

Session 7, March 17

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**GOD IN OUR CULTURE:
CHRISTIANITY**

Overview

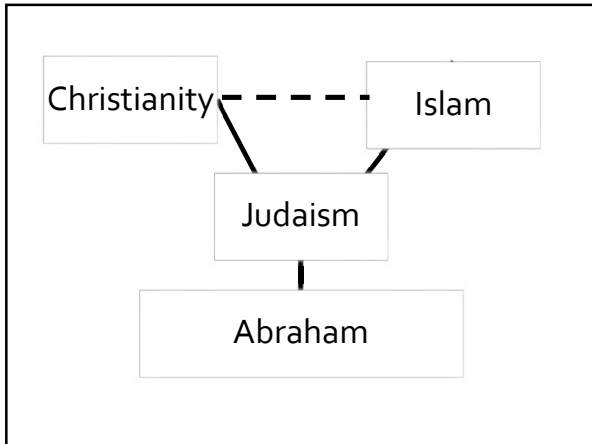
Basis for overview of religions:

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.
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...

¹ Peter 3:15 (NIV)

**Christianity:
an additional point of view**

- You may know Christianity from an "insider" point of view
- But how is Christianity understood from "the outside"?



The Link between Jews and Christians

- Geographically
- Historically
- Theologically
 - Understanding of God
 - Scriptures

Similar beliefs

- One God
- Ways of relating to people cannot be separated from ways of relating to God
- People fall short of this goal = sin
- People are not to exist in isolation but gather together

Historical development

- Centered around the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, "the Christ"
- "forerunner" in John, the Baptist
 - Cousin of Jesus
 - Emulated the Old Testament prophets in message and method
 - Announced the coming of "the Messiah" and the Kingdom of God

The problem

- Resentment did not come from Jesus doing miracles in his own name, but because he linked himself to God – the ONE true God
 - John 7:27-29: "However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from." Then Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, "You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. "I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me."
 - John 5:30 -- "I can do nothing on My own initiative As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

Teachings of Jesus

- Kingdom of God -- "reign" or "rule" of God
 - "has come" and "is coming"
 - Ethics of relationships, money and love of God
- The Law

Teachings of Jesus

- The Law
 - More than the "letter" – that is the "rules"
 - Moved beyond external to the internal – it is a matter of motivation and faith than just doing certain things and ignoring the reason for them
- Marked by parables and paradoxes
 - Parables are stories reflecting a spiritual truth or insight (not an allegory)

Writings about Jesus

- Gospels – meaning "good news"
- Four in number – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
 - Present aspects of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus from their perspectives and addressed to different groups in different times
- Significant portions given to last week of Jesus' life, his death and resurrection
- Emphasis on both divinity and humanity of Jesus

Beginnings

- New Testament book of Acts
 - Church – gathering of followers of Jesus
 - Kerygma – basic message of Christian belief
 1. The Age of Fulfillment has dawned, the "latter days" foretold by the prophets.
 2. This has taken place through the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 3. By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God as Messianic head of the new Israel.
 4. The Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory.
 5. The Messianic Age will reach its consummation in the return of Christ.
 6. An appeal is made for repentance with the offer of forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and salvation. (from C.H. Dodd summary of Acts 2:14-26)

Paul

- Significant because he was a Jewish leader poised to become the chief teacher of the Jewish law
- Became a follower of Jesus after an encounter with him on the road to Damascus, where he was going to persecute Christians
- Became "apostle to the Gentiles"

Writings

- Four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)
- Acts (accounts of the first 40-50 years of the church)
- Epistles – letters to the churches
 - Written mostly by Paul, but also Peter (Mark), James, and John
- The Revelation – vision of John about times of trial and the "rest of the story"
 - End times and understanding of them

Writings gathered

- The 'canon' – *measuring rod* – recognized authoritative writing by the Church
- Fully organized in 325 AD by the Nicaean Council into the Old and New Testaments

Worldview - Beliefs

- Absolute
 - One God, Father, Son and Spirit
 - God became human in Jesus
 - God dwells within followers of Jesus in the Holy Spirit
- The World
 - The world and people were created good; things have gone wrong since the rebellion of people at the beginning

Worldview - Beliefs

- Humans
 - Created in "God's image"
- The problem and solution
 - Separation from God because of sin inherent or sin evident
 - Only the grace of God – unearned and undeserved gift through belief / following of Jesus – can span the separation between people and God
 - A person cannot earn it; a person can never be perfect on his/her own to "make it"

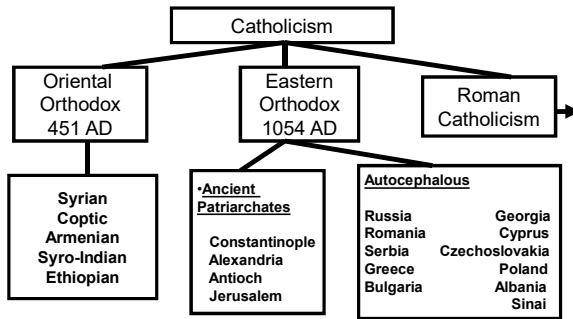
Worldview - Beliefs

- Community and Ethics
 - One becomes a part of the community – "church" – by baptism and by choice
 - Open to everyone of every race, gender, nationality

Worldview: beliefs

- Community and Ethics
 - Differences are because of organizational preferences based on sources of "authority" – church body, priest/pastor, Bible, connections of churches together
 - Some differences are because of emphases in theology - baptism and communion; place and use of Scripture; role of church leadership

Christianity



Reasons for the split

- Over the seat of the papacy
 - The seat should be in Rome
 - Because of struggles with Islam, the papacy was moved to Constantinople
- Over the place of the papacy
 - Roman Catholicism believes the pope is the successor to Peter
 - Eastern Orthodoxy holds to a "council" of rulers ... "Patriarchs"

Worldview – Beliefs

- Life after death
 - There is one!
 - Resurrected body with God for followers of Jesus
 - Choosing not to follow Jesus will result in “hell” – the place where God is not
 - The soul does live somewhere forever – the individual choose the destination
- Christianity and other religions
- Everyone ought to have the chance to decide—so Christianity is a missionary religion

Christianity and other religions

- Exclusive – only one true religion
- Teleological – one religion is superior to others
- Relative – Christianity represents God’s movement toward people; other religions are humanity move toward God

And the point is?

- Christianity is about the other person
- Caution: try not to do the work of the Spirit
- Instead: be an instrument of the Spirit
- It’s not about being right; it’s about presenting / representing / demonstrating Christ to others
