



Approaching Other Religions & Worldviews

Introduction

Dr. Shawn Nelson, 2022

8 Week Class Schedule

TODAY	Introduction
Oct 24	Yogananda & Self Realization Fellowship
Oct 31	Hinduism
Nov 7	Islam (Part 1)
Nov 14	Islam (Part 2)
Nov 21	Jehovah's Witnesses
Nov 28	Mormonism
Dec 5	Judaism



Outline

Introduction

- Why should Christians study other religions?
- What are the major religions?
- What is religion?
- What are worldviews?





Why should Christians study other religions/worldviews?

Cultural Reasons

- This is a time unlike any other in history.
- **Global industry/commerce.**
- **Global travel** (auto, airplane).
- **Global communication** (Internet).
- **Population increase.**
- We encounter people of all religious backgrounds in workplace, schools.

“Cultural diversity in the U.S. has created a melting pot. A **melting pot** refers to a society or community where different cultures, religions, races, traditions, and languages are present.”
(Cultural Diversity in the United States, Study.com)



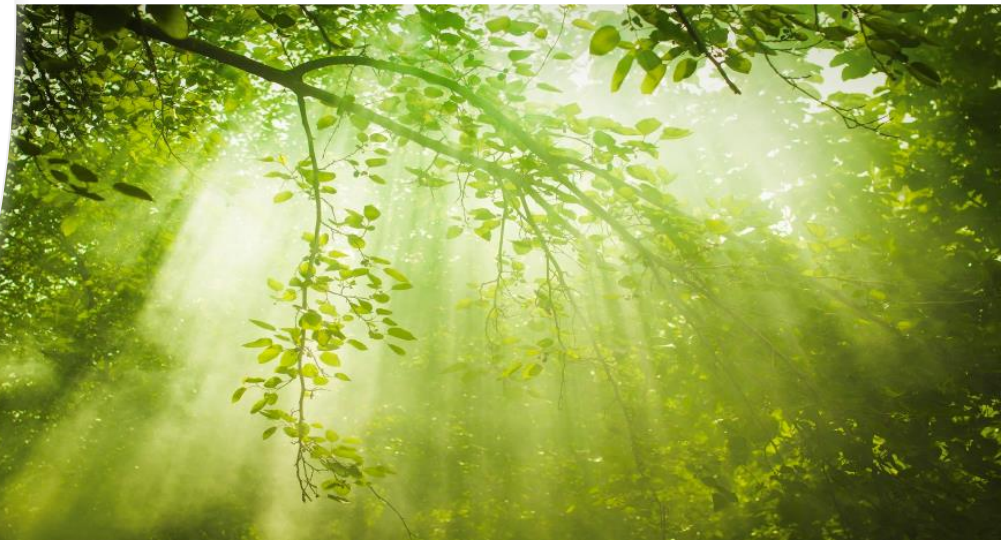
Biblical Reasons

Christians believe Jesus is the only way to heaven

- John 14:6 – Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
- Acts 4:12 – Peter said, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Central theme of Bible compels us

- Bible claims people fell away from God into other beliefs.
- Jesus came to restore fellowship with true God.
Luke 19:10 “The Son of Man (Jesus) came to seek and to save the lost.”
- God invites us in his plan.
2 Cor. 5:20 – “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”



Biblical Reasons

God commands to be ready

- 1 Peter 3:15 – “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”

We should follow the example of early church

- All 4 gospel writers were reaching out to different audiences trying to convince them Jesus was the messiah.
- Entire book of Acts was written to convince.
- Epistles. The apostles (Paul, Peter, Jude) were all defending Christianity from alternative beliefs.
- First 4 centuries: Judaizers, Gnosticism, Arianism, Pelagianism





Personal Reasons

- We learn about Christianity by comparing it to other beliefs.
- This builds my faith.
- Shows uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

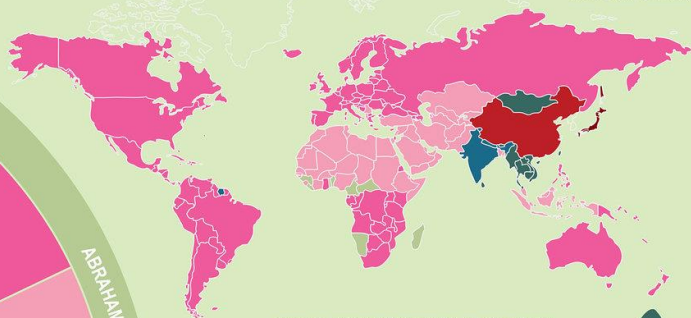


Major Religions

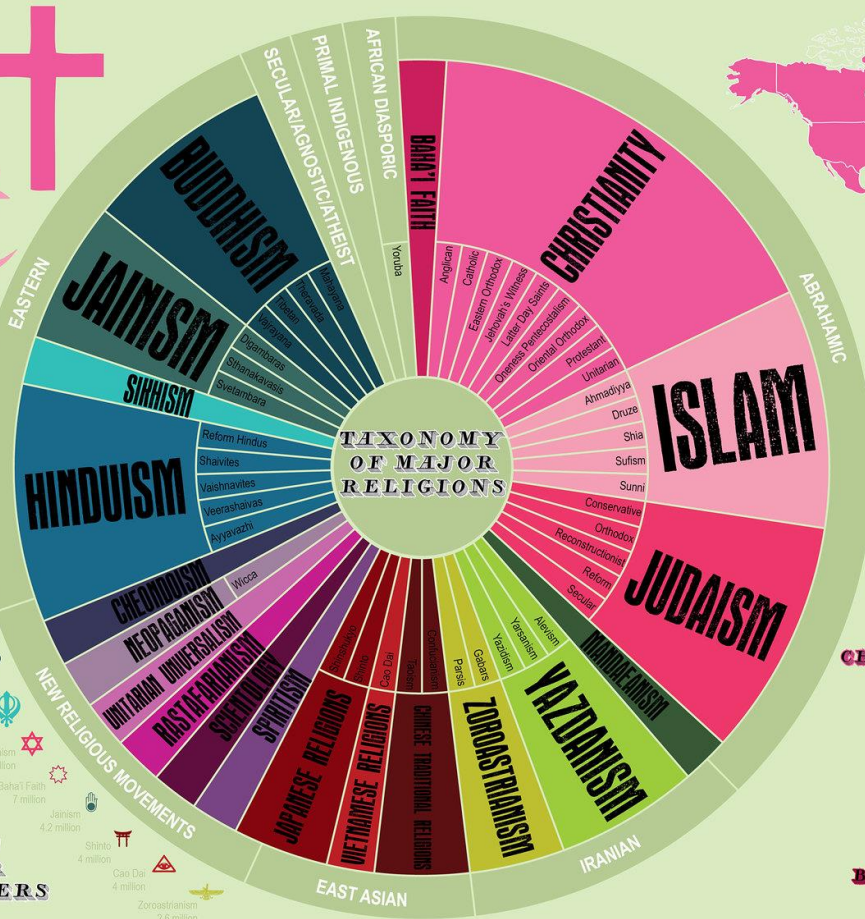
- Christianity
- Islam
- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Judaism
- Zoroastrianism
- Taoism
- Shinto
- Jainism
- Confucianism
- Sikhism
- Baha'i

