for the Dead and Continuing Revelation

Two further Mormon doctrines require attention because they touch many ordinary Christian families.

The first is baptism for the dead. Mormons baptize living persons as proxies for deceased persons, including non-Mormon ancestors, in the belief that the dead can accept the Gospel in the afterlife if a living Mormon has been baptized on their behalf. This practice — carried out on an industrial scale in Mormon temples — has distressed many Jewish, Catholic, and Orthodox families whose deceased relatives have been posthumously "baptized" without consent. The single verse Mormons appeal to, 1 Corinthians 15:29, is addressed polemically in a passage about the resurrection and is not a command;

the practice it refers to (obscure even to New Testament scholars) is never commended, explained, or established as a Christian ordinance anywhere in the Scriptures or the Fathers.

The second is the doctrine of continuing revelation. The living LDS president is said to be a prophet who may receive new revelations that supersede any previous revelation, including the Bible, the Book of Mormon, or any other text. This doctrine is the mechanism by which Mormon teaching has been modified over time, sometimes dramatically — most publicly in 1890, when polygamy was abandoned under federal pressure, and in 1978, when Black men were at last admitted to the priesthood after more than a century of explicit racial exclusion taught by Brigham Young and others in the most emphatic terms. Before 1978, Mormon teaching held that persons of African descent bore "the mark of Cain"; after 1978, God was said to have changed His mind. This is not what Christians mean by revelation. The God of Scripture does not evolve. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). A prophet whose prophecies fail and whose doctrines are reversed by later prophets has, by Scripture's own test, failed the test.

The Apostolic Answer, Point by Point

The servant should be able to set the two systems side by side without hesitation.

Element of Faith	Historic Christianity	Mormonism
Supreme Being	One eternal God, Creator of all, existing as Trinity — Father, Son, Holy Spirit (Genesis 1; Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19).	The Heavenly Father is an exalted man with a physical body of flesh and bone, who was once a man in a pre-existence.
Jesus Christ	The eternal Son, consubstantial with the Father, incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, perfect God and perfect Man (John 1:1-14).	The first-begotten spirit child of the Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother; spirit brother of Lucifer; conceived physically by the Father and Mary.
Work of Christ	The sinless Son offered Himself on the Cross for the sins of humanity; rose bodily; reigns at the Father's right hand (John 3:16).	His death guarantees universal resurrection; exaltation requires personal works, temple ordinances, and obedience. Suffered chiefly in Gethsemane.
Sources of Authority	The Old and New Testaments, interpreted within the apostolic Tradition guarded by the Church (2 Timothy 3:16-17).	The Bible as correctly translated; the Book of Mormon; the Doctrine and Covenants; the Pearl of Great Price; revelations of the current LDS prophet.

Humanity	Made in the image of God, distinct from God, fallen in Adam, to be restored in Christ (Genesis 1:26-28; Romans 3:23).	Pre-existent spirit children of the Heavenly Parents; gods in embryo; each person responsible for personal sin, not inheriting Adam's guilt.
Salvation	Restoration to communion with God by grace through faith, sealed in baptism, lived in repentance and love (Ephesians 2:8-9).	Exaltation to godhood through faith in Christ, repentance, baptism, laying on of hands, temple ordinances, celestial marriage, tithing, and continuing works.
Life After Death	Eternal communion with God (heaven) or eternal separation from God (hell) (Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20-22).	Three degrees of glory (Celestial, Terrestrial, Telestial); only the worst are consigned to outer darkness with Satan.

The table lays bare what the pleasant missionaries at the door do not always say quickly. The differences are not cosmetic; they reach to the nature of God and the meaning of salvation.

Mormonism presents itself with a Christian vocabulary and a clean public face, but its theological substance diverges from historic Christianity at every decisive point. It denies the eternity of God by teaching that He was once a man. It denies the monotheism of Scripture by teaching a plurality of gods. It denies the unique divinity of Christ by making Him a created spirit brother of Lucifer. It denies the sufficiency of Scripture by introducing three additional books of contested origin. It denies the sufficiency of the Cross by requiring a program of temple ordinances and obedience for exaltation. It denies the unchangeableness of God by teaching a continuing revelation that has reversed prior revelations.

The servant owes Mormons honesty about what they actually teach, charity in every personal encounter, and clarity in the pulpit and in the catechism classroom. He does not accept the premise that Mormonism is simply another branch of Christianity. It is a new religion that uses Christian names. The faithful must be taught the difference.

The positive task is greater than the negative one. We do not want merely to keep our people out of the Mormon Church; we want to form them so deeply in the true faith that no alternative proves sustainable. The Orthodox parish that teaches, worships, prays, loves, and lives the apostolic Gospel is the answer — to Mormonism and to every other system that offers a partial good at the price of the whole truth.



Review Questions

1. Who founded the Church of Latter Day Saints? (A: Joseph Smith)

2. What texts do they follow? (A: The Book of Mormon, the Bible, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price)
3. Where did God come from? (A: He was created by another god.)
4. How are Jesus and Lucifer related? (A: They are brothers and the first spirit children of the father god and his goddess wife)
5. What is continuous revelation? (A: The current prophet can receive new revelations from God that contradict previous revelations.)
6. What are their two types of worship. (A: Chapel worship and Temple worship)
7. Where did the Book of Mormon come from? (A: Golden tablets buried near Joseph Smith's house.)
8. How was Jesus born according to Mormons? (A: The father god had sexual relations with St. Mary.)
9. What is Jesus' role in salvation? (A: He had to die in order for all humans to be resurrected, but this is not sufficient for personal salvation)
10. Why do we not consider Mormons to be Christians? (A: They are polytheistic, they do not believe in the Trinity, they believe Jesus was created)

Hinduism, Buddhism, Humanism

DOGMA & THEOLOGY

We turn now from groups that claim the name of Christ to worldviews that do not — or at least, worldviews that assign to Christ a place entirely foreign to the Gospel. Hinduism and Buddhism were born in India centuries before the Incarnation and remain dominant across Asia; humanism is a secular philosophy of the West with deep roots in the Renaissance and wide reach in our own cultural moment. The three are not neatly parallel. Hinduism is a vast and ancient family of religions without a single founder, creed, or scripture. Buddhism began in the sixth century before Christ as a reform within the Indian religious world. Humanism is not a religion at all but a philosophy that has seeped so thoroughly into modern life that many who hold it do not recognize it as a doctrine. Yet the three meet in the servant's path in similar ways: not usually through doctrinal confrontation, but through yoga studios and meditation apps, through the quiet premise that all paths lead to God or that no path is needed at all, through a culture that tells our young people they are the authors of their own meaning. The servant must learn to recognize these ideas when they appear in borrowed Christian vocabulary, to answer them charitably but firmly from Scripture and the Fathers, and to proclaim the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ as the one way to the Father.

