

**CULTS &
CONTEMPORARY RELIGIONS**

By

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Know the Original

The American Banking Association has a unique training program each year for its bank tellers. Hundreds of bank tellers are sent to Washington D.C. to be taught how to detect counterfeit money. Counterfeit money has been a great source of loss revenue for the Treasury Department, so for the entire two-week training bank tellers are not given counterfeit money to examine but only original bills. The reason for this approach by the American Banking Association is that if a bank teller thoroughly knows the original then he will not be deceived by the counterfeit bill, no matter how similar the counterfeit is to the original.

Know the Scripture

The Inspiration of Scripture:

Divine inspiration refers to the superintendence of God the Spirit over the writers of Scripture in which He communicates His infallible (without deception) and inerrant (without mistakes) message through the writers without any error, deletion, or additions. Though the writers were fallible and prone to error, the process and finish product of Scripture was kept pure by the Holy Spirit (Psalms 19:7-9). This miracle was performed without bypassing the personalities, education, styles, emotions and culture of the writer. The prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit to write Scripture (2 Pet. 1:20-21); the Scriptures are inspired (God-breathed) not the writers (2 Tim. 3:16).

The original autographs or texts of the Old and New Testaments were written directly from the hands of the prophets, or amanuenses (as they dictated the statements of the prophets - Jeremiah 36:4) and are the Word of God. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he described the Scriptures of the OT and NT as being "inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). The word "inspired" (Greek *theopneustos*) literally means "God-breathed," meaning that all the original autographs are the actual words from God. The apostle Paul explicitly writes that "all Scripture is inspired by God" as opposed to all the writers of the OT and NT being inspired. It is only the original manuscripts that are God-breathed. This is what theologians refer to as "verbal inspiration," that every single word is from God (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). The doctrine of inspiration is derived from the self-witness of Scripture. In other words, the Bible itself claims to be inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Not only is the Bible inspired by God but also in all of its parts. This is what is called "plenary inspiration". In other words, there is no book, section, chapter, paragraph, verse, sentence, or word in the original autographs that is without divine origination. Therefore, since God by nature possesses the attribute of holiness and His glory refers to the perfection of His being, it is only logical that the Scriptures are inerrant and infallible. If you have a Perfect Author (God) then naturally you will have a perfect product (the Bible).

The Canon of Scripture:

The doctrine of inspiration becomes the standard in determining which books belong in the Bible and which books should be discarded. This standard or rule is referred to as the canon of Scripture. R. Laird Harris commented on the uniqueness of how the Bible was assembled by saying:

Now since it is obvious that the Bible is composed of many ancient books (of various types and ages and lengths), it is clear that any view which holds the Bible to be unique must face the question as to why this particular collection should have been assembled. The usual Protestant answer has been that inspiration determines canonicity. A book is in the canon because it has been recognized as being verbally inspired. The canon is, according to this view, a collection of authoritative books. (Inspiration and Canonicity of Scripture, pp. 125-26)

One of the clearest evidences by which books were regarded as Scripture was the internal endorsement of the prophets and apostles writings amongst one another (Deut. 31:24-26 - Moses considered his writings as God breathed; Josh. 24:26 - Joshua added his writings to the law of Moses, thus considering them as God breathed; 1 Sam. 10:25 - Samuel added his writings to the law of Moses, because he knew his writing were inspired by God; Dan. 9:2 - Daniel recognizes Jeremiah writings as Scripture; 1 Tim. 5:18 - Paul quotes a statement out of the Gospel of Luke, thus recognizing Luke's gospel as Scripture; 2 Pet. 3:15-16 - Peter regarded the writings of Paul as Scripture).

There were 3 questions that needed to be answered correctly to discern if an alleged book was to be considered a part of the canon of Holy Scripture:

- 1) Was the book written by an apostle, prophet or close associate of one of the two?
- 2) Is the book consistent in its teaching with the rest of Holy Scripture or does it contradict it?
- 3) Did the early church accept this book as divinely inspired and therefore authoritative in all matters of faith and practice?

The Bible is complete and therefore the Bible student has all that he needs in the 66 books of the Bible to grow in Christ. To add any suppose revelation to Scripture is to invite God's judgment (Rev. 22:18-19). The book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible, therefore, to add to that book is to add to the Bible and thus incur God's wrath. There are no new revelations from God being given today, because the canon of Scripture is closed.

The Authority of Scripture:

If the Bible is God-breathed or inspired by God, then it is natural to conclude that the Bible alone has inherit authority. Wayne Grudem stated, "The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God" (Systematic Theology, p. 73). In other words, one cannot have a high view of God apart from submission to the authority of Scripture since the Lord Himself "hast magnified His word according to all His name" (Ps. 138:2). Thus, when Scripture speaks,

God speaks (Rom. 9:17 compare with Exod. 9:16; Gal. 3:8 compare with Gen. 12:3); and when Scripture is distorted God is distorted. One of the highest forms of blasphemy or insult to God is to reject or distort the word of God, because the word of God explains the true God, so to distort it is to dishonor God Himself. Therefore since “all Scripture is inspired by God” it is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Sufficiency of Scripture:

The sufficiency of Scripture means that the Bible *alone* is fully reliable and more than adequate in meeting the spiritual needs of those who are seeking to know God in salvation, please Him in obedience, and trust Him in all things (2 Tim. 3:14-17; Ps. 119:1-11, 42). Wayne Grudem gives some practical application to the truth that Scripture alone is sufficient in knowing and doing God’s will:

1. The sufficiency of Scripture should encourage us as we try to discover what God would have us to think (about a particular doctrinal issue) or to do (in a particular situation). We should be encouraged that everything God wants to tell us about that question is to be found in Scripture.
2. The sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that we are to add nothing to Scripture, and that we are to consider no other writings of equal value to Scripture.
3. The sufficiency of Scripture also tells us that God does not require us to believe anything about himself or his redemptive work that is not found in Scripture.
4. The sufficiency of Scripture shows us that no modern revelations from God are to be placed on a level equal to Scripture in authority.
5. With regard to living the Christian life, the sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that nothing is sin that is not forbidden by Scripture either explicitly or by implication.
6. The sufficiency of Scripture also tells us that nothing is required of us by God that is not commanded in Scripture either explicitly or by implication.
7. The sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that in our doctrinal and ethical teaching we should emphasize what Scripture emphasizes and be content with what God has told us in Scripture.

The Necessity of Scripture:

The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible *alone* is absolutely essential in knowing the plan of salvation (Rom. 10:8-17; Acts 4:12; John 14:6); in maintaining a godly life (Matt. 4:4; Psalm 119:105; 1 Peter 2:2; John 17:17); in discerning sin in one’s life (Jas. 1:21-25; 2 Tim. 3:16); in standing against Satanic attacks (Eph. 6:17; Matt. 4:3-10); in enduring trials (Psalm 119:50, 92); in being kept from stumbling into sin (Psalm 37:31; 119:165) in restoring the soul and growing

in wisdom (Psalm 19:7); in being rewarded for obedience and warned against the dangers of disobedience (Psalm 19:11); in helping to examine if a person is truly a Christian (2 Cor. 13:5; 1 John 2:4-6) in protecting the church against false teachers and false doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1-6; Tit. 1:9; 1 John 4:1-6); and in edifying the church (Acts 20:32). Therefore, when Scripture is neglected or rejected in place of human philosophies, opinions, fallen common sense reasoning, false religious doctrine, human logic or legalistic rules then the plan of salvation is unknown or distorted; a person's godly life will suffer; one cannot discern sin in his/her life; one will be defeated in spiritual warfare; one will collapse in trials; one will stumble in sin; one's soul will not be restored nor will he grow in wisdom; there will be no reward for obedience only tragic consequences for disobedience; one will not be able to discern if he is a Christian (Matt. 7:21-23); the church will be led astray by false teachers and their satanic doctrine (Eph. 4:14; Tit. 1:10-12); and the church will not be built up in the truth (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel means "good news," thus the gospel is the good news from God to mankind through the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1-4). This good news is explained by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4:

1) Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, (2) by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. (3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (4) and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

This gospel was planned by One God: The Bible teaches that there is one God who eternally exist in three distinct persons – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Each person is co-eternal (uncreated), co-equal in possessing all the attributes of deity, co-existent (meaning that there is not one person playing three distinct roles but that all three persons exist and commune with each other at the same time) and yet one in essence or being (Deut. 6:4; Is. 6:8; Dan. 7:9-14; Matt. 3:16-17 Matt. 28:19; Jn. 10:30; Acts 8:55; Rev. 5:5-7).

This gospel is about a Person: The OT promised that the coming Savior would come from the seed of the woman (Eve) to destroy Satan (Gen. 3:15); that He would be born of a virgin (Is. 7:14); that He would come as King from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) through the line of David to reign over Israel and the world (2 Sam. 7:14; Is. 9:6-7; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 14); that He would be sinless and die as a substitute for the sins of mankind (Ps. 22:1, 6-7, 14-18; Is. 52:13-14; 53); and that He would rise from the dead (Ps. 16:10). This promise Messiah (Anointed One of God) would be both God (Is. 9:6; Mic. 5:2) and man (Gen. 3:15). The NT pronounces that the promised Messiah of the OT has come in the person of Jesus Christ (Messiah) (Matt. 1; Jn. 1:1-18; Rom. 1:1-4; 2 Tim. 2:8). Therefore, the NT testifies that Jesus Christ being both God and man (Jn. 1:1 & 14; Rev. 1:17-18) has fulfilled the promise of the OT by being born of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit (Lk. 26-38); that He attested to His Messianic claims by performing miracles (Jn. 10:37-38; 12:37); that He died as a substitute for man's sins and rose physically from the grave on the third day in order to appease God's wrath against mankind and satisfy His justice in reconciling man back into a relationship with a Holy God (Rom. 5:8-21; 1 Cor. 15:3-8;

2 Cor. 5:18-21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18); and that He ascended to heaven to seat at the right hand of the Father waiting until the time of His return to earth to reign over the nation of Israel and the world (Ps. 2: 110:1-2; Zech. 12:7-10; Matt. 25:31-46; Acts 1:9-10; 3:20-21; Heb. 1:3; 9:28).

This gospel is for sinful people: The Bible teaches that man was created in the image of God, possessing a mind, volition (will) and emotions to have a relationship with the living God. Yet due to Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3) man was judged by being separated from their chief Source of satisfaction and joy (God Himself) and placed under divine judgment (Rom. 5:12-14). As a result, man has a sin nature because he was viewed as participating in Adam's rebellion (Rom. 5:12), which means that every aspect of his humanness is corrupted - his thoughts, motives, emotions, words and actions (his entire character) (Matt. 15:18-20; Rom. 3:10-20; Eph. 2:1-3; 4:17-19). Man is totally depraved (without the desire or ability to please God) and thus is unable to deliver himself from God's righteous wrath (Rom. 8:6-8). Man in his lost state cannot perform self-conversion to save himself because he is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Prov. 21:10; Eph. 2:1). Therefore, total depravity or inability is being "dead in trespasses and sins" to the point that even a sincere act of worship directed to the true God is an abomination (Prov. 15:8; 21:27) and his good works are regarded as filthy rags (Is. 64:6). Man can do good things, but his good works have no merit towards God nor can it alter his sinful condition (Job 14:4; 15:14-16; Jer. 13:23; 17:9; Matt. 7:11).