WORLD RELIGIONS

MAIN RELIGION BY COUNTRY



PROHIBITED FOODS

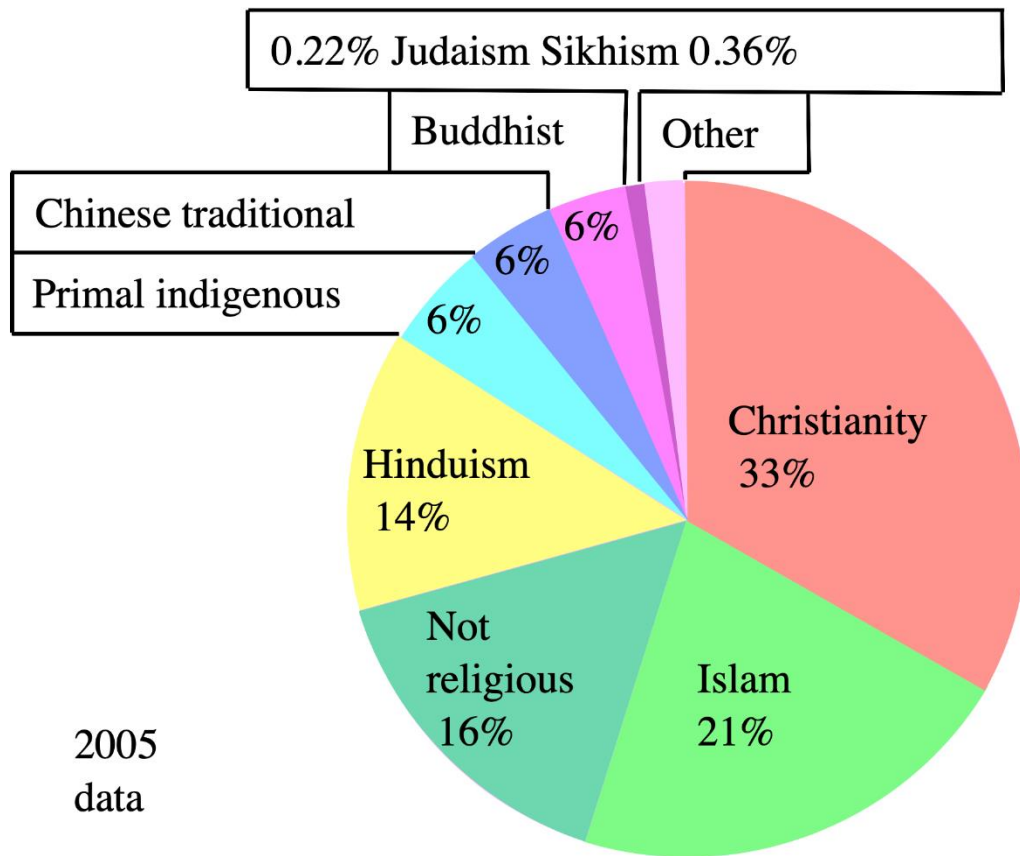


MAJOR RELIGIONS BY NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS

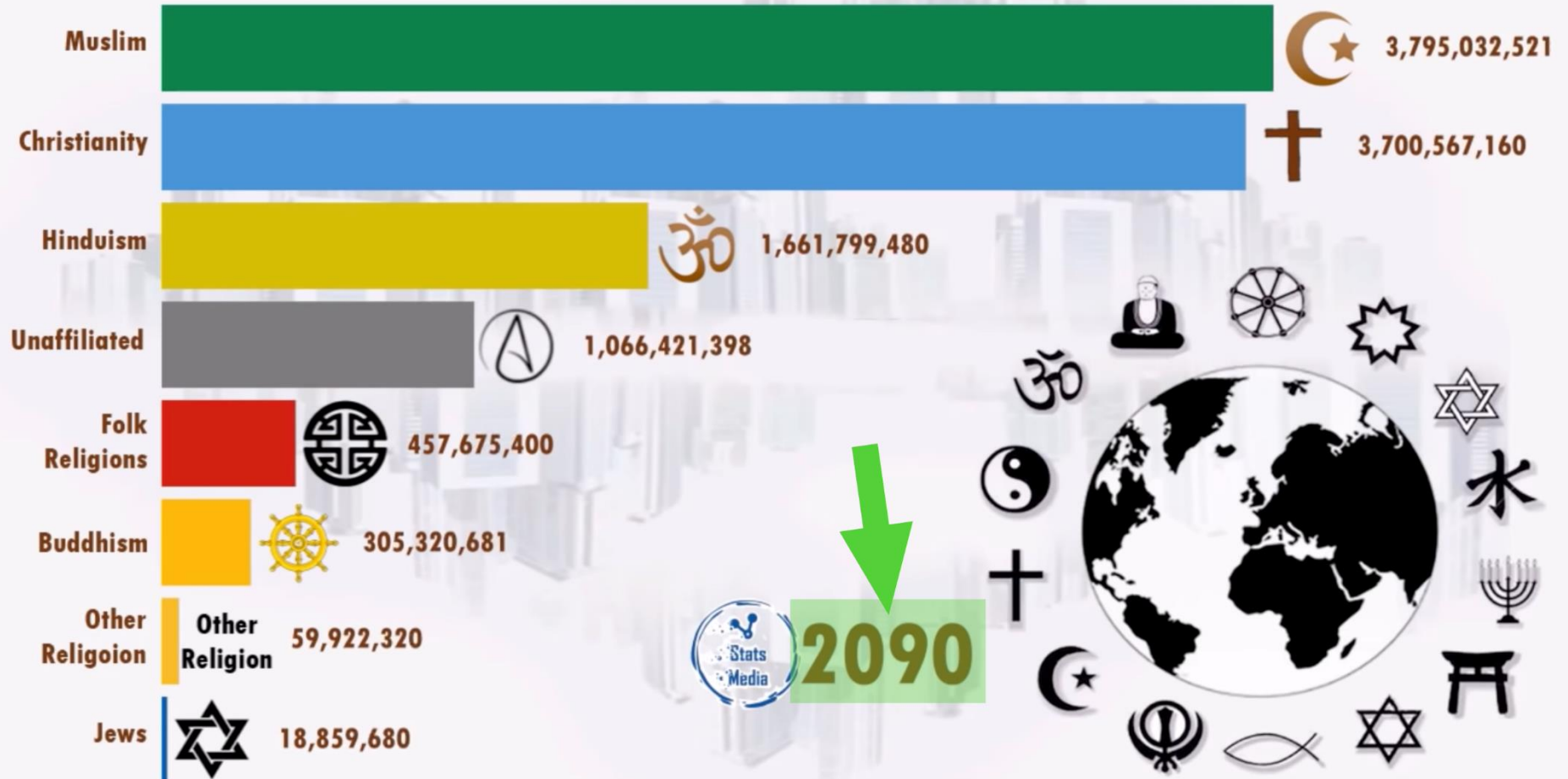
	FOUNDER	SACRED TEXT	-THEISTIC
CHRISTIANITY	JESUS CHRIST	BIBLE	MONO
ISLAM	MUHAMMAD	KURAN	MONO
HINDUISM		VEDAS	POLY
CHINESE	LAO-TZU/CONFUCIUS	TAO TE CHING	PAN
BUDDHISM	SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA	TRIPITANA	TRANS
SIKHISM	GURU NANAK	GURU GRANTH SAHIB	MONO
JUDAISM	ABRAHAM	TANAKH	MONO
BAHAI FAITH	BAHA'U'LLAH	KITAB-I-AQDAS	MONO
JAINISM	MAHAVIRA	AGAMAS	TRANS