A subtle presence

A congregant of Coptic Orthodox Church is unlikely to be asked by a Hindu friend to debate the Vedas, or by a Buddhist monk to dispute the Four Noble Truths. The encounter is almost always quieter and more subtle. A child in the church's youth program will come home from school having been told that her yoga class teacher asked her to chant "namaste" to the divine within; a college student will hear from a philosophy professor that Christianity is simply one culturally conditioned path among many; a young professional will describe a mindfulness app whose meditations are framed as "spiritual but not religious." None of these moments announce themselves as theological confrontations. All of them are.

The three systems treated in this lesson differ in many respects, but they share three premises that collide with the Christian faith.

The first is that ultimate reality is either impersonal (Hinduism's Brahman, Buddhism's Nirvana) or simply absent (humanism's secular universe) — never the personal, self-revealing God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The second is that salvation, if it is spoken of at all, is achieved by the effort of the seeker — through karmic merit, ascetic discipline, meditative insight, or human reason — never received as a gift from a God who acts first.

The third is that Jesus Christ, if He is acknowledged, is reduced to a teacher among teachers, an avatar among avatars, an enlightened one among the enlightened, a moral exemplar among moral exemplars — never confessed as the only-begotten Son of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, by whom all things were made.

It is that third premise which makes comparative theology at this point not optional but pastoral. The servants who will pass these traditions on to the next generation must first see where the Gospel is being quietly displaced in their own parishioners' lives. This lesson is written to help them see.

The Aryan Conquest

During the fourth century B.C., Aryans – the same people that developed Greek culture – conquered much of present-day India. Their pantheon of gods, similar to that of the Greeks, combined with indigenous Indian traditions of meditation to form a loose combination of beliefs and practices that came to be known as Hinduism. Hinduism is not really one religion, but many different religions that interact and blend with one another. There is no known founder and no creedal statements of faith. In fact, there is no agreed upon authority save the voluminous sacred body of texts, Vedas, which were written over 1400 year period. The contents of the Vedas are practically unknown to most Hindus and the texts are seldom drawn upon for information or advice. Interestingly, one can be a good Hindu and believe in one god, many gods, or no god at all!

For Hindus, contradictory ideas are not a problem as all reality is seen as “one” . There are, however, two foundational concepts that almost all Hindus believe: reincarnation and karma.

1. Reincarnation: The process that the atman (soul) must endure on the wheel of samsara (thousands of lives of suffering though reincarnations) before reaching moksha. Moksha is when the soul reaches the infinite and no longer endures suffering. In some forms of hinduism, the soul may be reincarnated in plants, animals or objects.
2. Karma: The cumulative value of one's life is good minus bad, which determines your next life in the reincarnation cycle.

A growing popular idea in today's society comes from the Hindu's Vedantic Motto: The world's religions offer varying approaches to God, each one true and valid, each religion offering the world a unique and irreplaceable path to God-realization.

Hinduism — Their gods

The Hindu Trimurti — Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, Shiva the destroyer — presides over a pantheon of hundreds of thousands of gods and demigods, some of whom are not morally upright by any standard a Christian would recognize. Above the Trimurti stands Brahman, the impersonal all-pervading essence with which the atman (the true self) seeks to be reabsorbed. Salvation is not the healing of a broken relationship but the dissolving of individual identity into an ultimate oneness. The paths to this dissolution are usually grouped as three yogas:

- karma yoga – selfless action without attachment to results,

- jnana yoga – disciplined knowledge attained through meditation and the guidance of a guru, and
- bhakti yoga – devotion to a chosen deity.

How Hinduism Speaks of Jesus

Some Hindus treat Jesus with considerable reverence but always on their own terms. He is regarded as an avatar, one among many divine incarnations who descend to restore cosmic balance, or as a guru, a spiritual teacher of unusual wisdom. His teachings are prized, particularly those that can be rearranged under the category of non-violence (ahimsa) or inward enlightenment. What is refused is precisely what the Gospel insists upon: that this particular Galilean carpenter is the only-begotten Son of the living God, that He was born of a virgin in the flesh of our flesh, that He was crucified once for all under Pontius Pilate for the sins of the world, that He rose bodily from the tomb on the third day, and that He alone is the way, the truth, and the life.

A growing motto attributed to the Hindu Vedantic tradition captures the heart of the matter: "The world's religions offer varying approaches to God, each one true and valid, each religion offering the world a unique and irreplaceable path to God-realization." This motto sounds generous. In fact it empties the Gospel of its content, because the Gospel is the announcement not of a path but of a Person — and this Person will not consent to be one of many. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6). "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Answering Hinduism

We answer from four places at once: from the person of Jesus Christ, from the doctrine of creation, from the doctrine of the soul, and from the shape of time itself.

From Christ Himself

The very own words of Christ Himself forbid the Vedantic motto. He does not say "I am one of the ways" but "I am the way." He does not say "I offer one truth" but "I am the truth." He does not say "I show you a path to life" but "I am the life." Hinduism may honor Him as an avatar or a guru; Christianity cannot accept the honor on those terms, because the honor is diminishing. A man who claims to be the Truth is either the Truth or a blasphemer; He cannot be safely filed beside Krishna and the Buddha.

From the doctrine of creation

The Hindu imagination dissolves the boundary between Creator and creation: the atman is a spark of Brahman; the self is divine at its root. Genesis refuses this picture. God speaks and the world is called into being out of nothing; human beings are made in His image but are not pieces of His substance. We are creatures — glorious creatures, loved creatures, destined creatures — but creatures. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1); "Let Us make man in Our image,

according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). The distance between God and the soul is not an illusion to be overcome; it is the space in which communion is possible.