This gospel is salvation: Salvation according to the Bible means deliverance from the penalty, power and presence of sin (Rom. 6:11-12; 8:1, 31). This gift of salvation is offered to any person who submits to the command to repent and believe in the gospel (Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9-10). At the moment of saving faith, the believing sinner is immediately delivered from the penalty of sin, which is eternal hell (Jn. 3:16; 8:51) and is declared righteous (*justified*) in the sight of God (Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:21). Also, he is delivered from the power of sin, which is spiritual depravity and thus made spiritually alive (*sanctified*) (Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13). In other words, the believer is no longer enslaved to the power of sin but is now a slave of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). Though the believer is not under the power of sin, he still has sin present in him which frustrates his desires to glorify God with his life perfectly (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:16-17). Therefore, the believer looks forward to the future when Christ returns to be forever delivered from the presence of sin (*glorified*), his fallen humanness (Rom. 7:24-25; 8:23; 1 Jn. 3:3).

Why Defend the Faith?

The apostle Jude wrote to believers who were being confronted by false teachers. And in the third verse of his epistle, he wrote this:

[3] Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

The apostle Jude understood that if believers did not stand up or defend “the faith” (the gospel message) against false teachers and their doctrines there would not be a “common salvation” to write about anymore. As someone once said, “a man who will not stand for something is quite likely to fall for almost anything”. Therefore, to not defend the faith means that many will be vulnerable to falling away from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1-6). False doctrine is like leaven or yeast it permeates or spreads throughout the dough and causes it to rise (Gal. 5:6). So it is with false doctrine, it can spread fast throughout the church and thus ruin believers’ life and conduct (Tit. 1:9-11). Therefore, knowing this danger the Bible commands believers to be discerning, to test all things according to Scripture (Deut. 13:1-3; Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:20-21); to not be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14); to test the spirits to see whether they are from God (1 Jn. 2:18-27; 4:1-6); and to warn and deliver others who have been taken captive through error (1 Tim. 4:1-6; Col. 2:8; Jude vv. 20-23).

The apostle Peter commanded believers to not back down from those who would challenge them to give a defense of the faith that they have placed their confidence in:

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence (1 Pet. 3:15)

Now defending the faith doesn’t mean being arrogant, condescending, sarcastic or crass when proclaiming the gospel. But speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) with humble boldness (Eph. 6:19) for the purpose of leading them to salvation in Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:24-26). And when it comes to warning fellow believers of the dangers of false teachers and their teachings it is important to name names in order that they may see who we are talking about (Phil. 3:2; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; 3:8; 4:14-15). This is not being disrespectful but loving.

How to discern truth from error?

The belief system of every major false religion and cult in the world contradicts the truth of Scripture and the gospel message in some way. There are several major tests or questions you are looking to answer when examining false religions or cults - What is their concept of God? Is He one or many; impersonal; a force; nonexistent? What do they believe about the Bible? Is the Bible alone the Word of God, the source of authority, or one of many divine books? What do they believe about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ? Is He God in human flesh or just a good religious person? Did His death on the cross alone provide salvation for anyone who believes, or must one do good works to be saved? What do they believe about the nature of man? Is he created in the image of God, yet a sinner by nature? Or is he: a little god; an evolving creature; a good person who can earn his way to heaven; or in a process of reincarnation?

The believer must know the meaning of essential terms of the Christian faith, so that he will not be misled by unbiblical answers to his questions. Walter Martin, in his book “Kingdom of the Cults” writes, “The cults capitalize on the almost total inability of the average Christian to understand the subtle art of redefinition in the realm of Biblical theology” (p.19). Therefore, Martin gives 5 steps in addressing a cult or false religion:

Whenever a Christian encounters a cultist then, certain primary thoughts must be paramount in his mind: (1) he must strive to direct the conversation to the problem of terminology and maneuver the cult adherent into a position where he must define his usage of terms and his authority, if any, for drastic, un-Biblical redefinitions, which are certain to emerge; (2) the Christian must then compare the “definitions” with the various contexts of the verses upon which the cultist draws for support of his doctrinal interpretations; (3) he must define the words “interpretation,” “historic orthodoxy,” and standard doctrinal phrases, such as “new birth,” “atonement,” “context,” “exegesis,” “eternal judgment,” etc., so that no misunderstanding will exist when these things come under discussion as they inevitably will; (4) the Christian must attempt to lead the cultist to a review of the importance of properly defining terms for all important doctrines involved, particularly the doctrine of personal redemption from sin, which most cult systems define in a markedly un-Biblical manner; (5) it is the responsibility of the Christian to present a clear testimony of his own regenerative experience with Jesus Christ, in terminology which has been carefully clarified regarding the necessity of such regeneration on the part of the cultist in the light of the certain reality of God’s inevitable justice. (Kingdom of the Cults, p. 23)

Typically, cults will have a leader who has replaced the Bible as the source of authority with himself as the source of authority. This is what makes a cult a cult. The leader will claim to have received revelation from God which all who follow him must believe and submit to without question. No one can verify if these revelations are from God or if the person is making them up, because he has placed himself as the source of authority. Yet, when anyone claimed to speak on behalf of God to the people in the Bible, there were *two ways* to discern whether the message was truly from God: **1)** The message (new revelation) could not be in contradiction to the written word of God in any way (Deut. 13:1-5; Acts 17:10-12; 1 Thess. 5:19-20). And if the message was a prediction, it could not fail to come to pass in any of its details (Deut. 18:20-22); **2)** If the message was an elaboration of truth that was not formerly known or understood, the Lord would authenticate the messengers with signs and wonders before the very presence of their hearers. These signs and wonders were even performed before skeptical hearers who could not deny the divine origin of such miracles (Exod. 3:13-4:9; John 10:22-38; 12:37; Acts 4:5-22; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1-4).

The Difference Between A Religion and A Cult:

Dr. Charles Braden, emeritus professor at Northwestern University defined the difference between a cult and religion:

A cult, as I define it, is any religious group which differs significantly in some one or more respects as to belief or practice from those religious groups which are regarded as the normative expressions of religion in our total culture. (These Also Believe, preface, xii).

Dr. Walter Martin defined a cult “as a group of people gathered about a specific person or person’s mis-interpretation of the Bible” (p. 11). So, a cult is a religious group who has taken the belief system of a major religion and distorted it by the authority of its cult leader.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Origin/History:

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact time the Roman Catholic Church came into existence, but its history goes as far back as the early fourth century. At that time there were tensions that arose between the Western (Latin) and Eastern (Greek) styles of theology and governance. These differences reached its highpoint in 1054 A.D. when the Eastern and Western sects of Catholicism split with the Eastern sect declaring itself independent of Rome, because of centuries of disagreement over theological and political issues. The Eastern sect regarded itself as the more Orthodox or “right believing” sect of Christians, thus becoming the Greek Orthodox Church. But the title “Roman Catholic” did not come into common use until after the sixteenth century (1500s) Protestant Reformation.

Adherents:

It is estimated that there are more than one billion members of the Roman Catholic Church in the world today. Out of a population of 285,538,000 in the United States there are 64,621,000 Catholics, exactly 22.63% of the population. The highest percentage of Roman Catholics in a country is found in Saint Pierre and Miquelon regions with 6,000 Roman Catholics, with a population of 6,000, 100% of the population. Italy comes in second with 57,665,000 Catholics out of a population of 59,725,000, 96.55% of the population. These statistics are from www.Catholic-Hierarchy.org, November 2005 study.

Important Definitions:

Apocrypha: in Greek means “hidden things” and is a term applied to the fourteen books of the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) that are not a part of the Hebrew Bible. They are not accepted as part of the official canon of Scripture by Protestants or Jews, but some are accepted as deuterocanonical by the Roman Catholic, Russian and Greek Orthodox churches.

Assumption of Mary: a Roman Catholic doctrine promulgated in 1950 declared that Mary the Mother of Jesus was taken up into heaven and thus avoided the pangs of death.

Eucharist: a term derived from the Greek word meaning “to give thanks,” which is applied to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, also known as Communion or “the Breaking of Bread”.

Ex Cathedra: literally, “from the chair”. Refers to the Pope in his official office as head of the Roman Catholic Church. When the pope speaks ex cathedra his judgments in matters pertaining to faith and practice are assumed by his followers to be infallible.

Immaculate Conception: the Roman Catholic dogma, declared in 1854, that the mother of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, was conceived without sin.

Indulgences: a practice which emerged in medieval Roman Catholicism, based upon the belief that the Church has the power to forgive sin, whereby Priests had the power to remit the sins of individuals who made appropriate contributions to the church or undertook pilgrimages or other sacred duties.

Inspiration: in Roman Catholicism, it is the church that judges what is to be considered inspired.

Justification: a technical theological term used in the New Testament writings of Paul to signify that act by which God restores humans to a right relationship with Himself. Protestant reformers and Roman Catholic theologians disagreed as to how justification was to be interpreted. For the Roman Catholic it meant making the sinner just through the infusion of supernatural grace that blots out sin and regenerates the soul, making it worthy of God. For the Reformer, justification was an act of divine forgiveness brought about by faith in the sacrifice of Christ.

Pope: the title given to the Bishop of Rome, the head of the Roman Catholic Church.

Protestant: a member of any of the Christian denominations that reject (*protest*, added by instructor) papal authority and support the reformation principles of justification by faith, the priesthood of all believers and the authority of Scripture.

Purgatory: a Roman Catholic doctrine which teaches that after death souls must be purified before they can enter heaven. This doctrine was the basis for sale of indulgences and the saying of prayers for the dead.

Mass: the Roman Catholic term for the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, which is a Christian Ritual commemorating the Death and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Council of Trent: the great Roman Catholic Church council, held intermittently between 1545 and 1563, which provided the definitive definition of Catholicism in reaction to the Protestant Reformation. The council affirmed the equal validity of Tradition and Scripture as sources of religious truth, the sole authority of the church to interpret the Bible, and the institution of the seven sacraments, and it denied the Protestant understanding of justification by faith. Efforts were initiated to reform the church, and Protestant doctrines were condemned as heretical.

Transubstantiation: during the Mass the substance of the elements of bread and wine are transformed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ by the words of the priestly consecration, even though their appearance (accidents) remains the same.

Vatican: the residence of the Pope in Rome, which has the status of an independent city-state.