Religions
with
most
followers
in 2005

2005
data

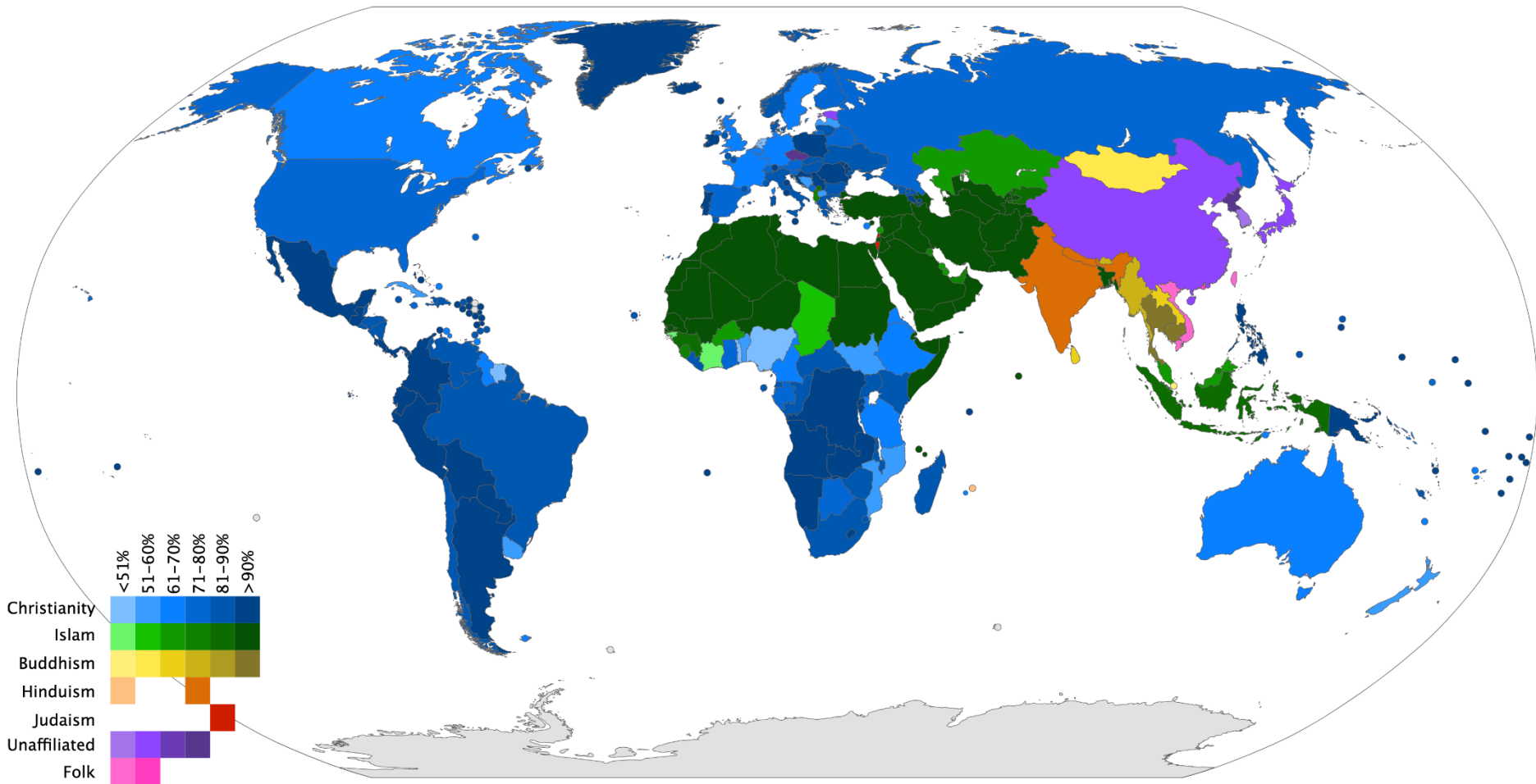


Most followers by 2090



2090

Prevailing Religion By Country

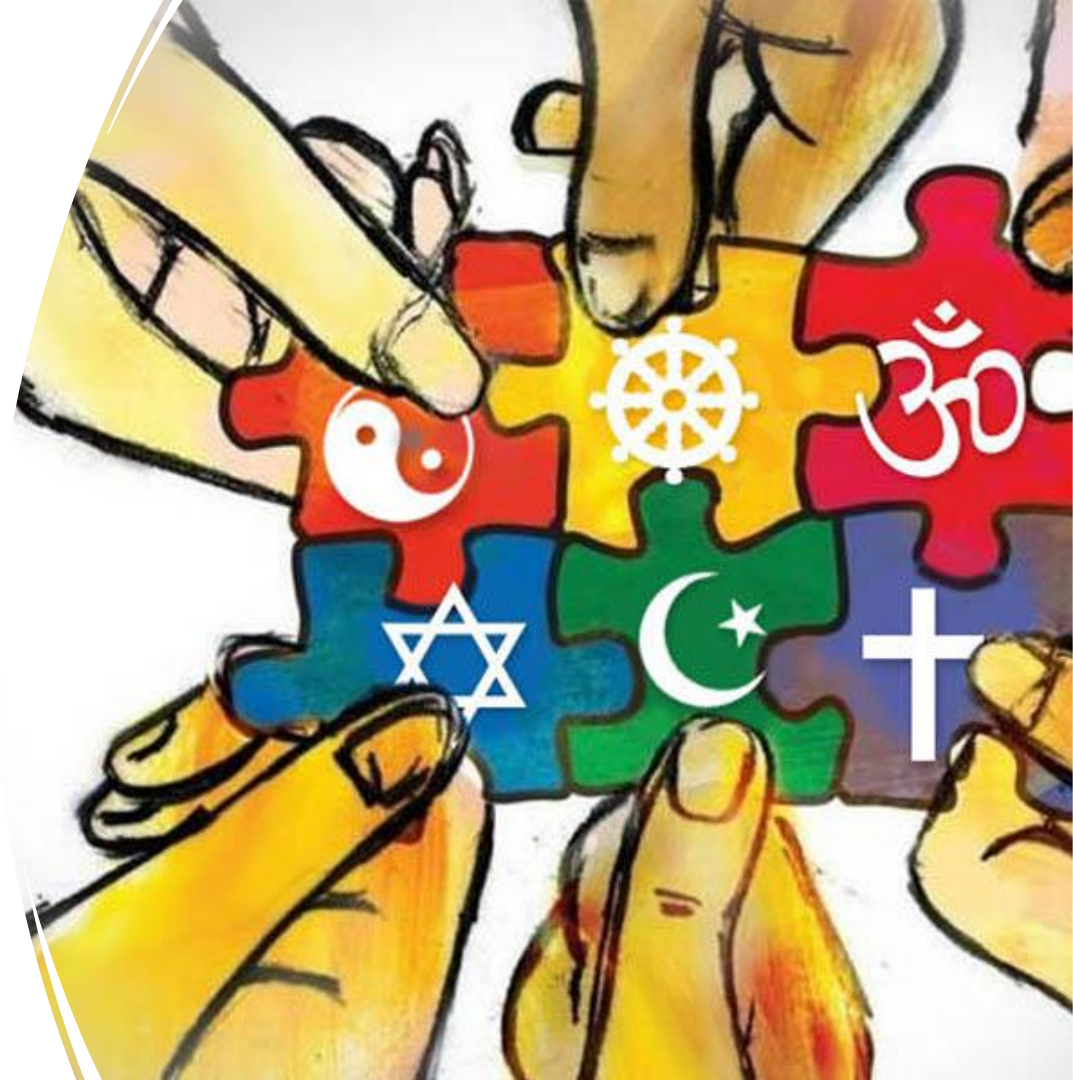


What is
Religion?

How some
academics define it

Religion...

- ... is the center of one's life
- ... gives one's life meaning (ultimate commitment)
- ... involves transcendence (thirst for something more)