From the doctrine of the soul

The Hindu seeker wants to be absorbed into Brahman as a drop is reabsorbed into the ocean. The Christian hope is exactly the opposite: not the erasure of the self but its glorification. "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). In heaven we shall not be less ourselves, but more — each one recognized, each one named, each one loved in a particularity no cosmic absorption could preserve.

From the shape of time

Reincarnation pictures time as a wheel turning endlessly toward moksha. Scripture pictures time as an arrow loosed toward judgment and resurrection. "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). This single mortal life is not one of ten thousand rehearsals; it is the one arena in which we accept or refuse the grace offered in Christ. Because Christ has conquered death in His own flesh, we are not condemned to repeat the cycle; we are invited to enter, once, through the narrow gate of His Cross into an eternity that does not need to be earned and will not be exhausted.

Buddhism — Enlightenment Through the Middle Way

Buddhism emerged from the Hindu world in the sixth century before Christ, when a prince of the Shakya clan named Siddhartha Gautama left his palace life, attempted extreme asceticism, and at last found what he called the Middle Way between indulgence and self-mortification. Seated beneath the Bodhi tree, he attained what his followers would call enlightenment, and became the Buddha — the Awakened One. He preached for forty-five years and died around 483 B.C. What he taught is not a revelation received from a personal God; Buddhism has no Supreme Being in the Christian sense. The Buddha explicitly set aside questions about God as "not conducive to edification." His word to his hearers was: rely upon yourself, not upon any deity.

The whole of classical Buddhist doctrine hangs upon the Four Noble Truths.

- First, that all of life is suffering (dukkha) — not only overt pain, but the subtle ache of impermanence.
- Second, that the cause of suffering is craving (tanha) — our desperate attachment to things that must pass away.
- Third, that suffering can cease, through the extinction of craving; this cessation is Nirvana, a state not of personal immortality but of the quenching of the flame of self.
- Fourth, that the path to Nirvana is the Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration — a program of ethical conduct, mental discipline, and meditative insight.

Buddhism's view of the human person is the doctrine of anatta, no-self: there is no permanent unchanging soul, only a stream of fleeting mental and physical components (the skandhas) that are

bundled together for a lifetime and dissolved at death, though the karmic momentum continues into another bundle. Jesus, when He is mentioned, is seen as a teacher who may have attained Buddhahood or at least a high measure of enlightenment — again, one of many, not the unique and eternal Son of God.

Solomon and the Buddha — Two Responses to Vanity

Five hundred years before Siddhartha Gautama sat beneath the Bodhi tree, another man surveyed the human condition and came to strikingly similar conclusions about its emptiness. King Solomon — whose wisdom, Scripture tells us, spread across the ancient world (1 Kings 4:31) — wrote in Ecclesiastes that all is "vanity of vanities" under the sun, that every toil is a chasing after wind, that wealth, pleasure, learning, and power alike cannot fill the human heart. To this point Solomon and the Buddha agree. The diagnosis is almost the same.

The prescription is utterly different. The Buddha concludes that the solution is the extinction of craving and eventually of the self itself: to stop desiring is to stop suffering. Solomon concludes otherwise. At the end of his long search he writes: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Eccl. 12:13). His son's psalmist puts the Christian answer still more positively: "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4). The problem is not that we desire; the problem is that we desire the wrong things. St. Augustine — who had tasted every pleasure the Mediterranean world could offer — summarized the matter in the opening lines of the Confessions: "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You."

Where the Buddha teaches us to extinguish desire, Christ teaches us to reorder it. Where the Buddha offers release from suffering through detachment, Christ offers both a new kind of suffering — the carrying of the Cross in fellowship with Him — and a hope that the Buddha cannot give, namely, that this suffering will be swallowed up in resurrection. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

Answering Buddhism

The Buddhist diagnosis of suffering is more honest than most modern alternatives. It refuses to pretend that the world is well; it refuses to drown its sorrow in distraction. To this extent, the Christian can begin any conversation with a Buddhist in genuine sympathy. Where we must part company is in the account of the cause of suffering, in the nature of the self, and in the remedy.

The cause of suffering, for the Buddhist, is craving rooted in ignorance. For the Christian, it is sin rooted in a rebellion of the creature against the Creator — a personal rupture in a personal relationship. Suffering is not the fabric of existence; it is the wound of a good creation gone wrong. "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope" (Rom. 8:20).

The self, for the Buddhist, is an illusion to be dissolved. For the Christian, the self is a gift to be healed. Each soul is willed into being by God, stamped with His image, known by name, loved with a particular love, destined for a particular glory. To teach a child that the self is a bundle of impermanent skandhas

to be extinguished is to teach her that the love of the Father is also an illusion — for love requires a beloved who persists.

The remedy, for the Buddhist, is the Eightfold Path — a disciplined climb by one's own effort toward a goal in which the climber himself is finally extinguished. The Christian remedy is the Cross: not our climb up toward God, but God's descent toward us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The Christian walks a narrow way, too — but not alone; the Shepherd walks it with us, and at its end stands not Nirvana but the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Humanism — Man at the Center

Humanism is not an organized religion. It is a philosophical and ethical stance that places the human being at the center of its concern and appoints human reason and empathy as sufficient sources of meaning. Its classical genealogy is traced to the Renaissance recovery of Greek and Roman letters; its modern articulation is at home in the writings of Enlightenment rationalists, nineteenth-century scientific naturalists, and twentieth-century secular moralists. Its practical reach, however, is much wider than its manifestos. It has seeped into the ordinary air of modern Western life so thoroughly that most of those who breathe it cannot name it.

A humanist may be an atheist, an agnostic, or a deist; what unites humanists is the rejection of a personal God who intervenes in human affairs and the confidence that human reason, human empathy, and human science are sufficient to the tasks of ethics, meaning, and the good life. Scripture is not authoritative; tradition is not binding; revelation is not received; the cross is at best a noble symbol. Ethics are to be built from the ground up, on human welfare and human rights. Social justice is pursued — often admirably — as a human project without a transcendent anchor. Meaning is constructed by the individual, who must give his or her own life purpose in the absence of an afterlife or a divine plan.

In North America especially, humanism rarely presents itself by name. It presents itself as "You be you," as "Live your truth," as "Follow your heart," as "I'm spiritual but not religious," as "We don't need God to be good." These mottoes sit on coffee mugs and classroom walls and Instagram captions. They are a catechism.