Vatican Councils: the First Vatican Council, which was highly conservative and emphasized differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, was held in Rome during 1869 and 1870 as the twentieth Ecumenical Council. It ended abruptly with the outbreak of war and the occupation of the city. The Second Vatican Council, lasting from 1962 to 1965, was also held in Rome. It met at the bidding of Pope John XXIII, who attributed the idea to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He defined its task as renewing the religious life of the Roman Catholic Church and modernizing its teaching, discipline and organization as a step toward unifying all Christians.

The far-reaching decisions of the council completely revolutionized the Roman Catholic Church, encouraging both the ministry of the laity and, inadvertently, the Charismatic movement.

(Definitions taken from Concise Dictionary of Religion, Irving Hexham, Intervarsity Press)

Belief System:

Out of all the religions in the world Roman Catholicism comes the closest to Biblical Christianity in its belief system. It is for this reason that many people, including those within Protestant denominations (Baptists, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostals, etc...) often regard Roman Catholicism as a Christian religion. This confusion is dangerous even though Roman Catholics affirm the central doctrines of the Christian faith such as - the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, the Virgin birth, the sinlessness of Christ, the substitutionary death and resurrection of Christ, and faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Yet, Roman Catholicism redefines crucial doctrines and even adds to these truths teachings that run counter to the Scriptures. Thus, disqualifying itself as a bona fide Christian religion. It can more accurately be defined as a pseudo (false, not real) Christian religion. Here are the reasons:

Truth is not revealed through Scripture alone:

Clarifying the source of authority is crucial when witnessing to a Roman Catholic because the legitimacy of any belief system is tested by whether its source for authority is infallible and inerrant. In other words, the belief system of any religion stands or falls if its source of information is truth or false. Therefore, it is important to establish the standard or source of authority by which beliefs will be tested. Now it is a fact that Roman Catholics *do not* hold to the Scriptures *alone* as the only source of authority in all matters of faith and practice. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, Christian Apologist who defend the truth of the gospel from a Protestant perspective, outlined the five sources of Roman Catholic authority:

Roman Catholicism teaches that in addition to the Protestant Bible (*66 inspired books of the OT and NT*, added by instructor), there are five other sources having divine authority. First, there are additional books written between the Old and New Testaments, known to Catholics as the deuterocanonical books (*Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Ben Sirach, also called Ecclesiastus, Baruch, Wisdom, and there are new portions added to the book of Esther and Daniel*, added by the instructor) and to Protestants by the term "apocrypha". Second, Catholicism maintains that divine authority is to be found in the authorized Tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, which is also classified as the "Word of God". Third, divine authority (infallibility) is given to the Pope when he speaks officially on matters of faith and morals (*ex cathedra*, this dogma was instituted on July 18, 1870, at the First Vatican Council, *added by instructor*). Fourth, when speaking or teaching in conjunction with the Pope and orthodox Catholic Tradition, Roman Catholic bishops are also held to be infallible, and hence, divinely authoritative. Finally, official Roman Catholic interpretation of the Bible (Catholic teaching) is considered to have divine warrant and authority. In essence, all five of these sources can be summarized by the term "Roman Catholic Tradition". (The Facts on Roman Catholicism, pp. 8-9)

Now Protestant believers would protest “Roman Catholic Tradition” as a source of authority because of its contradictions with the inspired Word of God, the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In fact, the apocrypha contain historical and theological errors. John Ankerberg, in quoting the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 1, (207-210), Norman Geisler and William Nix, A General Introduction and the Encyclopedia Britannica states:

Tobit...contains certain historical and geographical errors such as the assumption that Sennacherib was the son of Shamans (1:15) instead of Sargon II, and that Nineveh was captured by Nebuchadnezzar and Ahasuerus (14:5) instead of by Nabopolassar and Cyaxares... Judith cannot possibly be historical because of the glaring errors it contains... [In 2 Maccabees] there are also numerous disarrangements and discrepancies in chronological, historical, and numerical matters in the book, reflecting ignorance or confusion... (*This quote can be found in The Facts on Roman Catholicism, John Ankerberg and John Weldon, pp. 42-43*)

In the book of Judith 9:10 & 13, the text clearly endorses immoral acts; 2 Maccabees 12:44, support prayers to the dead; Tobit 12:9; 4:10, teach that alms giving has atoning value which also leads to deliverance from death; Tobit 12:12, supports the worship of angels and 2 Maccabees 12:42 & 46 teach the doctrine of purgatory and the salvation of souls after death. But the Bible clearly teaches against these views: 1 Thess. 4:3 says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality”. Compare this truth with Judith 9:10 & 13 support of immoral acts. In regards to prayers for the dead, this conflicts with Deut. 18:9-13; the giving of alms in hopes of redeeming a person’s soul from eternal death stands totally against Ps. 49:5-9; Mark 10:23-27 and Acts 8:14-20; the worship of angels contradicts Col. 2:16-19; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9; and the doctrine of purgatory and salvation after death is not compatible with Luke 16:19-31 & Heb. 9:27. But the reason why the Roman Catholic Church holds to the Apocrypha as inspired is because it supports these false doctrinal views. Yet, the Scriptures state clearly that God is not a man that He should lie (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29) and that He is light and in Him there is no darkness (sin & error) at all (1 Jn. 1:5). Therefore, you cannot hold to the inspiration of the Scriptures and Roman Catholic Tradition because they contradict each other. Yet the Roman Catholic Church uses two ways to keep its followers from clearly seeing these contradictions. The first is that the Roman Catholic Church holds to a limited view of inerrancy when it comes to the Scriptures, they claim that the Bible is inerrant but not all of it. And the second way is that they claim that only the Roman Catholic Church can discern what areas of Scripture is inerrant and what areas of Scripture is false. In “The Documents of Vatican II,” under the category “Revelation,” you will find the following statement:

The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on [i.e., Tradition], has been entrusted *exclusively* to the living, teaching office of the Church... (pp. 117-118; quoted from The Facts on Roman Catholicism, p. 45)

In commenting on the Roman Catholic Church self-declaration of certain written material as inerrant Ankerberg and Weldon write:

Most Catholic literature contains the *Nihil Obstat* and the *Imprimature*, Church seals that designate authority. They are defined as a “declaration that a book or pamphlet is considered to be free from doctrinal or moral error”. Yet *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, which contains these seals, teaches the following demonstrable errors:

1. Salvation by works (and other theological errors)
2. Muslims worship the biblical God
3. The book of Daniel was written in 165 BC (instead of 536BC, *added by instructor*)
4. Mormons “believe in the Trinity”
5. Papal infallibility is true
6. The Catholic Church is the only true Church (p. 46)

It is clear from these facts that the source of authority, “The Roman Catholic Tradition” is an errant and fallible source of information on which to base a belief system on matters of salvation and righteous living. Ron Carlson and Ed Decker in their book “Fast Facts on False Teaching” write, “In practical terms, the real rule of faith for a Roman Catholic is not the Bible, or even the Bible and tradition, but rather the Roman Catholic Church itself” (p. 219).

Salvation doesn’t come through Christ alone:

The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone:

John 14:6 - Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me”.

Acts 4:12 - “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved”.

1 Timothy 2:5 - “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”

Yet the Roman Catholic Church teaches that salvation comes through Jesus Christ plus the Roman Catholic Church, the sacraments, the Mass, the reciting of the rosary, the help of the Mary and through suffering in purgatory after death. In “Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma,” Dr. Ludwig Ott stated, “The Sacraments are the means appointed by God for attainment of eternal salvation. Three of them are in the ordinary way of salvation *so necessary* that without their use *salvation cannot be attained* [i.e., baptism, penance, holy orders] (pp. 340-341, quoted from “The Facts on Roman Catholicism, p. 27). The Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965 declared to the church:

This sacred synod teaches that the Church is necessary for salvation. Whoever, therefore, knowing the Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ, would refuse to enter her, or remain in her, could not be saved. (quoted from Fast Facts on False Teaching, p. 231)

In the Catholic Catechism it cites the Council of Trent's standard view on the Mass, "This sacrifice [the Mass] is truly propitiatory...through the Mass we obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For by this oblation the Lord is appeased...he pardons wrongdoing and sins, even grave ones" (p. 468, quoted from "The Facts on Roman Catholicism" p. 29)

There are seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church that assisted the Catholic in attaining salvation. These sacraments are baptism, confirmation, penance, Holy Eucharist, Marriage, anointing the sick and holy orders. The priest presides over these sacraments as a mediator between God and the Catholic worshiper. Robert Broderick, the editor of the Catholic Encyclopedia summarizes these sacraments:

- Baptism (which is not repeated) cleanses from original sin, removes other sins and consequent punishments, provides spiritual rebirth or regeneration (Jn. 3:3), begins the process of justification, and is "necessary for salvation".
- Confirmation (not repeated) bestows the Holy Spirit in a special sense, leading to "an increasing of sanctifying grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit" as well as other spiritual power and a sealing to the Catholic Church.
- Penance removes the penalty of sins committed after baptism and confirmation. Mortal or "deadly sins" are remitted and the "justification" lost by such sins is restored as a continuing process.
- Holy Eucharist is where Christ is resurfaced, and the benefits of Calvary are continually applied anew to the believer.
- Marriage is where grace is given to remain in the bonds of matrimony in dictates with the requirements of the Catholic Church.
- Anointing the sick (formerly extreme unction) bestows grace on those who are sick, old, or near death and helps in forgiveness of sins and sometimes the physical healing of the body.
- Holy orders (not repeated) confer special grace and spiritual power upon bishops, priests, and deacons for leadership in the Church as representatives of Christ "for all eternity". (quoted from "The Facts on Roman Catholicism" p. 18-19)

Regarding the role of Mary in salvation, The Catholic Encyclopedia states, "Mary was not subject to the law of suffering and death, which are penalties of the sin of human nature, even though she knew these, experienced them, and endured them for our salvation" (p. 412, quoted from same source as before, p. 30)

Ott, in the "Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma" stated in purgatory "the temporal punishments for sins are atoned for in the purifying fire [of purgatory]... by the willing bearing of the expiatory punishments imposed by God". (p. 485, quoted from "The Facts on Roman Catholicism, p. 31)

In adding these means to the work of Christ nullifies His all sufficient and once for all sacrifice on behalf of the whole world. The Hebrew writer makes it clear:

10:10-12, 14 - (10) By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (11) And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; (12) but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, (14) For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Notice that the Hebrew writer emphasizes that Christ's death on behalf of sinners was "once for all" (v. 10); and "for all time" (v. 12), this speaks against the Mass, which claims that Christ is being sacrificed continually through the offering of the bread and wine (transubstantiation). Also he says that through Christ's one offering for sin He has perfected "for all time" those who are being sanctified, made holy or set apart. In other words, those who trust in Christ *alone* for salvation do not need any assistance outside of Christ to be made fit for heaven (no need for sacraments, Mary, rosary or purgatory). His death made provision for those who would trust in Him to be holy (Rom. 6). It is finished (Jn. 19:30)

Salvation is not received through faith alone:

The Bible teaches that salvation is received by grace alone through faith alone:

Ephesians 2:8-9 - "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast".

