

Lecture 1—Getting Our Bearings

What is a religion?

A religion is a system that appeals to transcendence to answer the core questions of the human experience

Primary Elements of Religion

1. A notion of God or gods
2. Authorized teaching
3. An ethic
4. A way of worship
5. Leadership

Core Questions of the Human Experience

1. Where did the world come from?
2. What is the point of my life?
3. What does it mean to live well?
4. Why shouldn't I do bad things? How do I morally self-regulate?
5. Why is there so much suffering?
6. What happens after I die?

Questions that Distinguish Religions

- What is God like?
- What is the most basic human problem?
- Where is our hope?
- How do we restore relationship with God?

Religion	Core Concern	Insufficient Solution
Buddhism	Escaping the problem of suffering	But the answer is to repudiate the goodness of human existence.
Islam	Awe before divine immensity	But the result is a God who is disconnected from our existence and who we would not want to emulate.
Animism and Hinduism	Finding prosperity and managing life with the help of the gods	But the result is that everything is fundamentally ego-centric and we manage the gods like they are children.
Confucianism & Mormonism	Moral self-regulation	But how do we practically achieve the needed changes?
Catholicism	Dealing with guilt and meriting eternal life	But when will we achieve sufficient righteousness to give us rest?

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Lecture 2—A Theology of False Religions

1. False religions have deceived mankind since the very beginning (Gen. 3-4) *“Has God actually said? Is God hiding good from you? Can't you decide for yourself?”*

2. False Religion Sells: The Case of Balaam (Num. 22-24; Num. 31:8; 2 Pet. 2:15; Rev. 2:14) *Balaam embodies the false prophet: speaks truth but is spiritually corrupt. Do not be surprised when corrupt people sometimes speak the truth (Exodus 34).*

3. Religions Syncretize. God's people are no exception (Ex. 32:1-8; The book of Judges) *Israel blends God's worship with pagan practices.*

4. False Religion Springs up from Within the True (John 8:39-47) *It is the Pharisees that challenge Jesus.*

5. False Religion is more alluring than the true (John 8:45; 2 Tim. 4:2-4; 2 Pet. 2:1-3) *Do not be surprised when false religions flourish. The gospel is a hard truth to accept.*

6. False Religion Unifies (Gen. 11:1-9; Rev. 13:1-8; Rev. 17) *From the beginning of the biblical story to the end, nothing draws people together more effectively than organized denial of the gospel.*

Is there good in religion?

- **Common Grace:** if humans had no notion of the divine, what kind of horrifying place would we live in?
- **General Revelation:** we can observe that even deceptive religions find their true fulfillment in Christ.
- **Judgment:** People are satisfied enough by their pseudo-worship (Rom 2:14-15; Acts 17:22-23).

There is an Ultimate Demonic Influence Behind False Religion (Lev. 17:7; Deut. 4:19; 32:15-17; Psa 106:35-38; 1 Cor. 10:20-21; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 9:20; 2 Cor 4:1-6)

We are Nothing Special

We are tempted to feel particularly embattled against the false religions that surround us and pervade our culture. Remember that every generation has faced the same challenges.

Lecture 3—Basic Facts about Islam

Introduction: Is Islam fundamentally violent?

Basic History

610—First revelation to Prophet Muhammad.

622—Hijrah, migration to Medina.

630—Conquest of Mecca, Islam gains stronghold.

632—Death of Prophet Muhammad.

650—Standardization of the Quran by Uthman

656—First Fitna, civil war within Islam

Key Vocabulary

- **Surahs**—144 chapters in the Quran
- **Sunnah**—ethical examples from the prophet
- **Hadiths**—historical records of the prophet’s actions, especially Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim.
- **Ummah**—the worldwide Muslim community.
- **Sunni:** Majority branch (80-90%) that believes in electing the Caliph through community consensus; dispersed authority structures.
- **Shia:** Minority branch, holds that leadership should descend from the prophet’s family, starting with Ali. Mostly Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Bahrain.

The Five Pillars

1. Shahada (Faith): “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet.”
2. Salat (Prayer): Performing five daily prayers facing Mecca.
3. Zakat (Charity): Giving a fixed portion of wealth to the poor.
4. Sawm (Fasting): Fasting from dawn to dusk during Ramadan.
5. Hajj (Pilgrimage): Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once, if able.

Lecture 4—How to Engage with Islam

Where is Islam today?

- **In the world:** 2 billion or 26% of world population.
- **In Canada:** 1.8 million Muslims or 4.9%
- **In Edmonton:** 86,120 or 6.16%
- There are 32 mosques, masjid or Islamic centers in Edmonton.
- Do you want to visit a Mosque? Masjid Al Fatima, near the Costco at 91st street and 23rd Ave. Friday, March 1 at 1:00.

So is Islam Violent?