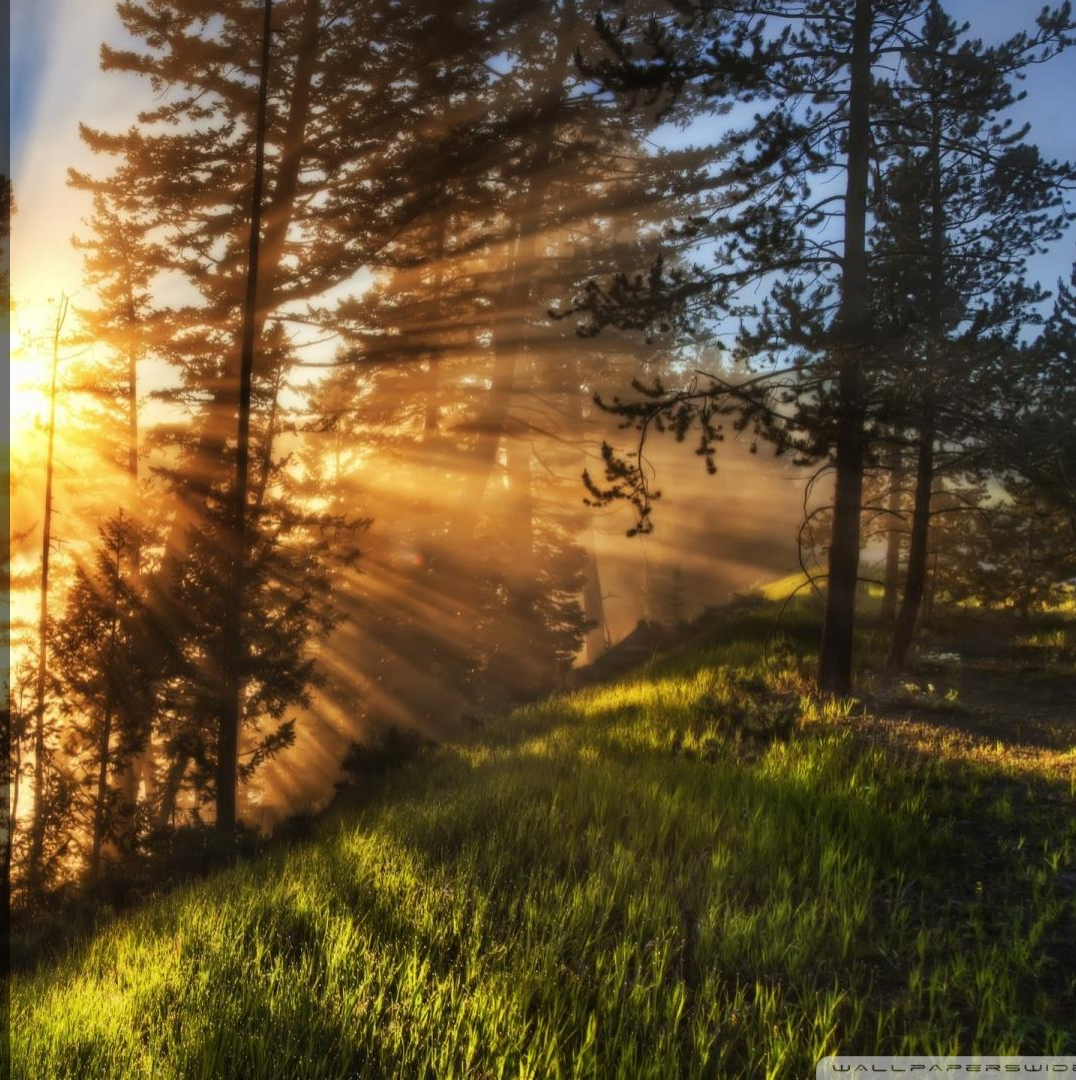


Transcendence

Transcendence is an aspect of religion that directs us beyond the mundane.

“A religion is a system of beliefs and practices that directs a person toward transcendence and thus provides meaning and coherence to a person’s life.” (Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, 27).

Woman at well (John 4).





Spiritual v. Religious?

Met someone who is 'spiritual'?

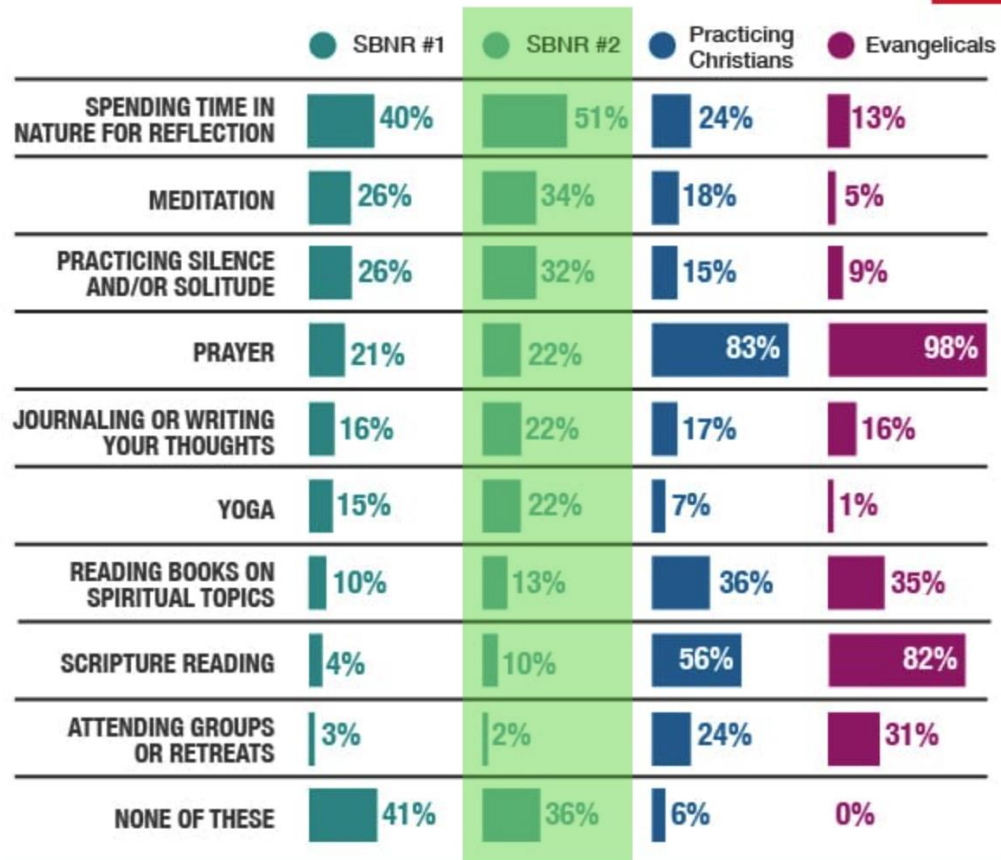
A 2017 George Barna report, titled "Meet the 'Spiritual but Not Religious,'" identified two groups of 'spiritual' people in the US.

- Spiritual but Not Religious #1: Those who self-identify as spiritual but say their **faith is not very important** in their lives.
- Spiritual but Not Religious #2: Those who self-identify as spiritual but **do not claim any faith** (atheist, agnostic or unaffiliated).



Spiritual Practices

Barna





What makes religion and 'spirituality' different?