Romans 11:6 - "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace".

Romans 10:9-11 - "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed".

Romans 4:5 - "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness".

Acts 16:30-32 - "and after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household'. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house".

The Protestant position on salvation by grace through faith teaches that when a person repents and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord he or she is immediately justified. Now justification is a once and for all act by God by which He pronounces or declares the believing sinner righteous by virtue of his faith in Christ. In other words, God the Father imputes or transfers the righteousness of His Son to the believer's account because of his faith and thus declares him legally righteous in His sight (Romans 3,4 & 5; 2 Cor. 5:21). Yet, the Roman Catholic Church defines justification different than how the Bible describes it. Justification according to the Catholic Church is the infusion of grace by God that enables the person to have supernatural ability or sanctifying grace to do the works that are required of him in order that he may become objectively righteous in the sight of God. Instead of justification being a once and for all act by God in which He declares the believing sinner righteous by virtue of his faith alone in Christ alone (Protestant position); the Catholic Church defines justification as a process by which God infuses the person with sanctifying power to enable him to measure up to God's righteous standard for salvation. In other words, justification makes it possible for the person to earn his salvation. The Catholic Encyclopedia defines justification by stating, "Primarily and simply justification is the possession of sanctifying grace... We are justified by Christ... and by good works" (p. 319, quoted from "The Facts on Roman Catholicism" p. 38).

This view of justification is held so dogmatically by the Roman Church that at the Council of Trent (1545-1563), in defense of their position of justification against the Reformers, they stated in the section titled “Canons Concerning Justification”:

Canon 9 - If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification...let him be anathema [cursed by God]

Canon 24 - If anyone says that the justice received [i.e., justification] is not preserved and not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema. (p. 43 & 45, quoted from “The Facts on Roman Catholicism” p. 40)

Yet, when the apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, he was concerned that they were turning away from the gospel by believing that one becomes righteous through keeping the Law (Gal. 3 & 5) instead of by placing one’s faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul was so adamant about this false teaching of salvation by works that he wrote:

Gal. 1:6-9 - “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we [i.e., the apostles], or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed [anathema]. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed [anathema].

The Roman Catholic Church’s teaching on salvation through works is another gospel, which really is no gospel or good news at all, because one is hopelessly trying to earn his way to heaven, while bypassing the only One who can grant full and complete forgiveness of sins forever, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 2:13-15; Heb. 10:1-18). The Roman Catholic Church is *not* a Christian religion, but a false Christian religion that teaches a false gospel of works, which according to Galatians 1:6-9, should be considered anathema (accursed of God).

For Additional Information:

The Facts on Roman Catholicism, John Ankerberg and John Weldon.

The Handy Religion Answer Book, John Renard.

Fast Facts on False Teachings, Ron Carlson and Ed Decker.

ISLAM

Origin/History:

The religion Islam was founded by Muhammad in the early seventh century who lived in Arabia. The word “Islam” is derived from the verb “SLM” which means to resign, surrender, or submit oneself, and thus Islam means the act of submission. The one who professes Islam is called a “MuSLiM,” which is also derived from the verb “slm”. It means one who submits or has submitted. Many Muslims consider Islam to be the religion of all the prophets in the Bible from Adam to Jesus, with Muhammad being the last and greatest of all the biblical prophets.

Muhammad was born in a wealthy merchant town called Mecca in 570 or 571 A.D. This town was considered famous for its shrine, the Kaba. This cube like building was the center of the veneration of many sacred stones including the Black Stone, a meteorite, which many claimed to have fallen from heaven. It was believed that as many as 360 deities were worshiped at Kaba. In other words, the Arabs who lived in Mecca were polytheistic (believed and worshiped many gods).

Patrick Sookhdeo, in his book “A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Islam” gives a chronology of Muhammad’s life (Appendix 1 pp. 85-87):

LIFE IN MECCA

- Birth 12th Rabi al-awwal (Monday, 22 April, A.D. 571) Father, Abdullah, already dead.
- Age 6 Death of mother, Aminah
- Age 8 Death of grandfather, Abdul Mutalib
- Age 12 First business trip to Syria
- Age 25 Marriage to Khadijah (40 yrs. old), (their marriage produced seven children - three boys and four daughters; all of which died young except for their daughter Fatimah who married Ali-ibn-Abu Talib, who Shi’ites consider to be the first caliph after Muhammad’s death - *added by instructor*)
- Age 40 Prophet hood (A.D. 610) (while mediating in a cave on the slopes of Mount Hirah, three miles from Mecca, Muhammad was in a trance when he heard the voice of Allah or was visited by the archangel Gabriel, who gave him messages to preach to mankind - *added by instructor*)
- 1st -3rd year (As a prophet) Secret preaching of Islam
- End of 3rd yr Open call to Islam from Mount Safa, near Mecca
- 10th year Year of Sorrow - deaths of uncle, Abu Talib, and first wife, Khadijah (after his wife’s death Muhammad married twelve wives, therefore sanctioning polygamy - *added by instructor*)

Miraj [Muhammad’s night journey to heaven], 27th Rajab

13th year Five times daily prayers made obligatory during *miraj*
 Hijrah to Medina, 27th Safar (2nd month in Islamic calendar) (A.D. 622);
 (hijrah is used as the starting point of the Islamic calendar - *added by*
 instructor)

LIFE AT MEDINA

- A.H. 1 (first year after the hijrah) Arrival at Medina; Establishment of First
 Islamic State Treaty with the Jews
- A.H. 2 Jihad ordained, 12th Safar; Ramadan fast prescribed; Marriage of Ali and
 Fatimah
- A.H. 3 First revelation restricting the drinking of wine; First revelation about *riba*
 (interest); Revelation of laws about orphans; Revelation of laws of
 inheritance;
- A.H. 4 Revelation of the requirement for *hijab* for women
- A.H. 5 Revelation of laws about adultery and slander
- A.H. 7 Revelations of laws about marriage and divorce
- A.H. 8 Conquest of Mecca, 20th Ramadan
- A.H. 9 Revelation of order concerning *jizya* tax for non-Muslims minorities; Hajj
 prescribed
- A.H. 11 Death, 12 Rabi al-awwal (3rd month on Islamic calendar), at age 63 (A.D.
 632)

In regard to the revelations that Muhammad received for 22 years up until his death. Sir Norman Anderson, in his book, “The World’s Religions,” comments on Muhammad’s initial thoughts regarding the source of these revelations:

It seems, however, that Muhammad himself was at first doubtful of the source of these revelations, fearing that he was possessed by one of the jinn, or sprites, as was commonly believed to be the case with Arab poets and soothsayers. But Khadijah and others reassured him, and he soon began to propound divine revelations with increasing frequency. (p. 55; quoted from Handbook of Today’s Religions p. 380)

Adherents:

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world today with 1.2 billion followers. It is the second largest religion in the world. Islam influences and dominates 50 nations in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. There are 35 countries with a population of 87% Muslim.

Ron Carlson and Ed Decker in “Fast Facts on False Teaching” state:

When most people think about Muslims, they immediately think of Middle East or North Africa, but in fact most of them live in other countries. The largest Muslim country is Indonesia, with 196 million Muslims. Bangladesh has 104 million and Pakistan another 125 million. India has about 133 million Muslims (www.islamicweb.com).

To the surprise of many people, there is also a large Muslim population in China. In fact, nearly 133 million Muslims live in China. Russia has approximately 26 million Muslims. In Turkey there are about 62 million and in Iran about 65 million. (p. 102)

There are two main divisions within Islam: Sunni and Shiah (Shi'ites). Sunni Muslims make up 90% of the adherents to Islam. Shi'ites are the majority only in Iran. But in other countries they are the minority and have at times been persecuted by the Sunnis. Patrick Sookhdeo explains the origins of Shiah:

The split into Sunni and Shiah originated in a dispute over the leadership succession little more than twenty years after Muhammad's death. Muhammad's successors were known as caliphs, and the first three [Abu Bakr (632), Umar (634) and Uthman (644) - *added by instructor*]. The fourth caliph, who succeeded in 656, was Ali, the husband of Muhammad's daughter Fatima. He was not universally accepted as the rightful successor and Muslims began to fight each other over this issue. Ali was eventually murdered in 661 and the struggle was continued by his two sons, Hassan and Hussain. Hassan was poisoned in about 670 and Hussain died at the Battle of Karbala in 680. Ali's followers, Shiah Ali [the party Ali], became the Shiah Muslims. (p. 65)

Important Definitions:

Abu Bakr - (reign: 632-634 A.D.) The first Moslem caliph, according to Sunni Muslims. The Shi'te Muslims reject this and instead consider the fourth caliph, 'Ali, as the first true successor to Mohammad.

Allah - The Supreme Being. The name of God, derived from the Arabic *Al-Ilah*.

Caliph - The title given to office of the spiritual and political leadership which took over after Mohammad's death.

Fatima - The daughter of Mohammad and of his first wife; and the wife of 'Ali, the fourth Caliph.

Hadith - The sacred sayings of Mohammad, handed down by oral tradition, for generations after Mohammad's death until finally transcribed.

Hajj - the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, to be performed by the believer once in a lifetime if economically possible.

Hajji or *hadji* - one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Hijab - literally 'partition' or 'curtain'; the institution of the seclusion of women; often used to mean the woman's head covering which conceals, neck, hair and sometimes face.

Hijrah or *Hegira* - Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622, which was used as the starting point of the Islamic calendar.

Iblis - one of the names of the devil.

Imam - A Moslem who is considered by Sunnis to be an authority in Islamic law and theology or the man who leads the prayers. Also refers to each of the founders of the four principal sects of Islam. The Shi'ites accept 12 great Imams.

Islam - literally, "submission to the will of Allah".

Janna - literally "garden"; a term used for paradise (heaven).

Jihad - literally 'an effort of striving'; a religious or holy war; sometimes understood as spiritual struggle.

Jinn - a spirit created by Allah. There are some good jinn, but many are evil.

Jumma - Friday, the Muslim holy day

Kaba - A small stone building located in the court of the great mosque at Mecca containing the black stone (a meteorite) supposedly given to Abraham by Gabriel.

Kabira - 'great' sins

Koran (Quran) - said to be the final and complete inspired word of God transmitted to the prophet Mohammad by the angel Gabriel.

Mahdi - "the guided one". A leader who will cause righteousness to fill the earth. The Sunnites are still awaiting his initial appearance while the Shi'ites hold that the last Imam, who disappeared in 874 A.D. will someday reappear as the Mahdi.

Mecca - the birthplace of Muhammad. This city, located in Saudi Arabia, is considered the most holy city by the Moslems.

Medina - a holy city of Islam named for Mohammad. It was previously named Yathrib. It is the city to which Mohammad fled in 622 A.D.

Mohammad or *Muhammad* - The prophet and founder of Islam. Born around 570 A.D., and died 632 A.D.