- Which sect? Which group?
- Which strain of the Quran or the Hadiths?
- How desperate is someone to enter paradise?
- Is this Islam or is it politics?

Attack Points

- Your Bible was twisted by the Jews and Christians.
- The Crusades
- The Trinity is nonsense.
- Why would your God kill His own Son? Cosmic child-abuse?
- Deuteronomy 18; John 14-16

Why does Islam appeal?

- Moral structure. Is the West better?
- A God of Majesty and Total Justice
- Triumphalism—Intellectually, Morally and in Power

What should I emphasize?

- A fundamentally different view of sin—is your God holy enough that He judges every sin?
- A fundamentally different view of mercy—how can Allah forgive?
- The Missing Cross

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Lecture 5—Introduction to Hinduism and Buddhism

What do these faiths teach?

Hinduism is a mixture of 4,000 years of religious traditions. It is a polytheistic mixture of up to 3 million gods. Our eternal soul longs to be united with the universal essence (Brahman) by fulfilling our personal duty according to caste and time of life and through observing worship celebrations. Today, most Hindus (1.1B) are of Indian descent.

Buddhism was founded around 550 BC as a reform to Hinduism. There is no personal God; the self is an illusion that brings suffering. We find peace by renouncing all desires, following the four noble truths and eightfold path to transcend reality itself. Today, most Buddhists (500M) live in SE Asia.

Key Vocab

- Samsara: Cycle of birth, death, and rebirth
- Reincarnation: Rebirth of a soul in a new body
- Liberation: Freedom from the cycle of rebirth
- Karma: Every action has consequences eventually
- Dharma: Personal duty; ethics
- Renunciation: Giving up worldly desires
- Non-violence: Principle of avoiding harm
- Meditation: Focused mental practice for tranquility

Why do people turn to Buddhism?

- How are Buddhism and Hinduism different?
- Are these faiths more compatible with Western sensibilities?
- Are Hinduism and Buddhism religiously tolerant?
- Do Hinduism and Buddhism offer transcendence?
- Does Buddhism answer the problem of evil?

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Lecture 6—Core Teachings

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism

- Life is suffering
- Suffering is caused by craving
- Suffering can have an end
- There is a path that leads to the end of suffering.

The Noble Eight-Fold Path (Buddhism)

- Right View
- Right Resolve
- Right Speech
- Right Action
- Right Livelihood
- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Meditation

What are the holy books?

- Hinduism: The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, & Ramayana.
- Buddhism: The Tripitaka (Pali Canon), Mahayana Sutras, Tibetan Book of the Dead, and others.

What is the appeal?

- Hinduism—a method for controlling divine powers for your benefit. “Don’t you want many friends?”
- Buddhism: A sense of inner calm. Transcendence. A framework for repudiating materialism and hedonism. A kind of provisional answer to the problem of evil.
- They give you the option of access to the divine without having to deal with the person of God.
- They allow you to be a practical atheist.
- They allow you to create a kind of spirituality or a kind of “religion” but put yourself at the center as God.

Lecture 7—Introduction to Sikhism

The Story of Sikhism

- **Guru Nanak (1469-1539)** decried the exclusivity of other faiths and excessive liturgy. He traveled across India as a teacher, singing religious texts that form the bulk of Sikhism's holy book.
- **Guru Arjan (5th Guru)**, formalized the Adi Granth (first holy book). He set Sikhism on a militaristic pathway and was executed for political intrigue in 1606.
- **Guru Gobind Singh (10th, final Guru)** formalized the Khalsa (dedicated warriors) in 1699 and defined the 5 Ks.
- **The Partition of Punjab (1947)** split the traditional land between India and Pakistan, creating the longing for Khalistan and a perpetual political struggle.

The Five Ks (requirements for “baptized” Sikhs)

- **Kesh (uncut hair):** Symbolizes the acceptance of God's will, naturalness, and strength.
- **Kara (steel bracelet):** Represents restraint from evil deeds and the eternity of God.
- **Kanga (wooden comb):** Signifies cleanliness, order, and discipline.
- **Kachera (cotton undergarments):** Denotes chastity and moral behavior.
- **Kirpan (ceremonial sword):** Stands for the responsibility to protect the weak and fight against injustice.

Critical Terms

- **Harmandir Sahib** (the Golden Temple) in Amritsar Punjab.
- **Khalistan:** The longed for homeland for Sikhs.
- **Gurdwara:** Sikh place of worship.
- **Khalsa:** The “baptized,” committed community.
- **Sangat:** The worldwide Sikh community

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Lecture 8—Key Beliefs of Sikhism

God is One

- **ੴ (Ik Onkar)**—“There is one God.” “By itself the One is just One, One and only One, and the One is the source of all creation.”
- Because God is one, all religions point to Him.
- God is the ineffable—“The True Name” (Nam) and cannot be portrayed or named, though hundreds of adjectives describe His mercy and justice.
- God created the world. But all other physical existence is also *Maya*—illusion—and not ultimate. Only God is eternal.