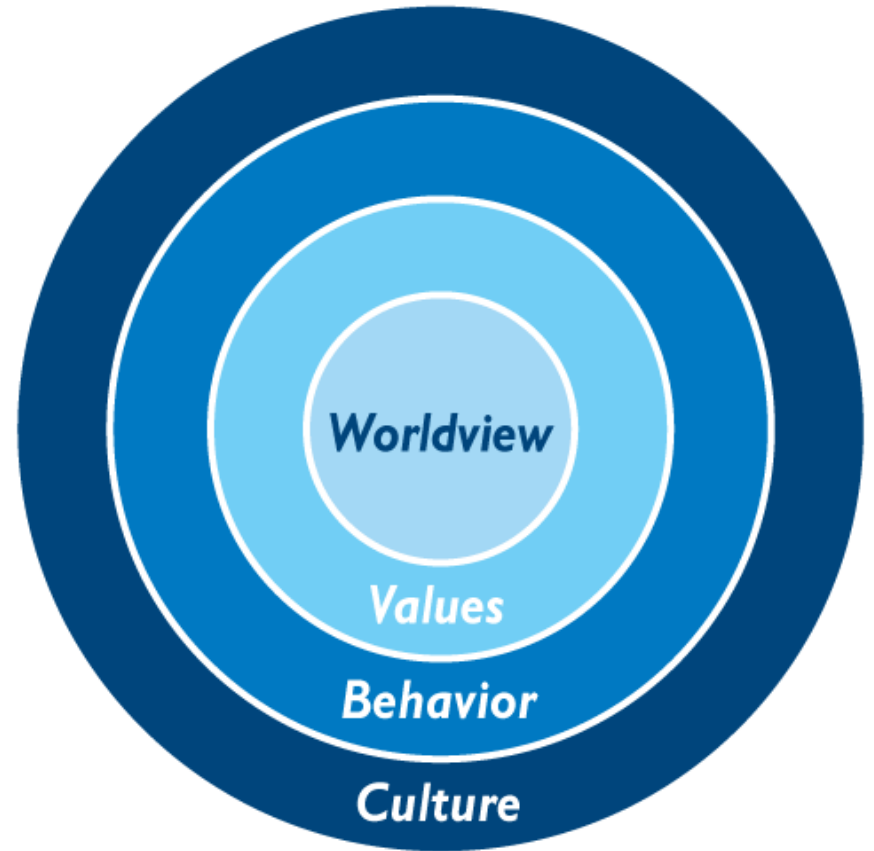
- Religion also involves external features/practices. These features—called *cultus* of the religion—are unnecessary for the non-religious but have meaning for the religious.
- The *cultus* of the religion is “established or accepted religious rites or customs of worship.”
- Full definition of ‘religion’:
“A religion is a system of beliefs and practices that *by means of its cultus* directs a person toward transcendence and, thus, provides meaning and coherence to a person’s life.” (Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, 28).

What are Worldviews?

We're exploring
religions *and*
worldviews

Worldview

- “A collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group.”
- “The overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world.”
- Each person’s worldview is typically affected by their culture.



E.g., Social Norms



Social Norms – Rules, practices or customs of a culture/society that create expected behaviors. We could call these manners or traditions.

American social norms:

- Say “hello” and “goodbye” when using the phone.
- Always say “**please**” and “**thank you**” when asking.
- Don’t talk with food in your mouth.
- When you get into an elevator, turn and face the door and don’t look at people.
- If somebody sneezes, say “bless you.”

Non-American norms:

- Never use salt food in Egypt (it means you find the taste repulsive).
- Make sure you’re 10-15 minutes late in Venezuela (arriving on time is rude).
- Never play or stab food with chopsticks in Japan.
- Don’t flush used toilet paper—throw it in trash (will break pipes in Latin America).
- Make slurping noises in Japan when eating to complement host.

WORLDVIEW SUMMARY

How you view the world you live in has profound effects on the way you live your life in the world. The following is a short summary of the major worldviews that exist today. Each worldview summary is also accompanied by a diagram which visually represents each of the worldviews and the relationship it sees existing between us, the world and God (if any). The legend for the three main elements of each worldview diagram is as follows:



ATHEISM

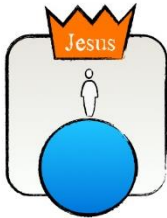
The term 'atheism' comes from the Greek word 'atheos' meaning 'without God'. The term has been used from as early as ancient Greek times to refer to godless people. There are various degrees of atheistic

belief but the most extreme form of Atheism is a denial of the existence of any God (eg. 18th Century French atheists and 21st Century New Atheists like Dawkins and Hitchens). Generally speaking, in atheism humans have no special place above the rest of the natural world as in other theistic beliefs (hence the human figure in the diagram is inside the world not on top of it). Without the existence of God to give life meaning, Atheists often look to other sources for meaning, eg. in the mechanics of the natural world (Naturalists), in humanity (Humanist) our subjective experience of life (Existentialists), or in their own personal beliefs (Relativists).



CHRISTIAN THEISM

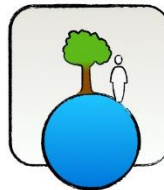
Christian Theism, further defines Theism as a view of God who is transcendent and immanent, personal and infinite who creates, sustains and controls the world. This God has made himself personally known in Jesus Christ. It is through His death, resurrection and ascension as king of the universe that humanity, who is made in the image of God, is redeemed from their punishment of death for rejecting God and is given eternal life. There are two basic groups within Christianity who both profess a theistic worldview. One believes that man is saved by faith in Jesus alone, the other by faith in Jesus and by doing good works. The latter we could further define as being Christian Legalists.



NATURALISM

In Naturalism the God of Theism who was reduced to an impersonal creator in Deism is even further reduced out of existence and completely replaced by reason. Naturalism says that matter which exists eternally is all that there is. The cosmos as a closed system of cause and effect governed by natural laws. Human beings are complex machines in the system who are unique among the animals because of our ability for conceptual thought, speech and the creation of culture. It is this uniqueness that gives humanity its value not a supernatural being who creates with an overarching purpose.

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NIHILISM

The term 'nihilism' comes from the Latin 'nihil' which means 'nothing'. The term was first popularised in 19th century Russia. Nihilism is the denial of everything - God, philosophy, knowledge,

morality, values, even the reality of existence itself (hence the blank box pictured adjacent). Any religious and moral truths are seen as entirely irrational. In other words, Nihilism is a negation of everything, where nothing has any meaning and where everything is therefore permitted. For nihilists, human beings are merely conscious machines without the ability to do anything effective or meaningful in life. Some forms of existentialism are nihilistic viewing humans as nothing but what they make of themselves.



RELATIVISM

Relativism has become popular as a result of post-modern philosophical thinking of the 20th Century. Post-Modern philosophy rejected all modern notions of an absolute truth

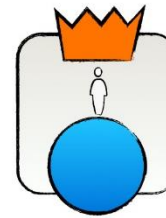
because such expressions of truth were viewed as an abuse of power over others the response was not to deny all truth but rather to say that the truth is relative to each individual. In other words the truth of something is what I think to be true but it may not be true for someone else who has their own truth. Religious Relativism otherwise known as Religious Pluralism says that all religions are true, that each religion is a valid expression of faith in God.