Moslem or *Muslim* - a follower of Mohammad. Literally "one who submits".

Mosque - an Islamic place of worship.

Muezzlin - A Moslem crier who announces the hour of prayer.

Mulla - a teacher of Islamic laws and doctrines.

Omar - according to the Sunnites, the second Moslem caliph and principal advisor to the first caliph, Abu Bakr.

Purday - a veil or covering used by Moslem women to ensure them privacy against public observation, and to indicate their submission.

Ramadan - The ninth month of the Moslem year, when Mohammad received the Quran from heaven, and now devoted to fasting.

Saghira - 'little' sins.

Salat - The Moslem daily prayer ritual. One of the five pillars of Islamic faith.

Shaytan - one of the names of the devil.

Shi'ites - A Moslem sect which rejects the first three caliphs, insisting that Mohammad's son-in-law 'Ali was Mohammad's rightful initial successor.

Shirk - associating anyone with Allah as a co-deity. The worst sin in Islam.

Sufis - Iranian (Persian) philosophical mystics who have largely adapted and reinterpreted Islam for themselves.

Sunnites - the largest Moslem sect which acknowledges the first four caliphs as Mohammad's rightful successors. Literally 'one of the path'.

Surahs - what the chapters of the Quran are called. Literally 'a row or series'.

(Definitions taken from both "A Christian's Pocket Guide to Islam" and "Handbook of Today's Religions")

Belief System:

Islam is not only a religion but a culture which embraces all of life both politically and socially. Therefore, it is important to know a little bit about Islamic culture, how they think, in order to be an effective witness for Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Faith and Works:

The first demand of Islam upon its followers is what is called 'iman' (first believed and confessed). Islamic theologians define this term as a confession with the tongue and belief with the heart. The full confession required by its adherents goes - "I believe in Allah, his angels, his books, his prophets, in the last day, in the predestination by the Most High Allah of good and evil, and in the resurrection after death". The section titled - 'The Six Articles of Faith' describe in detail iman. The shorter confession, known as *shahada* or *kalima* goes - "I testify that there is no Allah [god] but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah".

The second requirement of Muslims is *din* or religion, which connotes doing good works or practical duties, which are five in number, known as *arkan-ud-din* (the pillars of religion). These five requirements of religious duty are defined and described under 'The Five Pillars of Islam'.

The Six Articles of Faith:

Patrick Sookhdeo describes these 'Six Articles of Faith':

1. God [Allah]

The unity of Allah is clearly taught in the Quran. Like the Bible, the Quran does not argue for the existence of God. It assumes that Allah is. The oneness of Allah is the first article of the *kalima*: 'There is no deity but Allah [la ilah ill Allahu]. Similarly, there is the repeated affirmation that *shirk*, the 'giving of partners to Allah' is the worst of sins. Allah is one, having no equals and no partner. Omnipotence and omniscience are ascribed to Allah and are thought to safeguard both his unity and his majesty.

2. Angels [malaikah]

Angels are frequently mentioned in the Quran. They are created beings, made of light, and are referred to as 'messengers of Allah' with specific functions. They watch over humans and some record their deeds, both good and bad... The greatest Jib rail [Gabriel], the revealer of Allah to Muhammad, who is also called Rul ul' Amin, the Holy Spirit. The other archangels include Mikail [Michael] the provider, Israfil the trumpeter of doom, and Izrail the custodian who has the care of the faithful at death.

Contrasted with the angels are the jinn, some good, some evil. They were created by Allah out of smokeless fire before he created Adam out of clay (Q 15:26)... The devil, whose name is Iblis or Shaytan [Satan], is sometimes described as a jinn and sometimes as an angel.

3. Books [kutub]

Muslims believe that Allah has revealed his commands to men through his prophets and through 104 sacred books. Of these books, only four now remain, believed to have been given to Moses (the Taurah I.e. the Pentateuch), David (the Zabur, the Psalms), Jesus (the Injil, the Gospels or the New Testament in general) and Muhammad (the Quran). It is claimed that Jews and Christians, described jointly as *ahl-al-kitab* [the people of the book], changed and distorted their own Scriptures, so Allah sent the Quran as the final revelation to mankind.

4. Prophets [nabi]

A Muslim cannot deny any of the prophets of the Old Testament or John the Baptist and Jesus in the New Testament (Q 2:285). Of the many prophets, only nine are regarded as major prophets. These are Noah, Abraham, David, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Muhammad is the only prophet mentioned in the Quran who is not mentioned in the Old or New Testaments, though Muslims think that some of the references to the coming Holy Spirit were prophecies about Muhammad. As the final messenger, he is often referred to as "the seal of the prophets".

Muslims do not worship Muhammad or any of the prophets but consider them examples and models for mankind. They dislike being called 'Muhammadans' because they are not worshippers of Muhammad but of Allah. None of the prophets are considered divine.

5. Day of judgment [yawm al-akhirah] and resurrection after death [basi bad al-maut]

The day of judgment is described vividly in the Quran and is closely connected with the resurrection. The day will be preceded by clear signs and natural catastrophes, the appearance of the Antichrist [Dajjal], tumults and seditions, commotion in heaven and earth (Q 101:1-5; 70:9-10), darkening of the sun and moon (Q 75:8; 81:1) and Christ's second coming, as a Muslim. On the last day:

The trumpet will (just) Be sounded, when all that are in the heavens And on earth will swoon, except such as it will, Please Allah (to exempt). Then will a second one, Be sounded, when, behold, They will be standing, And looking on! (Q 39:68)

After the resurrection people will wander about for forty years, during which time the books containing the records of their deeds kept by the recording angels will be given up. Then will follow the weighing of the deeds on the eschatological scales [mizan].

Then those whose balance (of good deeds) is heavy - They will attain salvation. But those whose balance is light, will be those who have lost their souls; In Hell will they abide. (Q 23:102, 103)

Then everybody, believers and unbelievers, has to cross a very narrow bridge [sirat]. Some Muslims will be saved immediately, some will fall off the bridge into hell and afterwards be released. The infidels will all fall into hell and remain there forever.

6. Allah's sovereign decrees - predestination [taqdir]

Muslim devotion attributes to Allah supreme and sovereign power over all things. The Muslim believer must submit to Allah's will. The doctrine of absolute predestination is widespread. Maktub [it is written], maqdur [it is decided] and kismat [it is my lot] are expressions commonly used to express this fatalism.

(A Christian's Pocket Guide to Islam, pages 15-19)

Shariah - Islamic Law:

Islamic teaching is not only derived from the Quran, but also from a collection of traditions that record the words and deeds of Muhammad called the "hadith". The hadith is considered second only to the Quran and thus provides Muslims with detailed instructions on religious practices and social conduct based on the life of Muhammad. Sookhdeo writes:

Where the Quran and traditions are silent on a particular subject, rules are derived by consensus of the religious leaders [ijma] and by analogous reasoning [qiyas]. The combination of Quran, hadith, ijma and qiyas have been used by Islamic scholars to create the immensely detailed body of rules and regulations known as the Shariah, that is, Islamic law. (p. 19)

Another feature of the Shariah are the draconian punishments for certain crimes, such as amputation for theft, stoning for adultery etc. Of relevance to the Christian evangelist is the death sentence for any Muslim who leaves the faith, which is considered equivalent to treason against the state. (p. 20)

The rule that apostates from Islam should be executed is part of the state law in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Sudan, to name but three. The Shariah's teaching that apostasy from Islam is like treason results in terrible shame being felt by a Muslim family if one of their members converts to Christianity. There will normally be rejection of the convert and sometimes violence, even murder, in accordance with the Shariah's death penalty for an apostate.

The ultimate goal of Muslim radicals is to introduce full Shariah as widely as possible in the world, and thus create an Islamic state similar to that in Medina in Muhammad's time. (p. 21)

Jesus in Islam:

Jesus is a prominent person in the Quran. He is referred to as the 'Son of Mary' or 'Jesus, son of Mary,' and four times as 'the Messiah, son of Mary'. But never as the Son of God. Though Jesus is regarded as a prophet sent from Allah, yet He is rejected as God in human flesh. His death for sin and resurrection is rejected, in fact, it is not only rejected but denied. Some interpreters of the Quran believe that Jesus did not die on the cross but rather Allah frustrated the plans of the Jews by having them crucify Judas instead. Many Muslims believe that Allah took Jesus to heaven but He will return to earth in the future as a Muslim, will get married, have children, die and then be buried next to Muhammad.

Here are some statements in the Quran concerning Jesus:

1. The virgin birth

Behold, The angels said: 'O Mary! Allah giveth thee
Glad tidings of a Word from Him, his name will be Christ Jesus.
The son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter
And of (the company of) those nearest to Allah.' (Q 3:45)

She said: 'O my Lord! How shall I have a son
When no man hath touched me?' He said: 'Even so:
Allah createth
What He willeth:
When He hath decreed
A Plan, He but saith
To it, "Be," and it is' (Q 3:47)

2. Denial of the Trinity and of the deity of Christ

Christ Jesus the son of Mary
Was (no more than) A messenger of Allah,
And His Word,
Which He bestowed on Mary,
And a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe

In Allah and His Messengers.
 Say not 'Trinity': desist: It will be better for you:
 For Allah is One God: (Far exalted is He) above
 Having a son. (Q 4:171)
 And behold, Allah will say:
 'O Jesus the son of Mary!
 Didst thou say unto men,
 "Worship me and my mother
 As gods in derogation of Allah?"
 He will say: "Glory to Thee!
 Never could I say
 What I had no right (To say)." (Q 5:116)

If you notice in the above verse the question Allah reportedly asks Jesus, "Didst thou say unto men, 'Worship me and my mother as gods in derogation (tending to impair the value of; detracting) of Allah?" Muslims use this verse to reject the Trinity and we as Christians would reject their concept of Trinity based on this verse. Evangelical Christians believe that the Holy Trinity consists of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Not the Father, the Mother (Mary), and the Son. And it is clear from Scripture that Jesus claimed to be God and never rebuked anyone who regarded Him as such (John 1:1; 8:58; 10:30; 20:28).

(All quotes from the Quran come from Sookhdeo's book, A Christian's Pocket Guide to Islam, pp. 34-37)

The Quran:

The Quran is the chief sacred book for Muslims, they believe that it was revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel during the last twenty-two years of his life. Muslims believe that when the Quran speaks that it speaks with absolute authority. And though Muslims believe that the Old and New Testament are inspired by Allah, yet they also believe that the Jews and Christians have corrupted the Scriptures, thus Muslims must decide which Scriptures are from Allah and the Scriptures that have been corrupted.