Answering Humanism

We answer humanism at three points — the question of human dignity, the question of freedom, and the question of hope.

On Human Dignity

Humanists rightly insist that every human being is a subject of worth. They are, however, unable to account for this worth on their own premises. If human beings are only the present output of blind evolutionary processes, if the universe is indifferent to whether we rise or fall, if there is no Creator in whose image we are made, then the insistence on universal human dignity is a sentiment without a foundation. Christianity provides the foundation. "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image,

according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Our dignity is not a fact we confer upon ourselves; it is a gift conferred upon us by the God who made us and is now working to glorify us: "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4).

On Freedom

Humanism presents itself as the great liberator, freeing the individual from the constraints of tradition, authority, and divine command. In practice it often produces the opposite — a humanity enslaved to its own appetites, to the marketing that shapes those appetites, to the ideologies that replace the faith it has rejected, to the addictions that are the wages of unbounded desire. The Christian answer is not less freedom but true freedom. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1). The servant has learned in the lesson on free will that freedom is not the absence of limits; it is the power to become what we were made to be.

On Hope

Humanism pours all its energy into the pursuit of happiness in this life, because it believes there is no other. The accomplishment is real; the floor is thin. When illness, grief, betrayal, or simply old age arrive, humanism has nothing to offer but stoic acceptance. "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:13-14). Christian hope does not deny the pain of this world; it hands the sufferer a horizon beyond it.

Discerning Truth from Falsehood — A Rule for the Servant

Because Hindu, Buddhist, and humanist ideas usually arrive parishes not as whole systems but as isolated fragments — a yoga class, a meditation app, a college lecture, a self-help book — the servant needs a simple rule of discernment to carry into every conversation. St. Paul gives us the frame: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8-9). He repeats it at Corinth: "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted — you may well put up with it!" (2 Cor. 11:3-4).

Four questions form the servant's rule.

- Does the teaching in question honor Jesus Christ as the only-begotten Son of God, true God of true God, incarnate of the Virgin Mary, crucified and risen for our salvation — or does it reduce Him to one of many teachers, one of many avatars, one of many paths?
- Does it receive the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God, not to be added to or taken away from — or does it supplement Scripture with a new revelation treated as superior to it?
- Does it confess that salvation is the gift of God's grace received in the Body of Christ — or does it teach that man can climb by his own effort into divinity?

- Does it honor the Church as the pillar and ground of the truth, bearing the apostolic faith across the centuries — or does it locate authority in a single modern founder, a single modern book, or the lone judgment of the individual conscience?

Where the answer to the first half of each question is yes, the servant is safe to engage freely. Where the answer is to the second half, the servant must be gentle in tone but unbending in substance. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Approaching Our Neighbors

We do not approach our Hindu neighbor as if his devotion to his tradition were contemptible; we recognize in his prayers, in his fasts, in his reverence for teacher and text, a hunger for the divine that Christ came to satisfy. We do not approach our Buddhist friend as if his search for release from suffering were shameful; we recognize in it a wound the Cross is shaped to heal. We do not approach our humanist colleague as if her concern for justice and human flourishing were a moral failing; we recognize that she is reaching for goods whose fullness is given in Christ. The servant's posture is that of the apostle Paul on the Areopagus: "Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23).

This charity is not a softening of the Gospel. It is the Gospel's native speech. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Meekness and fear — never contempt, never sarcasm, never the cheap triumph of scoring a point.

How to Form the Faithful

The servant who is forming the next generation against these particular currents has three tasks in the parish. The first is to catechize the household in the uniqueness of Christ before the world catechizes it in the interchangeability of saviors. A child who has memorized "I am the way, the truth, and the life" will not be disarmed by a friendly Instagram post about many paths up the mountain.

The second is to teach the difference between the practice and the worldview beneath it. Breathing exercises and stretching are not idolatry; a yoga class whose instructor opens with an invocation to Hindu deities is another matter. Mindful attention to the present moment is not heresy; a meditation app that teaches that the self is an illusion is another matter. The servant must help the faithful to receive the created gifts of the body and the mind — stillness, breath, attention, discipline — as the gifts of the Creator, while refusing the metaphysics that elsewhere comes bundled with them. Where a practice can be extricated from the worldview, it may be received with thanksgiving; where it cannot, it must be set aside.

The third is to cultivate a life of praise within the household, because praise is the deepest Christian answer to every alternative worldview. The humanist cannot praise, because there is no One to receive the praise. The Buddhist cannot praise in the Christian sense, because ultimate reality is impersonal. The Hindu offers devotion to a pantheon that cannot finally love him back. Christian praise knows

itself to be received, heard, and returned in love. A household that sings "Holy, Holy, Holy" with its children has given them a defense the philosophers cannot touch.



Review Questions

1. Where did Hinduism & Buddhism originate? (A: India)
2. What is the goal of Buddhism? (A: To reach Nirvana, a state of nothing)
3. What is the Vedantic motto? (A: You can reach God through all religions/paths)
4. What faith are humanists associated with? (A: atheists)
5. What common Hindu practices do we find in today's society? (A: Yoga, universalism)
6. What common humanist ideas do we find in today's society? (A: We make our own happiness/purpose, we don't need God)
7. Do Buddhists believe in God? (A: God is irrelevant)
8. Who was Jesus to Hindus? (A: An Avatar or a guru.)
9. Who was Jesus to Buddhists? (A: Possibly a Buddha)
10. Why is it important to learn about world religions? (A: Their ideas enter into the society we live in)

Jehovah's Witness

DOGMA & THEOLOGY

The Watchtower Society

Charles Taze Russell, the founder of what would become Jehovah's Witnesses, began his religious journey in a period of significant religious ferment in America. In contrast to the apostolic origins of ancient churches, Russell's movement emerged from personal Bible study groups in Pennsylvania during the 1870s. This presents a stark contrast to the traditional model of apostolic succession that characterizes the Orthodox church, where authority is traced directly to the apostles through an unbroken line of succession.

Russell's background is particular. As a teenager, he struggled with traditional Christian doctrines, particularly eternal torment, leading him to question his Presbyterian upbringing. He briefly joined the Adventist movement, influenced by Nelson Barbour, before starting his own Bible study group. This pattern of individual interpretation and rejection of established church authority marks a fundamental departure from how ancient Christian churches were established through direct apostolic mission and succession.