THEISM

The term 'theism' comes from the Greek word 'theos' meaning 'God' and so is literally the view that God exists. While this view has been held for 1000's of years the term is only recent (17th century). The term is often used

as the opposite to Atheism. Broadly defined, Theism is the belief that God being thoroughly transcendent (i.e. separate from the world) and impersonal is the ultimate reference point that gives meaning to the world. This view of the world is held for example by Muslims. More narrowly defined, Theism believes that God, while transcendent, is also immanent in the world and personal (see Christian Theism).



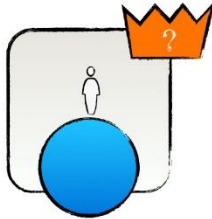
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AGNOSTICISM

This is a term generally used for the view that we can not know whether God exists or not. The term, which comes from the Greek word 'gnosis' meaning knowledge, was first coined by L. H. Huxley in the 19th century to signify religious skepticism. On a continuum of belief in God, agnostics generally sit in the mid-point between theism and atheism. Today, agnosticism usually means suspending judgement on all matters divine. But even if God does exist, He is regarded as irrelevant to modern life. Agnosticism is considered a more respectable anti-theist position than atheism since it carries less of the social stigma that atheism carries. In addition, agnosticism, which neither affirms or denies the existence of God, is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore doesn't need to give reasons for it's profession of ignorance.



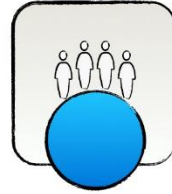
EXISTENTIALISM

Atheistic Existentialism which arose in the first half of the 19th century is an attempt to 'transcend nihilism'. This view does not look for meaning in the objective world like Naturalism does but rather in the individuals subjective self-consciousness. The reason for this is that the objective world is viewed as absurd especially in light of the suffering and death that is part of life. Since there is no God it is people who are in total control of their lives and who make themselves who they are. Existentialism says that in order to transcend the absurdity of the world and create meaning we must learn to love life. Any good that a person does is merely what a person chooses to do. Evil is therefore not choosing but simply doing what others do. That is, evil is a failure to recognize the absurdity of the world.



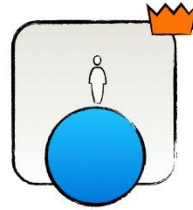
HUMANISM

Humanism, is a form of naturalism that originated in Ancient Greece as summed up in Protagoras's famous statement that man is the measure of all things. Humanism emphasizes the special value of human beings and their aspirations and values. During the Renaissance period many Christians were regarded as Humanists because they emphasized the dignity of man. However they emphasized this not in opposition to God but because they believed we were uniquely made in God's image. Humanists who reject the existence of God while upholding the value of humanity have become known as Secular Humanists. One significant example of Secular Humanism is teaching of Marxism from the 19th century which says that 'man is the supreme being for man'.



DEISM

Originating during the scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries, Deism from the Latin 'deus' meaning God, denies that God can be known by the revelation of the scriptures but only by human reason. God became viewed as the divine watchmaker, the first cause of the universe whose existence is only evident in the mechanisms of his creation. This God is transcendent not immanent, not fully personal, not fully sovereign over human affairs and not providential. God therefore doesn't care or love the world because he has no personal relationship to the world. What happens in the world is determined by the cause and effect of it's closed mechanism allowing no intervention by God. Humans are part of this clockwork universe with no relation to God and are in charge of their own destiny but with no way to transcend the mechanism.



PANENTHEISM

This view which literally means "Everything is in God" was first articulated in West in the 19th - 20th centuries. While not a common view it is still held to today particularly by some Hindus. Panentheism says that everything that exists in the world (including humanity) exists as a part of God. This view is an attempt to combine the strengths of Theism with Pantheism. Since the world is a part of God, everything that happens in the world affects God and changes Him and therefore changes God's knowledge of the world. Also, since everything is only a part of God, there is also a part of God that remains the same despite the changes in the world. God is therefore independent of any particular event that happens in the world but still requires the world for him to exist.



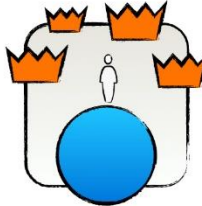
PANTHEISM

This view which literally means "Everything is God" was first coined in the 18th century. It is seen by some as an attempt at finding a mediation between Theism and Atheism. This view is common in Eastern monistic religions. There are many forms of Pantheism but they generally view God not as transcendent but rather as immanent in the world. Since God is viewed as being immanent in all of the substance of the world, God is therefore not omnipresent (i.e. doesn't exist in totality anywhere) existing as an impersonal force animating the world. This existence of the eternal God in all parts of the world means that the sense of time in the world is illusory. Also, since the world is God, then everything in the world is in some sense divine leaving man without any real freedom in the world.



POLYTHEISM

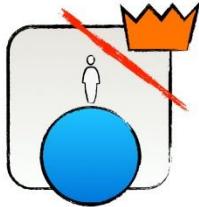
The term 'polytheism' literally means 'many Gods'. Polytheism was widespread in the ancient world particularly in the Egyptian, Greek and Roman Empires. In Polytheism the supernatural forces believed to exist in the world are personified into a cosmic family. Each member of the divine family is used to explain natural phenomena that occur in the world and to establish a cultures role in the universe. These gods are often unpredictable and unreliable. Polytheistic belief continues today in India through Hinduism, in Asia and in the tribal religions of Africa and Native America. Each believer in polytheistic religion is free to worship the god of their choice in the way they see fit. However such flexibility and lack of accountability often leaves followers living their life at the whim of these gods without a sense of purpose or eternal hope.



APATHEISM

The term 'Apatheism' is a blending of the words 'apathy' and 'theism'. This view of the world is the most recent (early 21st Century) at least in it's articulation. Apatheism, also known as

Practical or Pragmatic Atheism is characterised by an apathetic view of God that includes the question of his existence. Apatheists don't care about God and whether or not he exists because they believe that God has shown no evidence of caring about us. Since God does not care about us, he does not care about what we do which leaves the Apatheist free to not care about what they or others do or believe.



2022 American Culture





Challenges in evangelism today

Remember the “Four Spiritual Laws?” from the 70s/80s/90s?

1. **God loves you and created you** to know Him personally.
2. **Man is sinful and separated** from God, so we cannot know Him personally or experience His love.
3. **Jesus Christ is God's only provision** for man's sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience God's love.
4. **We must individually receive Jesus** Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know God personally and experience His love.