The Quran is about the same length as the New Testament and is divided into 114 surahs (chapters), with the longest chapters placed at the beginning and the shortest chapters placed at the end. The only exception to this is surah 1, which is a prayer to Allah, but it is Allah himself who is speaking not the prophet Muhammad. The first surah is the daily prayer of the Muslims, almost like the Lord's Prayer for Christians. Sookhdeo writes:

The word 'Quran' is derived from the Arabic word qara meaning 'to read' or 'to recite'. Its use in connection with the Muslim Scriptures is based on the first word of surah 96, which begins: 'Proclaim! (or read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher...' The first five verses of this surah are generally regarded as the earliest revelation. (p. 26)

The Five Pillars of Islam:

The Five Pillars of Islam are foundational practices for every Muslim. These duties are absolutely essential in the process of trying to reach paradise [*janna*]. Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, in the book “Handbook of Today’s Religions” gives a brief summary of the five pillars of Islam alongside with quotes from other resources giving further detail:

1. The Creed. (*Kalima*). “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah,” is the bedrock of Muslim belief. One must state this aloud publicly to become a Muslim. It is repeated constantly by the faithful.

2. Prayer (*Salat*). Prayer as ritual is central to a devout Muslim. Boa comments:

The practice of prayer (salat) five times a day (upon rising, at noon, in midafternoon, after sunset, and before retiring). The worshipper must recite the prescribed prayers (the first surah and other selections from the Koran) in Arabic while facing the Ka’aba in Mecca. The Hadith (book of tradition) has turned these prayers into a mechanical procedure of standing, kneeling, hands and face on the ground, and so forth. The call to prayer is sounded by the *muezzin* (a Muslim crier) from a tower called a *minaret* which is part of the *mosque* (the place of public worship).

3. Almsgiving (*Zakat*). Muhammad, himself an orphan, had a strong desire to help the needy. The alms originally were voluntary, but all Muslims are legally required to give one-fortieth of their income for the destitute.

Since those to whom alms are given are helping the giver to salvation, they feel no sense of debt to the giver. On the contrary, it is the giver’s responsibility and duty to give and he should consider himself lucky he has someone to give to.

4. Fasting (*Ramadan*). Faithful Muslims fast from sunup to sundown each day during this holy month. The fast develops self-control, devotion to God and identity with the destitute. No food or drink may be consumed during the daylight hours; no smoking or sexual pleasures may be enjoyed, either. Many Muslims eat two meals a day during Ramadan, one before sunrise and one shortly after sunset.

5. The Pilgrimage (*Hajj*). The pilgrimage is expected of all Muslims at least once in their lifetimes. It can be extremely arduous on the old or infirm, so in their cases they may send someone in their places. The trip is an essential part in Muslims’ gaining salvation. It involves a set of ceremonies and rituals, many of which center around the Ka’aba shrine, to which the pilgrimage is directed. Of the Ka’aba, Muhammad M. Pickthall comments in *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*:

The Meccans claimed descent from Abraham through Ishmael, and tradition stated that their temple, the Ka’aba, had been build by Abraham for the worship of the One God. It was still called the House of Allah, but the chief objects of worship there were a number of idols which were called daughters of Allah and intercessors (Pickthall, op. cit., p. ix)

When the pilgrim is about six miles from the holy city, he enters upon the state of *ihram*: he casts off, after prayers, his ordinary clothes and puts on two seamless garments; he walks almost barefooted and neither shaves, cuts his hair nor cuts his nails.

The principle activity consists of a visit to the Sacred mosque (*al-Masjid al-Haram*); the kissing of the Black Stone (*al-Hajar al-Aswad*); seven circumambulations of the Ka'aba three times running and four times slowly; the visit to the sacred stone called Maqam Ibrahim; the ascent of and running between Mt. Safa and Mt. Marwa seven times; the visit to Mt. Arafat; the hearing of a sermon there and spending the night at Muzdalifa; the throwing of stones at the three pillars at Mina and offering sacrifice on the last day of Ihram, which is the 'id of sacrifice (*'Id al-Adha*) (Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit., p. 664).

There is a sixth religious duty associated with the five pillars. This is *Jihad*, the Holy War. This duty requires that when the situation warrants, men are required to go to war to spread Islam or defend it against infidels. One who dies in a *Jihad* is guaranteed eternal life in Paradise (heaven). (pp. 391-92).

Sharing the Gospel with Muslims:

Sookhdeo, at the end of his book gives some important advice in witnessing to Muslims:

- For Christians who would preach the Gospel to Muslims, nothing less than the power of God released by the Holy Spirit is adequate.
- Most Muslims who come to Christ are not won over by intellectual arguments which disprove the validity of Islam.
- The Christian seeking to witness to Muslims should have a thorough knowledge of the Bible, as well as of Islam. Personal testimony is always powerful.
- For the Muslim, Muhammad is the last and greatest of the prophets. No useful purpose is served by unnecessary criticism of him.
- When challenged as to the life and work of Muhammad and the authority and inspiration of the Quran, it may be wiser to attempt to bring the questioner to consider Christ rather than to counter the Muslims' claim about Muhammad, and to point to the Bible rather than to become involved in argument about the nature of the Quran.
- (When it claims to the godless immorality in western society) The Christian believer must make it clear that true Christians are just as shocked by this as Muslims (1 Pet. 2:11-12). To prove this, the Christian must be very careful about certain aspects of culture. Clothes should be modest and not close fitting, especially for women. The Christian should only seek to talk to those of the same sex. Any conversation with the opposite sex should be at the Muslim's initiative. Never touch anyone of the opposite sex, even to shake hands, unless the other person initiates it. Try also to avoid eye contact with the opposite sex, even if a conversation develops. Treat both the Bible and the Quran with great respect, not placing them on the floor and not writing in them. (pp. 73-75)

For Additional Information:

A Christian's Pocket Guide to Islam, Patrick Sookhdeo.

The Kingdom of the Cults, Walter Martin.

Handbook of Today's Religions, Josh McDowell and Don Stewart.

The Islamic Invasion, Robert Morey.

The Facts on Islam, John Ankerberg and John Weldon.

BUDDHISM

Origin/History:

The religion of Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama who probably lived from 563 to 483 B.C., who was born into a wealthy Hindu family. Siddhartha lived a sheltered life in his earlier years in the hill country that bordered modern day India and Nepal.

Josh McDowell and Don Stewart in the “Handbook of Today’s Religions” gives a good biography of Siddhartha’s early life and how he later became “the Buddha” or “enlightened one:

His family name was Gautama, his given name Siddhartha. Siddhartha was the son of a rajah, or ruler. His mother died when he was just a week old and Siddhartha was cared for by his mother’s sister, who was also the rajah’s second wife. There was supposedly a prophecy given at the time of his birth by a sage at his father’s court.

The prophecy said that the child would be a great king if he stayed at home, but if he decided to leave home, he would become a savior for mankind. This bothered his father, for he wanted his son to succeed him as king. Therefore, to keep him at home, his father surrounded him with wealth and pleasures and kept all painful and ugly things out of his sight.

Siddhartha eventually married and had a son but was still confined to the palace and its pleasures. One day he informed his father that he wished to see the world. This excursion would forever change his life, for it was during this journey that he saw “the four passing sights”.

Although his father ordered the streets to be cleansed and decorated and all elderly or infirmed people to stay inside, there were those who did not get the message. The first troubling sight Siddhartha saw was that of a decrepit old man. When Siddhartha asked what happened to this man, he was told that the man was old, as everyone someday would become.

Later, he met a sick man and was told that all people were liable to be sick and suffer pain like that individual.

He then saw a funeral procession with a corpse on its way to cremation, the followers weeping bitterly. When asked what that meant, the prince was informed that it was the way of life, for sooner or later both prince and pauper would have to die.

The last sight was that of a monk begging for his food. The tranquil look on the beggar’s face convinced Siddhartha that this type of life was for him. Immediately he left the palace and his family in search of enlightenment. The night that he left his home to seek enlightenment became known as the Great Renunciation.

The former prince, now a beggar, spent his time wandering from place to place seeking wisdom. Unsatisfied by the truths taught in the Hindu scriptures, he became discouraged but continued on his quest. He tried asceticism but this gave him no peace. The fateful day in his life came while he was meditating beneath a fig tree.

Deep in meditation, he reached the highest degree of God-consciousness, known as nirvana. He supposedly stayed under the fig tree for seven days, after that, the fig tree was called the bodhi, or the bo tree, the tree of wisdom. The truths he learned he would now impart to the world, no longer as Siddhartha Gautama, but as the Buddha, the enlightened one (p. 305)

After Siddhartha's experience under the fig tree, he met with five monks and began teaching them the way of enlightenment. These monks would become his companions as he would spread his teachings throughout India.

This new teaching created such hope to the people of India who were disillusioned with the religious beliefs of Hinduism, that at the time of Buddha's death at the age of 80, his teachings had received strong support from the populace.

Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism:

When the religion of Buddhism began, it was largely confined to India and was referred to as Theravada Buddhism. But as Buddhism became popular outside of India, particularly in China and Japan, it began to distinguish itself in its teachings from Theravada Buddhism and thus became known as Mahayana Buddhism. Theravada means "Little Vehicle" and Mahayana means "Great Vehicle". The term "vehicle" pictures for Buddhists the belief that the teaching of Buddhism is like a vehicle or ship that takes them through this life of suffering to the state of bliss or Nirvana. The Agency of Cultural Affairs in Japanese Religion describes the beginnings of Mahayana Buddhism and how distinct its teachings are from Theravada Buddhism:

By the time of King Asoka (236-232 B.C.), Indian Buddhism had split into a number of groups generally referred to as Theravada schools. Again, around the beginning of the Christian era, Mahayana Buddhism arose, being distinguished from Theravada Buddhism primarily by its enlargement of the bodhisattva ideal, according to which certain compassionate beings or bodhisattvas defer their own emancipation in order to save others, and by its consequent enlargement of the offer of salvation, making it available not only to those who enter monastic orders but to all who trust in a bodhisattva.

For several centuries Buddhism continued to evolve in India, developing in interaction with the various Indian religions and philosophies, but due to the Islamic invasion of the thirteenth century, it ceased to exist in the land of its birth (Agency of Cultural Affairs, Japanese Religion: A Survey, Tokyo, New York and San Francisco: Kodansha International Ltd., 1972, 1981, p. 48; copied from *Handbook on Today's Religions*, p. 308).

The Handbook of Today's Religions gives a good comparative chart distinguishing the teachings of Theravada Buddhism from Mahayana Buddhism:

<i>Theravada</i>	<i>Mahayana</i>
Man as an individual	Man as involved with others
Man on his own in the Universe (emancipation by self effort)	Man not alone (salvation by grace)
Key virtue: wisdom	Key virtue: <i>karuna</i> , compassion
Religion: a full-time job (primarily for monks)	Religion: relevant to life in the world (for laymen as well)

Ideal: the Arhat
 Buddha: a saint
 Eschews metaphysics
 Eschews ritual
 Confines prayer to
 Meditation
 Conservative

Ideal: the Bodhisattva
 Buddha: a savior
 Elaborates metaphysics
 Includes ritual
 Includes petitionary prayer
 Liberal

(Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, New York: Harper and Row, 1958, p. 138; *copied from Handbook of Today's Religion*, p. 308-09)

Adherents:

Buddhism is the sixth largest religion in the world with 376 million followers, 6% of the world's population (www.adherents.com). The two main branches of Buddhism: Theravada and Mahayana can be found largely in these countries: Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, Laos, and Cambodia (Theravada); Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam (Mahayana).