In 1879, Russell founded Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence (later known as The Watchtower), a publication that would become the cornerstone of his ministry. In 1881, he established the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, a legal entity designed to support the publication and distribution of religious literature. This organization became the administrative backbone of the movement, enabling its rapid expansion across the United States and eventually worldwide. Through this magazine, Russell disseminated his interpretations of biblical prophecy, including:

- Rejection of the Trinity doctrine
- Predictions about Christ's return in 1914
- Denial of eternal punishment
- Rejection of traditional Christian symbols and celebrations
- All who disagree with them will be destroyed during the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16)

These teachings were largely developed through personal interpretation rather than being grounded in historical Christian tradition or apostolic teaching. His teachings attracted a growing number of followers, who came to be known as "Bible Students."

Time Lines and Conundrums

1874: The Invisible Return of Christ

Charles Taze Russell, influenced by Adventist calculations, initially taught that Christ had returned in 1874. This date was based on a complex interpretation of biblical chronology, particularly the "Gentile Times" mentioned in Luke 21:24 and Daniel 4 (a period of 2,520 years calculated from 607 BCE). With the beginning of Christ's presence in 1874, the start of a 40-year harvest period would lead Russell to predict the end of the world in 1914. This belief was central to his early teachings and was widely promoted in Zion's Watch Tower. When no visible events occurred in 1874, Russell reinterpreted the prediction, claiming that Christ's return was indeed invisible and spiritual. This adjustment allowed him to maintain the significance of the date while avoiding the embarrassment of a failed prophecy. The 1874 prediction became a cornerstone of Russell's theology, setting the stage for later chronological calculations.

1878: The Resurrection of the "Saints"

Building on his earlier calculations, Russell predicted that 1878 would mark the resurrection of the "saints" (the anointed Christians) and the end of God's favor toward nominal Christianity. This prediction was based on his belief that a 1,260-year period of Gentile domination over Jerusalem had ended in 1799, followed by a 79-year period leading to 1878.

When 1878 passed without the expected resurrection, Russell again adjusted his teachings. He claimed that the resurrection was a gradual process rather than a single event and that 1878 marked the beginning of Christ's invisible reign. This reinterpretation allowed him to preserve the importance of the date while explaining away its lack of fulfillment.

1914: The End of the Gentile Times and Armageddon

Russell's most famous prediction was that 1914 would mark the end of the "Gentile Times" and the beginning of Armageddon, the final battle between God and Satan. This prediction was based on his calculation of 2,520 years from 607 BCE, which he believed was the date of Jerusalem's destruction. Russell taught that 1914 would bring the collapse of human governments, the resurrection of the faithful, and the establishment of God's Kingdom on Earth.

When World War I broke out in 1914, Russell and his followers saw it as confirmation of the prophecy. However, the expected apocalyptic events did not occur. After Russell's death in 1916, as the predictions failed to materialize as expected, the movement had to reinterpret these prophecies. His failed predictions about the end of the world, most notably his assertion that Christ would return in 1914, led to criticism and schisms within the movement. The Watchtower reinterpreted the events of that year. They claimed that Christ had indeed begun ruling invisibly in heaven in 1914 and that the "last days" had begun, but the end was still future.

1918: The Resurrection of the "Anointed" and the Fall of Religions

Following the disappointment of 1914, the Watchtower shifted its focus to 1918, predicting that this year would see the resurrection of the "anointed" Christians and the destruction of organized religion. This prediction was based on the idea that a 40-year "harvest period" had begun in 1878 and

would end in 1918.

When 1918 passed without the predicted events, the Watchtower again adjusted its teachings. It claimed that Christ had begun inspecting spiritual temples in 1918, but the resurrection and destruction of religions were postponed. This reinterpretation allowed the organization to maintain the importance of 1918 while explaining its lack of fulfillment.

1925: The Resurrection of Patriarchs and the End of the World

Under the leadership of Joseph F. Rutherford, who was elected president in 1917, the Watchtower predicted that 1925 would see the resurrection of Old Testament patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as the beginning of the Millennium. Rutherford promoted this idea in his book *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* (1920), and the Watchtower even purchased a mansion in San Diego, California (Beth Sarim), to house the resurrected patriarchs.

When 1925 passed without the predicted events, the Watchtower faced significant criticism and a loss of members. The organization later downplayed the significance of 1925 and sold the Beth Sarim property. This failure marked a turning point in the Watchtower's approach to prophecy, as it became more cautious about setting specific dates.

1975: The End of 6,000 Years of Human History

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the Watchtower promoted the idea that 1975 would mark the end of 6,000 years of human history, based on a calculation of biblical chronology starting from Adam's creation. Many Jehovah's Witnesses believed this would coincide with the start of the Millennium and the Battle of Armageddon.

The 1975 prediction was primarily promoted by the Watchtower leadership, particularly under the presidency of Nathan H. Knorr (1942–1977). While the idea was not entirely new—it built on earlier chronological calculations by Charles Taze Russell and Joseph F. Rutherford—it was during Knorr's presidency that the prediction gained widespread attention and became a central theme in Watchtower publications.

The 1975 prediction was based on the Watchtower's interpretation of biblical chronology, particularly the calculation of time from the creation of Adam to the present. The organization taught that:

- Adam was created in 4026 BCE, based on their interpretation of genealogies in Genesis.
- Adding 6,000 years to 4026 BCE brought them to 1975 CE, which they believed would mark the end of 6,000 years of human history.

- They associated this 6,000-year period with the "six days" of creative work in Genesis 1, followed by a "seventh day" of rest (the Millennium). This led to the belief that 1975 could mark the beginning of Christ's Millennial reign.

The Watchtower's emphasis on 1975 led many Jehovah's Witnesses to make significant life changes in anticipation of the end. Some sold their homes, quit their jobs, or delayed education and career plans, believing that the current system would soon be replaced by God's Kingdom. When 1975 passed without the expected events, the Watchtower faced widespread disappointment and a significant drop in membership. In response, the organization took several steps to adjust its teachings, downplay the prediction and maintain its authority.

The Generation of 1914

For decades, the Watchtower taught that the generation alive in 1914 would not pass away before the end of the world. This belief was based on Jesus' words in Matthew 24:34 ("this generation will by no means pass away until all these things occur").