This approach no longer works!



'Four Spiritual Laws' implies...

- There is **a God!**
- God is **personal!**
- There is **an afterlife!**
- There are **moral absolutes!**
- The **resurrection** happened!
- Only **one religion (Christianity)** leads to God!



**The average
person today
might answer...**

- That's **true for you** but not for me!
- I **believe in science** instead of religion!
- I believe **all religions** lead to God!
- There are **no moral absolutes**!
- I **don't believe** in God!
- The **Bible isn't true**!



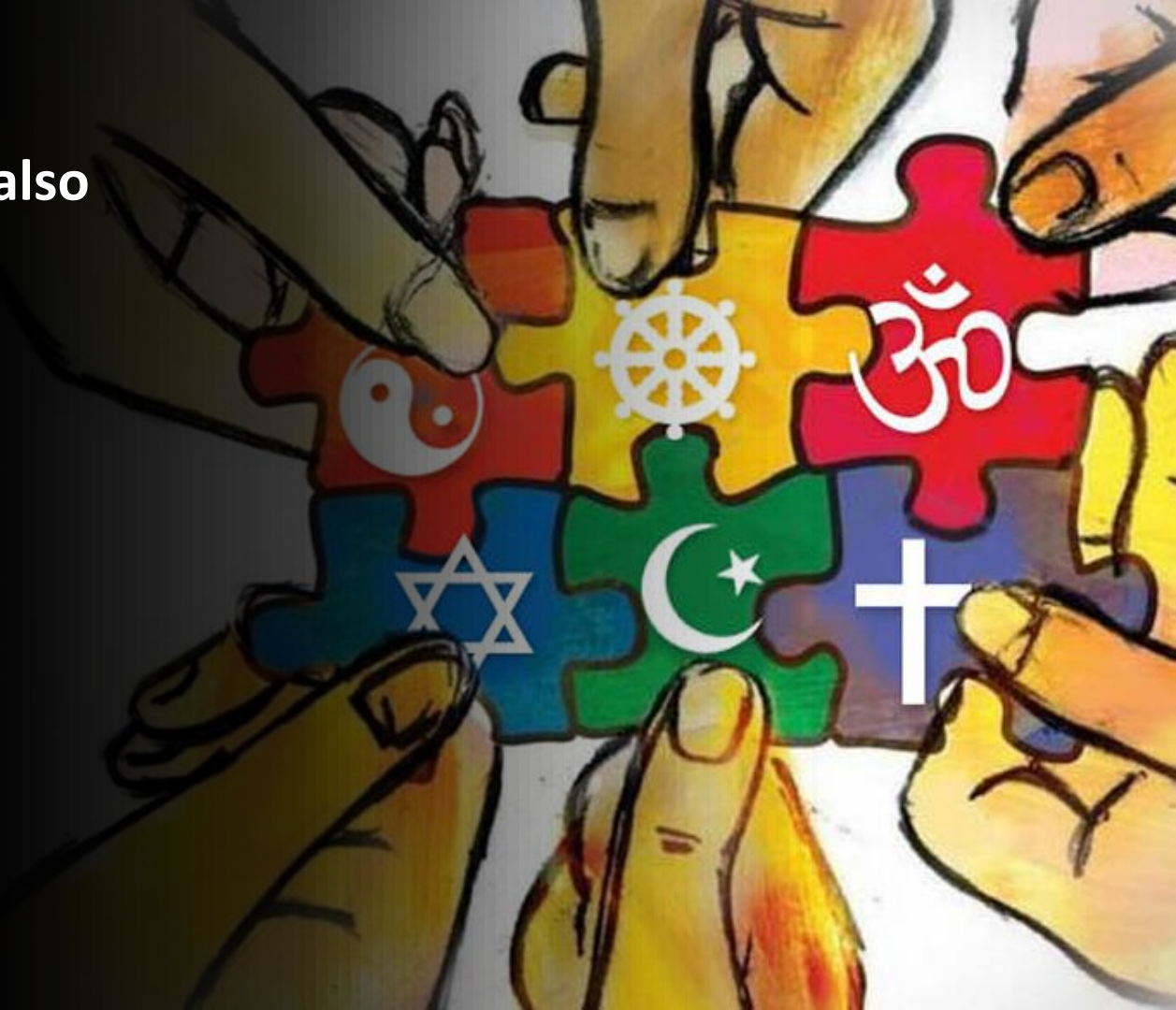
Challenges in evangelism today

Postmodern culture

- We are living in the **'Postmodern era.'**
- More people today believe that **truth is relative** (relativism), there are **many truths** (pluralism) and **morality is a personal preference** (subjectivism).
- There has also been a **major cultural shift** in America since the 1950s; people are now further from the Christian worldview.
- **Younger people** also have distrust of church, institutions organized religion.

21st Century culture also includes many worldviews

- **Pantheism/New Age**
All is God; we just need to discover that we are god.
- **Polytheism**
There are many gods.
- **Atheism**
There is no God.
- **Deism**
There are no miracles; Bible is just a moral book.





Testing Worldviews

How can we know which worldview is true?

1. Logical consistency

- A true worldview will not contradict itself.
- Is the world view without contradictions in its essential points?

2. Explanatory power

- Does the world view adequately explain the data of reality?
- A true worldview will fit the facts.

3. Livability

- Can a person live consistently within the worldview?

4. Existential power

- Does the worldview provide a sense of meaning in life?
- Does it make sense of our moral and rational experience?
- Does it meet our emotional and societal needs?

5. Societal Impact

- Does it enhance freedom, order, and human rights?

Goal of **comparative religious apologetics** is to examine religions and shows that only Christianity meets these criteria.

Review



Introduction

- Why should Christians study other religions?
- What are the major religions?
- What is religion?
- What are worldviews?



8 Week Class Schedule

DONE	Introduction
Oct 24	Yogananda & Self Realization Fellowship
Oct 31	Hinduism
Nov 7	Islam (Part 1)
Nov 14	Islam (Part 2)
Nov 21	Jehovah's Witnesses
Nov 28	Mormonism
Dec 5	Judaism



Questions

1. Do you think Christianity is a religion? Why or why not?
2. What is your experience with other religions or worldviews?
3. How would you describe to somebody how Jesus is different than any other religious figure?
4. What are you hoping to get from this class?



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