Famous Buddhist: [Ernestine Anderson](#) - jazz singer; [Laurie Anderson](#) - performance artist; [Kate Bosworth](#) - actress; [Orlando Bloom](#) - actor; [Susan Blackmore](#) - parapsychologist, Zen Buddhist, ghost buster, professional skeptic; [Cora L. E. Christian](#) - Black female doctor who was an independent candidate for Governor of U.S. Virgin Islands, 2002; [Leonard Cohen](#) - Canadian poet, novelist; [Rob Cohen](#) - film director; [Dadon Dawadolma](#) - singer, actress; [Diane di Prima](#) - Feminist poet; [Nathaniel Dorsky](#) - filmmaker; [Richard Gere](#) - actor, movie star; [Goldie Hawn](#) - Oscar-winning actress; [Frank Herbert](#) - science fiction writer famous for *Dune* series; [Becky Johnston](#) - author, screenwriter; [Phil Jackson](#) - basketball coach; [Jack Kerouac](#) - poet, writer; [George Lucas](#) - film producer, director ("Star Wars"); [Jennifer Lopez](#) - singer, actress; [Joanna Lumley](#) - actress; [Melissa Mathison](#) - screenwriter; [Tano Maeda](#) - filmmaker; [Me'shell Ndegeocello](#) - musician, songwriter; [Bruce Joel Rubin](#) - screenwriter; [Keanu Reeves](#) - actor; [Michael Stipe](#) - musician; [Oliver Stone](#) - film director; [Patti Smith](#) - rock star; [Steven Seagal](#) - actor; [Renee Tajima-Pena](#) - filmmaker; [Tina Turner](#) - singer; [Uma Thurman](#) - actress; [Babeth VanLoo](#) - filmmaker; [Gene Vincent](#) - rockabilly musician; [Mark Wahlberg](#) - rap singer, actor; [Alice Walker](#) - author, *The Color Purple*; [Ruby Wax](#) - actress, comedienne; [Adam Yauch \(MCA of the Beasties\)](#) - rap singer

Important Definitions:

An-Atta - literally, "not self". A concept in Theravada Buddhism denying the permanent existence of self as contained by physical and mental attributes.

Bhikkhu – A Buddhist monk who wanders about depending upon others for his basic necessities.

Bodhi - A Buddhist term for the wisdom by which one attains for his basic enlightenment.

Bodhisattva - In Mahayana Buddhism, one who postpones attaining nirvana to help others achieve this goal. In Theravada Buddhism, it is one who is on the way to becoming a Buddha. Gautama is called a Bodhisattva before he attained enlightenment.

Buddha - “The enlightened one.” This title was given to Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, upon his enlightenment. Likewise, a person can attain this position through following the fourfold path to enlightenment.

Buddhism - The religion based upon the teachings of the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama). The Buddha’s main teaching revolved around the causes for human suffering and the way to salvation from this suffering could be achieved. The two main branches of Buddhism are called Mahayana and Theravada or Hinayana.

Dalai Lama - The title of the head of the hierarchal system of Tibetan Buddhism. Worshipped as the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Chenresi.

Dhamma or *Dharma* - The teachings of the Buddha. Related to the Sanskrit *Dharma*, or virtuous principles.

Dukkha - Suffering, which is rooted in desire and attachment.

Gohonzon - A small black wooden box used as an object of religious devotion, an altar, in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism.

Heart Sutra - One of the most important scriptures to Zen Buddhists.

Koan - A verbal puzzle in Zen Buddhism which aids the pupil in loosing himself from this world and moving toward enlightenment.

Mahayana - The form of Buddhism prevalent in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Literally translated, means “the great vehicle”.

Maya - In Buddhism, the mother of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha).

Nirvana - A difficult, if not impossible, word to define. In Buddhism, it is basically a blissful spiritual condition where the heart extinguishes passion, hatred and delusion. It is the highest spiritual plane one person can attain.

Pitaka - Literally, “basket”. Refers to the “three baskets” (Tripitaka) of sacred Buddhist writings.

Pure Land - Refers to a teaching in the Lotus Sutra which emphasizes faith in the Buddha of immeasurable light (Buddha Amitabha) and the goal of rebirth in his heaven of the pure land. Emphasizes easy attainment of nirvana. There are also Chinese and Japanese Pure Land sects.

Pure Land Buddhism - A sect that bases its faith in the Amida Buddha (the Buddha of the infinite light) as its saviour who will lead his followers into a celestial paradise. Salvation is achieved by repeating Amida’s name (the Nembutsu).

Samsara - The cycle of birth, suffering, death and rebirth.

Sangha - The Buddhist monastic order literally translated as “group” or “community”. May be the oldest order in Buddhism.

Satori - The term for enlightenment in Zen Buddhism.

Soka Gakkai - The Creative-Value Study Society. The modern revival of a thirteenth century Buddhist sect, Nichiren Shoshu.

Stupas - Originally, burial mounds, now used as relic chambers or memorials, especially of the Buddha.

Theravada - Literally the “teachings of the elders”. The form of Buddhism that arose early among Buddha’s disciples. Also called Hinayana Buddhism. Prevails in Southeast Asia.

Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism) - A sect of the Buddhism that began in Tibet in the seventh century A.D. It combined Buddhist principles with the occult religion of Tibet, producing Lamaism. The priests are all called Lamas and at the head is the Dalai Lama, a man who is worshipped as the reincarnated Bodhisattva Chenresi (Avalokita).

True Sect of the Pure Land - A sect emphasizing the teachings of Pure Land, founded in the thirteenth century by Shinran. Today it is the largest of any Buddhist sect in Japan.

Vinaya - The first of the three parts of the Pitaka, or scriptures of Buddhism, containing the rules of discipline of the Buddhist monastic order.

Zazen - Zen meditation, concentrating on a problem or koan.
(Definitions taken from “Handbook of Today’s Religions,” pp. 321-323)

Belief System:

When Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) began to disciple the five monks who became his companions in spreading the teachings of Buddhism, he first preached a sermon to them at Benares which describes the basics of Buddhism:

These two extremes, monks, are not to be practiced by one who has gone forth from the world. What are the two? That conjoined with the passions and luxury, which is low, vulgar, common, ignoble, and useless; and conjoined with self-torture, which is painful, ignoble, and useless. Avoiding these two extremes the Blessed One has gained the enlightenment of the Middle Path, which produces insight and knowledge, and leads to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment, nirvana.

And what, monks, is the Middle Path...? It is the noble Eightfold Path: namely, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration...

Now this, monks, is the noble truth of pain (dukkha): birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, sorrow, lamentation, dejection, and despair are painful. Contact with unpleasant things is painful, not getting what one wishes is painful. In short the five components of existence are painful.

Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of pain, the cessation without a remainder of craving, the abandonment, forsaking, release, non-attachment.

Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the path that leads to the cessation of pain: this is the noble Eightfold Path (E.A. Burtt, ed., *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, New York: New American Library, 1955, pp. 29-30; *copied from the Handbook of Today's Religions*, p. 306).

From this sermon the “Four Noble Truths” were developed which form the foundation of Buddhism:

- 1) Life is suffering.
- 2) Suffering is caused by desire.
- 3) The cessation of desire eliminates suffering.
- 4) The stopping of desire comes by following “The Middle Path” between the extremes of sensuousness and asceticism (Fast Facts on False Teaching, p. 24).

Now the “Middle Path” that Buddha taught could not be achieved unless the “Eightfold Path,” is followed, which combines the knowledge of the “Four Noble Truths”. The “Eightfold Path” is:

The first step on that path is *Right Views*: You must accept the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

The second step is *Right Resolve*: You must renounce the pleasures of the senses; you must harbor no ill will toward anyone and harm no living creature.

The third step is *Right Speech*: Do not lie; do not slander or abuse anyone. Do not indulge in idle talk.

The fourth is *Right Behavior*: Do not destroy any living creature; take only what is given to you; do not commit any unlawful sexual act.

The fifth is *Right Occupation*: You must earn your livelihood in a way that will harm no one.

The sixth is *Right Effort*: You must revolve and strive heroically to prevent any evil qualities from arising in you and to abandon any evil qualities that you may possess. Strive to acquire good qualities and encourage those you do possess to grow, increase and be perfected.

The seventh is *Right Contemplation*: Be observant, strenuous, alert, contemplative, free of desire and of sorrow.

The eighth is *Right Meditation*: When you have abandoned all sensuous pleasures, all evil qualities, both joy and sorrow, you must then enter the four degrees of meditation, which are produced by concentration (*Handbook of Today's Religions*, p. 307).

Ron Carlson and Ed Decker describe in more detail the last three steps of the “Eightfold Path”:

The last three steps of the Eightfold Path are more spiritual in their concern. Right Effort is the emptying of the mind, directing your attention toward final liberation from the world of suffering. Right Concentration involves the higher states of mind and body control.

Right Ecstasy is achieved when all the sense experiences cease, and universal knowledge is obtained. This is release or final liberation, where you are no longer reborn through reincarnation.

You become one with the Impersonal, the state of Nirvana. It is often described as the blowing out of a candle. You lose all personality and awareness and merge into “nothingness”. At this point, Buddha said, you will be at peace. But it is always at the loss of your own soul and personality.

The goal of human existence, Buddha taught, was to free oneself from the law of “Karma” (cause and effect of good and bad deeds) and achieve the state of “Nirvana,” where one ceases desiring and thus eliminates suffering (Fast Facts on False Teaching, pp. 24-25).

Nirvana:

The motivation behind the “Four Noble Truths” and the “Eightfold Path” is the hope of attaining Nirvana. This is the final goal for all Buddhists. Donald K. Swearer gives insight into the concept of nirvana:

Nirvana has been a troublesome idea for students of Buddhism. Just what is it? The term itself does not offer much help. Like not-self (*an-atta*), nirvana is a negative term. Literally, it means the “blowing out” of the flame of desire, the negation of suffering (*dukkha*). This implies that nirvana is not to be thought of as a place but as a total reorientation or state of being realized as a consequence of the extinction of blinding and binding attachment. Thus, at least, nirvana implies that the kind of existence one has achieved is inconceivable in the ordinary terms of the world (Donald K. Swearer, *Buddhism*, Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1977, p. 44; copied from *Handbook of Today's Religions*, p. 309).

Sacred Scriptures:

In Theravada Buddhism there are three groups of writing that are considered sacred scripture, they are called “The Three Baskets” (Tripitaka):

The Vinaya Pitaka (discipline basket) contains rules for the higher class of Buddhists; the Sutta Pitaka (teaching basket) contains the discourses of the Buddha; and the Abidhamma Pitaka (metaphysical basket) contains Buddhist theology. The total volume of these three groups of writings is about 11 times larger than the Bible (*The Handbook of Today's Religions*, p. 310).