As the generation of 1914 began to die out, the Watchtower faced a theological crisis. In 1995, it reinterpreted the "generation" to refer to a longer, overlapping period of time, effectively extending the timeline indefinitely. This adjustment allowed the organization to maintain its emphasis on the imminence of Armageddon while avoiding the embarrassment of another failed prophecy.

The 144 000

The doctrine of the 144,000 is one of the most distinctive and controversial teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, rooted in a literal interpretation of Revelation 7 and 14. Introduced by Charles Taze Russell in the late 19th century, the teaching originally held that 144,000 faithful Christians would be resurrected to heaven to rule with Christ. Russell believed this group began to be selected in the first century and would be completed before the end of the world. Under his successor, the doctrine of the 144,000 underwent significant changes. Rutherford introduced the idea of a "great crowd" (based on Revelation 7:9) who would not be part of the 144,000 but would still receive salvation and live on a paradise Earth. This teaching created a two-tiered system of salvation:

- The 144,000 anointed, who would rule with Christ in heaven.
- The great crowd, who would live eternally on Earth.

This division became a defining feature of Jehovah's Witnesses' theology, with the 144,000 portrayed as a limited, elite group nearing completion by the mid-20th century. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that membership in the 144,000 is not something a person can choose or earn through their own efforts. Instead, they teach that it is a heavenly calling bestowed by God. According to their doctrine, individuals who are part of the 144,000 receive a personal, inward conviction from God that they are among the anointed. This conviction is described as a "heavenly hope" that sets them apart from other believers, who are destined to live eternally on Earth. Those who believe they are part of the 144,000 are expected to partake of the bread and wine at the annual Memorial of Christ's death, an act that symbolizes their inclusion in the heavenly covenant.

However, the process is not without its ambiguities. The Watchtower organization does not officially confirm or deny an individual's claim to be part of the 144,000. Instead, it leaves the matter to the individual's conscience, while discouraging public discussion or speculation about who is truly anointed.

For much of the 20th century, the organization taught that the 144,000 was nearly complete, with only a small remnant of anointed individuals remaining. However, in recent decades, the number of partakers at the Memorial has not consistently declined, as one would expect if the number were fixed and nearly fulfilled. In some years, the number of partakers has even increased, leading to questions about the validity of the doctrine. The watchtower shifted its explanation, suggesting that some partakers might be "mentally unbalanced" or mistaken about their heavenly calling.

Jehovah's Witness - in the New Millenium

Despite the repeated failures of their prophecies and the frequent changes in doctrine, the Jehovah's Witnesses experienced significant growth during this period. By 1977, their worldwide membership had reached 2 million, and it continued to climb in the following years, reaching 6 million by the turn of the millennium. This growth can be attributed to their active proselytizing, their appeal to those seeking a sense of community and purpose.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are known for their distinctive practices and beliefs, which often set them apart from mainstream society. They are perhaps most famous for their refusal to participate in activities that they perceive as conflicting with their religious convictions. This includes refusing to serve in the military or participate in warfare, as they believe that Christians should remain neutral in worldly conflicts. They also refuse to salute the flag or participate in nationalistic ceremonies, as they view these as forms of idolatry.

Additionally, Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Christmas, birthdays, or other holidays that they consider to have pagan origins or to be contrary to biblical teachings. They also have strict rules regarding blood transfusions, which they believe are prohibited by scripture. For many years, they refused to accept blood transfusions, even in life-threatening situations, leading to numerous deaths within their community. However, in recent years, they have softened their stance on this issue and now allow for certain blood fractions and medical procedures that do not involve the direct transfusion of whole blood.

Similarly, they once discouraged vaccination and organ transplantation, but they have since revised their policies to allow for these medical interventions, recognizing the potential benefits and acknowledging the advancements in medical science. These changes reflect the ongoing evolution of the Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs and practices as they navigate the complexities of the modern world while striving to remain faithful to their interpretation of scripture.

JW Theological Understanding of God

Jehovah's Witnesses emphasize the use of "Jehovah" as God's personal name, derived from the Tetragrammaton YHWH in Hebrew Scripture. This focus on the divine name leads to their

organizational identity, yet their understanding of God's nature presents several theological challenges when compared to traditional Christian doctrine.

Their rejection of the Trinity stems from several arguments:

1. The word "Trinity" doesn't appear in Scripture
2. They view the doctrine as making God into three separate deities
3. They claim it has pagan origins
4. They attribute its development to Satanic influence

Their theological framework establishes a hierarchical view where:

- Jehovah is the Almighty God
- Jesus is a created being, a "mighty god" (with a lowercase "g")
- The Holy Spirit is viewed as God's active force rather than a person

This understanding creates a de facto bitheistic system (belief in two gods of different ranks), though they would reject this characterization. Their translation of John 1:1 reflects this view: "the Word was a god," rather than the traditional "the Word was God."

The biblical testimony presents a more complex picture that affirms both God's unity and the full deity of Christ:

1. The Divine Name and Its Usage:
 - The Tetragrammaton (YHWH) indeed appears in the Hebrew Bible, but the New Testament authors regularly apply Old Testament passages about YHWH to Jesus
 - Philippians 2:9-11 states God gave Jesus "the name above every name," and in context, this refers to the divine name
 - Jesus himself used "I AM" (ego eimi) statements that recall God's self-revelation to Moses
2. Biblical Affirmations of Christ's Deity:
 - John 1:1-3 uses the Greek construction that emphasizes the Word's divine nature.
 - Colossians 1:15-20 presents Christ as creator of all things, not a created being.
 - Hebrews 1:3 describes Jesus as "the exact representation of God's being".
 - John 20:28 records Thomas's confession to Jesus: "My Lord and my God".
 - Titus 2:13 refers to "our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ".
3. Unity and Distinction in the Godhead:
 - Deuteronomy 6:4 affirms God's unity: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one"
 - Genesis 1:26 shows plurality within this unity: "Let us make mankind in our image"
 - Matthew 28:19 presents baptism in the singular "name" (not names) of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 - 2 Corinthians 13:14 demonstrates the cooperative work of all three persons
4. The Holy Spirit's Personhood:
 - John 14:26 describes the Spirit teaching and reminding, personal actions

- Acts 5:3-4 equates lying to the Holy Spirit with lying to God
- Romans 8:26-27 describes the Spirit's intercession with "groans too deep for words"

Jehovah's Witnesses' belief is similar to the heresy of Arius. This heresy denies the full divinity of Jesus Christ and His pre-existence as God the Son, co-equal with God the Father. Arius proposed that Jesus was a created being, the first and highest of God's creations, but still a creature nonetheless. Similarly, Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus did not exist as God the Son before his earthly birth. They believe that he was created by God as the archangel Michael and was used as an instrument by God to create other spirit beings. The Early Church Fathers have extensively elaborated writings uniformly affirming Christ's deity. In response to Arianism, the fathers are the one who carefully articulated this biblical teaching, not pagan influence.