Humans

- **Human Value:** All humans are equal, not subject to the caste system or gender inequality.
- **Suffering:** Humanity is subject to the cycle of *samsara*, but humans are at the highest stage in reincarnation.
- **Judgment:** Humans are also subject to the law of karma—all deeds will eventually be rewarded or punished. This also explains current inequalities and suffering.
- **Humanity's Problem:** We are self-centered rather than God-centered. We must view ourselves in light of His immensity.

Ethics

- We give God true devotion by speaking the True Name, by fulfilling our duties, by avoiding vice.
- **Five Vices:** Lust, anger, greed, attachment to the world, pride
- **Five Virtues:** Honesty, contentment, compassion, humility, love.
- **Four Prohibitions:** Cutting hair, eating halal or kosher meat, adultery, intoxicants (drugs, tobacco, etc)

Worship

- Sikh worship avoids ritual or images. And yet the same rituals have built up over time. Today, Sikh worship revolves around the Guru Granth Sahib and singing portions of the holy book.
- Naming a child, “Baptism,” marriage and death each have significance ceremonies.
- The Akhand Path is a continuous group reading of the Adi Granth from beginning to end in forty-eight hours.

Lecture 9—Restorationist Religions

What was the restorationist trend?

- Started in *The Second Great Awakening* (1790-1840)
- *Apocalypsim*—setting dates for Jesus’ return.
- *Primitivism*—the ambition to restore the church to its original, primitive purity, free from the encumbrances of denominations, traditions, or academic doctrines.
- Groups distort the *Trinity* (LDS, Iglesia, World Mission), *Deity of Christ* (JWs, Iglesia) or add *new revelation* (LDS, Adventism, World Mission). Others reincorporate aspects of the OT law.

Summary of the Groups

Millerites (Church of Christ)	1804	7 million	Baptism by immersion; weekly communion; no creed but the Bible; Baptism is critical for regeneration.
Mormonism (LDS Church)	1830	17 million	The Book of Mormon is scripture; revelation is ongoing; eternal families can progress to deification if they are worthy.
Seventh Day Adventism	1863	22 million	Ellen G. White; Saturday as the Sabbath; health and dietary laws; social activism.
Jehovah’s Witnesses	1870s	8.7 million	Deny the deity of Christ; New World Translation; 144,000 exclusive “anointed” who will reign with Christ in heaven.
Iglesia ni Cristo	1914	3 million	Origin in the Philippines; Felix Manalo was the last messenger; reject the Trinity.
World Mission Society Church of God	1964	1.75 million	Jesus returned in 1964 (Ahn Sahng-hong); God the Mother is a living Korean woman; Observe Sabbath, Passover, & OT feasts.

The Case for the Deity of Christ

- He regarded Himself as God (John 8:58; Rev. 22:13, c.f. 1:8; 21:6)
- Jesus accepted worship (Matt. 14:33; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:12-13) when Scripture is clear—only worship God (Ex. 20:3–5; Matt. 4:9–10; Rev. 19:10).
- Jesus created the world (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17), forgave sins (Mark 2:5-7), and will judge (John 5:22-23; 10:42; Rom 2:16).
- Jesus is OT Yahweh (Is. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10).

Lecture 10—Mormonism

Who was Joseph Smith?

- Born in 1805 to a poor family. Later moved to Western NY.
- First vision at 14 years old in 1820. Received golden plates in 1827 and translated them in 1830.
- On the way to establish “Zion” at Independence, MO, created serious conflicts in Kirtland, Ohio, Far West, MO, and Nauvoo, IL where he was killed by a mob in 1844.

Subsequent History

- A leadership crisis led to Brigham Young taking control and migrating the group to the Salt Lake Valley, arriving in 1847.
- Significant conflict with the US government over polygamy until the 1890 Manifesto denied it, allowing statehood for Utah in 1896.
- The church expanded globally through early missions (1837) but exploded after WW2 to the 16 million estimated today.
- Black priests were allowed through a new revelation in 1978.

What does the Church of Latter Day Saints teach today?

- Father and Son are physical but not the Spirit. God was originally human and there is a unknown number of gods.
- On salvation, the doctrine of eternal progression teaches, “as man is, God once was; as God is, man may become.”
- On the afterlife there are three levels: the celestial, terrestrial, and telestial. There is also a spirit prison, something like purgatory and “outer darkness” for Satan and the unusually wicked. A person must live righteous enough to be “worthy” of the highest heaven and marriage is necessary to enter the celestial sphere.
- “We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (Articles of Faith, #3).
- “There is no salvation outside the [LDS] Church” (Mormon theologian, Bruce McConkie)—specifically through the Melchizedekian priesthood. And yet Mormonism is also extremely inclusive. The resolution is proxy baptism.

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