JW Theological Understanding of Christ

Jehovah's Witnesses present a view of Jesus Christ that differs fundamentally from traditional Christian understanding. They propose that Jesus existed in three distinct and separate phases, rather than acknowledging the continuous nature of His person through the incarnation. Let's examine each proposed phase and the theological challenges this view presents.

Phase 1: The Pre-human Jesus

Jehovah's Witnesses' Position:

- Jesus was Michael the Archangel before coming to earth
- He was the first and greatest of God's creation
- He assisted in creating everything else
- He was a spirit creature, not divine

Theological Response:

The identification of Jesus with Michael the Archangel contradicts several biblical truths:

- Hebrews 1:5-6 explicitly contrasts Jesus with angels: "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'?"
- Hebrews 1:13-14 shows angels are ministering spirits, while Jesus is the one seated at God's right hand.
- Daniel 10:13 refers to Michael as "one of the chief princes," indicating he is one among many, whereas Christ is unique.
- Colossians 1:15-17 describes Jesus as the creator of all things, including angels, not as a created being himself.

Phase 2: The Human Jesus

Jehovah's Witnesses' Position:

- When Jesus came to earth, Michael ceased to exist
- The human Jesus was purely human, not divine
- God transferred Michael's life force into Mary's womb

- No incarnation occurred; instead, a complete transformation took place

Theological Response:

This understanding contradicts the biblical doctrine of incarnation:

- John 1:14 states "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," indicating addition rather than transformation
- Philippians 2:6-7 describes Christ as not giving up His divine nature but adding human nature: "who, being in very nature God... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant"
- Luke 1:35 describes the Holy Spirit's role in Jesus' conception, not a transfer of angelic life force
- Hebrews 2:14-17 explains that Jesus had to be made like His brothers in every way while remaining divine

Phase 3: The Resurrected Jesus

Jehovah's Witnesses' Position:

- Jesus was not physically resurrected
- His physical body was disposed of by God
- He was recreated as Michael the Archangel
- He now exists again as a spirit creature
- He returned invisibly in 1914

Theological Response:

This view contradicts clear biblical testimony:

- Luke 24:39 records Jesus saying, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have"
- John 20:27 shows Jesus inviting Thomas to touch His physical wounds
- Acts 1:11 describes Jesus' ascension and promise of return "in the same way"
- 1 Corinthians 15:14-17 ties the physical resurrection to the validity of Christian faith
- Colossians 2:9 affirms that even after the resurrection, "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form"

JW Understanding of Human Nature and Destiny

The Jehovah's Witnesses' view of human nature and destiny shapes not only their view of salvation but also their conception of human purpose and eternal destiny. They accept the biblical account of Adam's fall but interpret its consequences in a distinctive way. They teach the common narrative that when Adam sinned, he lost perfection and passed this imperfection to all his descendants. Their understanding however significantly differs when comes the subject of the mortality of the soul:

1. Hereditary Sin:

- All humans inherit sin from Adam

- This inheritance includes both sinful nature and death
- No one can achieve perfection in current human existence

2. Mortality of the Soul:

- They reject the concept of an immortal soul
- Humans are viewed as purely physical beings
- Death means complete cessation of existence
- No consciousness continues after death

This understanding differs from traditional Christian teaching in several crucial ways:

- It denies the spiritual dimension of human nature affirmed in Genesis 2:7
- It conflicts with Jesus' teaching about consciousness after death (Luke 16:19-31)
- It contradicts biblical affirmations of the soul's endurance (Matthew 10:28)

Additionally, as previously alluded, one of the most distinctive aspects of Jehovah's Witnesses' theology is their teaching about two different classes of saved people:

Class	The Anointed Class	The Great Crowd	Non-Believers
	The Anointed Class (144,000)		
	• Limited to exactly 144,000 individuals • Will receive immortality in heaven • Will rule with Christ as kings and priests • Called the "little flock" (Luke 12:32) • Selection began at Pentecost and continues until the full number is reached	• Unlimited number of other faithful Witnesses • Will live forever on paradise earth • Will be subjects of the kingdom ruled by the 144,000 • Must maintain faithfulness through Armageddon • Will never receive heavenly life	Complete Annihilation: • Non-believers cease to exist at death • No eternal punishment or separation from God • No consciousness or existence in any form • Second death means permanent extinction No Eternal Hell: • Reject concept of eternal torment • View hell (Sheol/Hades) as common grave • Interpret fire imagery as symbolic of destruction • Consider eternal punishment incompatible with God's love

Issues	• It creates a hierarchy within salvation not found in Scripture • It contradicts the unity of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6) • It misinterprets Revelation's symbolic numbers as literal • It introduces a class system foreign to New Testament teaching	This understanding requires reinterpreting numerous biblical passages: • Jesus' teachings about eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46) • Descriptions of conscious existence after death (Revelation 20:10) • Passages about degrees of punishment (Luke 12:47-48)
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Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a unique view about earth's ultimate destiny:

Earth Destiny	Eternal Earthly Paradise	Armageddon	Millennial Kingdom
Description	- Earth will never be destroyed - Will be transformed into paradise - Most faithful Witnesses will live here eternally - Perfect conditions under Christ's rule	- Will eliminate current world system - Won't destroy earth itself - Will usher in millennial reign - Will remove wicked people	- 1,000-year reign of Christ - 144,000 ruling from heaven - Great crowd living on earth - Progressive restoration to perfection
Implication	- It minimizes the cosmic scope of redemption (Romans 8:19-22) - It conflicts with biblical teachings about new heavens and new earth (2 Peter 3:10-13) - It creates an artificial separation between heavenly and earthly destinies		

Salvation and the Afterlife

Jehovah's Witnesses view salvation primarily as rescue from death and the opportunity for eternal life, either in heaven for the 144,000 or on paradise earth for the "great crowd." This understanding differs markedly from the Orthodox Christian view of salvation. Consequently, to achieve salvation, individuals must fulfill specific requirements: diligently studying the Bible with the guidance of Watchtower publications, adhering to both divine laws and the directives of the Watchtower Society, undergoing baptism within the Watchtower organization, and actively participating in door-to-door proselytization by distributing their magazines.

Upon attaining salvation, a select group of 144,000 individuals, referred to as the "little flock," are destined to ascend to heaven and share divine status with Jehovah. The remaining believers, constituting the "great crowd," will enjoy eternal life on Earth in the presence of Jesus. Those who fall outside these categories face annihilation, as Jehovah's Witnesses reject the concept of hell as a fabrication of the devil, whom they perceive as a deceptive entity.

General Morals and Worship

Jehovah's Witnesses adhere to a strict interpretation of the Bible, which leads to specific practices and prohibitions. Blood transfusions are strictly forbidden, even in life-threatening situations, as they believe the Bible forbids the consumption of blood. Celebrations such as birthdays and holidays like Christmas and Easter are also shunned. They view these as having pagan origins and therefore incompatible with their faith. Additionally, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and other similar celebrations are not observed as they are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible.

Jehovah's Witnesses are also politically neutral. They do not participate in the armed forces, vote, or salute the flag. These actions are seen as demonstrating allegiance to human governments rather than to Jehovah.

A key distinction between Jehovah's Witnesses and many other Christian denominations is their structure. They do not have a clergy class; all baptized members are considered ordained ministers. This reflects their belief in the priesthood of all believers. Religious symbols, such as the cross, are also rejected as they are viewed as having pagan roots. They believe that Jesus was crucified on a stake, not a cross, although this view is not supported by historical evidence.

Unlike some other Christian denominations, Jehovah's Witnesses do not observe the Sabbath. They believe that the commandment to keep the Sabbath was fulfilled with the coming of Christ.

Comparative Summary

Elements of Faith	Historic Christianity	Jehovah's Witnesses
Supreme Being	We believe in one personal/supreme God who is Creator and Lord of everything that exists. He eternally exists as Triune God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. (Gen. 1; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19.)	They believe in one God, properly called Jehovah. His Holy Spirit is an impersonal force. Reject the doctrine of Trinity.
Key Figures in	We believe in Jesus, the Christ,	Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916)

History	eternally one with the Father and incarnated supernaturally through the Virgin Mary. (John 1:1-12; Matt 1:18-25)	
Person of Jesus	The Lord, Jesus Christ, is perfect in His divinity and perfect in His humanity, yet His divinity parted not from His humanity for a single moment, nor a twinkle of an eye. A supreme example of God's character and His love for humanity. Full and final revelation of God and His love. (John 1:1-13.)	They believe he created being with stages of existence: 1. Archangel Michael or the Word. 2. Jesus, the perfect man, became Messiah at his baptism. 3. After His spiritual resurrection, became Michael again but retained the name Jesus.
Work of Jesus Christ	Jesus was born, lived, and died in a given time and place as a unique historical event. He lived a sinless life, and willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. He is the Messiah, (Christ,) Lord, and Savior. (John 1:14-18; 3:16)	Christ's ransom sacrifice on a "stake" made salvation possible for each and every one of us.
Sources of Authority	We believe in the Holy Bible, (Old and New Testaments,) and Tradition. Unique, revealed, factual, accurate, and the inspired Word of God. (2 Tim. 3:16-17.)	They believe in the Bible, (the New World Translation of Holy Scriptures,) as interpreted by Watchtower Bible, and Tract Society.
Doctrine of Humanity	Humanity is part of creation, but distinct from the rest of creation & from God. Human beings are created in God's image. Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity & worth. (Gen. 1:26-28.)	Created in Jehovah's image; a soul, not immortal; capable of responding to Jehovah.
The Basic Human Problem	By their free will, human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature, & pursuing a course of life that is opposed to His essential character & revealed law. (Gen.3; Rom. 3:23.)	Sin is viewed as a willful rebellion against Jehovah.
Solution to the Basic Human Problem	Salvation: restoring man back in communion with God. It is considered a process rather than an event. Freedom from the guilt &	Their solution is allegiance to Jehovah and the works, (baptism, faithfulness in Kingdom Hall work; those ignorant of Jehovah given a

	power of sin is God's gift of grace, as well as new nature received through baptism. (Eph. 2:8-9.)	chance to believe during the millennium.)
Ethics, (Value System)	Ultimate values for humanity are based on God's character and His Ten Commandments. Human beings are potentially good, but not inevitably good. They always need God's grace to renew their characters.	Those not loyal to Jehovah are unrighteous; all earthly organizations are controlled by Satan; Jehovah's Witnesses are required to obey Jehovah's laws as explained by the Watchtower Bible, and Tract Society.
Life After Death	Eternal communion with God, (heaven,) or eternal separation from God, (hell.) (Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20-22.)	144,000 "select" to reign with Christ in the Kingdom of God, (heaven.) Other Jehovah's Witnesses live on glorified paradise earth. Annihilation for all who reject Jehovah.



Review Questions

1. Are Jehovah's Witnesses Christians? (A: No)
2. How many 'gods' do they believe in? (A: Two)
3. How many people do they believe will get into paradise? (A: 144,000 followers.)
4. What is their scripture called? (A: The Watchtower Bible)
5. How many stages did they believe 'Jesus' went through? (A: Three.)
6. List three things forbidden for Jehovah's Witnesses. (A: Saluting the flag, blood transfusions, and birthdays/ holidays.)
7. What do they call their God? (A: Jehovah.)
8. How do they believe the events of the resurrection transpired? (A: They believe, in his resurrection as a "spirit person," "Jesus" became Michael the Archangel again, newly created or restored.)
9. How do they believe the events of the crucifixion transpired? (A: They claim Christ "was crucified on a stake, not a cross.")
10. What do they believe about Jesus? (A: He is seen as "the equal of the perfect man Adam.")



[The Heresy of Jehovah's Witnesses](#)