In Mahayana Buddhism the sacred scriptures are larger than “The Three Baskets” of Theravada Buddhism. Clark B. Offner, in his book “The World's Religions,” describes these scriptures:

“A Mahayanist is one who reads Mahayana scriptures” is the definition given by one ancient Buddhist scholar. In contrast to the comparatively limited scope of the Pali canon used by Theravada Buddhists, Mahayana scriptures have multiplied to the point where standard editions of the Chinese canon encompass over 5,000 volumes. While the oldest scriptures are based on Sanskrit and contain much that is parallel to the Pali canon, other scriptures which have no Sanskrit prototypes have been written in Nepalese, Tibetan and Chinese.

Since there are no clear limits to the Mahayana “canon,” comparatively recent works by later innovators are often given *de facto* canonical status in the sect which adhere to their teachings. As there are such a number and such a variety of scriptures, most Mahayana sects have chosen certain favourite ones to which they refer exclusively.

The fact is that some such selection is necessary, for this extreme bulk and breadth of the scriptures make it impossible for believers to be acquainted with, let alone understand and practice, the often contradictory teachings found in them (p. 181; *copied from Handbook of Today's Religions*).

The Buddhist Creed:

Colonel H.S. Olcott, one of the founding presidents of the Theosophical Society, proposed a unified creed of beliefs for all Buddhist. The various representatives of Buddhist schools of thought meet and agreed with what Olcott drafted in 1881. This fundamental Buddhist Catechism reads:

1. Buddhists are taught to show the same tolerance, forbearance, and brotherly love to all men, without distinction; and an unswerving kindness towards the members of the animal kingdom.
2. The Universe was evolved, not created; and it functions according to law, not according to the caprice of any God.
3. The truths upon which Buddhism is founded are natural. They have, we believe, been taught in successive kalpas, or world periods, by certain illuminated beings called Buddhas, the name Buddha meaning "enlightened".
4. The fourth teacher in the present kalpa was Sakya Muni, or Gautama Buddha, who was born in a royal family in India about 2,500 years ago. He is an historical personage and his name was Siddhartha Gautama.
5. Sakya Muni taught that ignorance produces desire, unsatisfied desire is the cause of rebirth, and rebirth the cause of sorrow. To get rid of sorrow, therefore, it is necessary to escape rebirth; to escape rebirth, it is necessary to extinguish desire, and to extinguish desire, it is necessary to destroy ignorance.
6. Ignorance fosters the belief that rebirth is a necessary thing. When ignorance is destroyed the worthlessness of every such rebirth, considered as an end in itself, is perceived, as well as the paramount need of adopting a course of life by which the necessity for such repeated births can be abolished. Ignorance also begets the illusive and illogical idea that there is only one existence for man, and the other illusion that this one life is followed by states of unchangeable pleasure or torment.
7. The dispersion of all this ignorance can be attained by the persevering practice of an all-embracing altruism in conduct, development of intelligence, wisdom in thought, and destruction of desire for the lower personal pleasures.
8. The desire to live being the cause of rebirth, when that is extinguished rebirths cease and the perfected individual attains by meditation that highest state of peace called nirvana.
9. Sakya Muni taught that ignorance can be dispelled and sorrow removed by the knowledge of the four Noble Truths, viz:

1. The miseries of existence;
 2. The cause productive of misery, which is the desire ever renewed of satisfying oneself without being able ever to secure that end;
 3. The destruction of that desire, or the estranging of oneself from it;
 4. The means of obtaining this destruction of desire. The means which he pointed out is called the Noble Eightfold Path, viz: Right Belief; Right Thought; Right Speech; Right Action; Right Means of Livelihood; Right Exertion; Right Remembrance; Right Meditation.
10. Right Meditation leads to spiritual enlightenment, or the development of that Buddha-like faculty which is latent in every man.
11. The essence of Buddhism as summed up by the Bathgate (Buddha) himself is:
 To cease from all sin,
 To get virtue,
 To purify the heart
12. The universe is subject to a natural causation known as “karma”. The merits and demerits of a being in past experiences determine his condition in the present one. Each man, therefore, has prepared the causes of the effects which he now experiences.
13. The obstacles to the attainment of good karma may be removed by the observance of the following precepts, which are embraced in the moral code of Buddhism, viz: (1) Kill not; (2) Steal not; (3) Indulge in no forbidden sexual pleasure; (4) Lie not; (5) Take no intoxicating or stupefying drug or liquor. Five other precepts, which need not here be enumerated, should be observed by those who would attain more quickly than the average layman the release from misery and rebirth.
14. Buddhism discourages superstitious credulity. Gautama Buddha taught it to be the duty of a parent to have his child educated in science and literature. He also taught that no one should believe what is spoken by any sage, written in any book, or affirmed by a tradition, unless it accord with reason (Cited by Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, London: Penguin Books, 1951, pp. 71-73; copied from *Handbook of Today's Religions*, pp. 311-13).

Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism:

Nichiren Shoshu is a Japanese mystical sect of the branch of Mahayana Buddhism. The founder of this sect, Nichiren, was born the son of a fisherman in Japan in A.D. 1222 (and died in A.D. 1282). McDowell and Stewart explain the worship style of this Buddhist sect:

Central to Nichiren Shostu belief is the “gohonzon”. The gohonzon is a black wooden box containing the names of important people in the Lotus Sutra and is used as a private altar. The gohonzon supposedly contains universal forces that control the devotee’s life. There is, they believe, a direct connection between events in a person’s life and the treatment of the gohonzon.

The worship ritual practiced by Nichiren Shoshu members is called “gongyo”. The practice consists of kneeling before the gohonzon, the recitation of passages from the Lotus Sutra, then rubbing of rosary-type beads while chanting the daimoku - “nam-myoho-enge-kyo”.

The chief object of worship in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism is a shrine known as the Dai-gohonzon located at the base of Mount Fuji in Japan. The individual gohonzons are mystical representations of Dai-gohonzon.

Zen Buddhism:

Zen is a branch of Mahayana Buddhism that is derived from the Japanese “meditation” school of Buddhist philosophy, which was introduced into Japan from China in the seventh century A.D. This form of Buddhist has found wide acceptance in the United States.

Walter Martin, in his book “The Kingdom of the Cults,” shares one of the legends of how Zen came into existence:

Zealous followers of Zen trace their origin to Buddha, who, they claim, imparted to one of his disciples, Mahakasyapa (or Kasyapa), what has become known as “the doctrine of the Buddha mind.” Buddha, as the legend goes, merely picked the flower in silence, and thus communicated the mystical fragment of his mind, hence the emphasis upon the “Buddha mind” in Zen (p. 261).

Josh McDowell and Don Stewart share another legend of how Zen came into existence:

The exact origin of Zen is unknown. Legend has it that Zen’s teaching was derived from Bodhidharma, a wandering Buddhist master living in India 600 years before Christ. Bodhidharma supposedly told a Chinese emperor that the basic tenets of Buddhism are not dependent upon the scriptures; its teachings were directly transmitted from mind to mind and do not need to be explained in words. This sums up Zen’s unorthodox approach to its teaching, for they have no sacred literature which they use for their instruction but employ any writings, Buddhistic or not, they deem necessary to further their religion. Bodhidharma summed up the Zen viewpoint with this famous saying:

A special tradition outside the scriptures,
No dependence on words,
A direct pointing at man,
Seeing into one’s own nature and the attainment of wisdom

One statement attributed to the Buddha has become a frequent reference by Zen teachers: “Look within, you are the Buddha” (Handbook of Today’s Religions, p. 318).

Martin gives an overview of Zen’s teachings:

1. Revelation

Zen is at once the knower and the known. It is also the factor which unites the two in one. It is a way to Truth and not facts about Truth. As Dr. Suzuki puts it, “When we think we know something, there is something we do not know”. For there is still an antithesis, the known and the knower, and Zen seeks that which lies beyond antitheses, however subtle (Christmas Humphreys, *Zen Buddhism*, London, p. 2; *copied from The Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 263-64).

2. Authority

Zen has nothing to teach us in the way of intellectual analysis; nor has it any set doctrines which are imposed on its followers for acceptance. In this respect Zen is quite chaotic if you choose to say so. Probably Zen followers may have sets of doctrines, but they have them on their own account, and for their own benefit; they do not owe the fact to Zen. Therefore, there are in Zen no sacred books or dogmatic tenets, nor are there any symbolic formula through which an access might be gained into the signification of Zen. If I am asked, then, what Zen teaches, I would answer, Zen teaches nothing. Whatever teachings there are in Zen, they come out of one's own mind. We teach ourselves; Zen merely points the way. Unless this pointing is teaching, there is certainly nothing in Zen purposely set up as its cardinal doctrines or as its fundamental philosophy (Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 38; *copied from Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 264).

3. The Nature of God

Is Zen a religion? It is not a religion in the sense that the term is popularly understood; for Zen has no God to worship, no ceremonial rites to observe, no future abode to which the dead are destined, and last of all, Zen has no soul whose welfare is to be looked after by somebody else and whose immortality is a matter of intense concern with some people. Zen is free from all these dogmatic and "religious" encumbrances.

When I say there is no God in Zen, the pious reader may be shocked, but this does not mean that Zen denies the existence of God; neither denial nor affirmation concerns Zen. When a thing is denied, the very denial involves something not denied. The same can be said of affirmation. This is inevitable in logic. Zen wants to rise above logic, Zen wants to find a higher affirmation where there are no antitheses. Therefore, in Zen, God is neither denied nor insisted upon; only there is in Zen no such God as has been conceived by Jewish and Christian minds. For the same reason Zen is not a philosophy, Zen is not a religion.

4. Self-Salvation

In Zen there are no miracles, supernatural interventions, ways nor refuges. We bear the whole responsibility for our actions and no Sage whomsoever he be has the right to encroach on our free will.

We are at the same time responsible for our slavery and our freedom; the chains of our enslavement have been forged by ourselves, and only we can break them...

Nor have we anything to acquire, say the Zen Masters. We have nothing either to receive from the outside, nor anything to build up or "make" in the usual sense of the word. Rather have we to "undo" the complex accumulations of our false views (Robert Linssen, *Living Zen*; *copied from The Kingdom of the Cults*, pp. 265-66).

5. Sin and Evil

The opposites (dvandva) of light and darkness, good and evil, pleasure and pain, are the essential elements of the game, for although the Godhead is identified with Truth (sat),

Consciousness (chit), and Bliss (ananda), the dark side of life has its integral part in the game just as every drama must have its villain, to disrupt the status quo, and as the cards must be shuffled, thrown into chaos, in order that there may be a significant development of the play. For Hindu thought there is no Problem of Evil. The conventional, relative world is necessarily a world of opposites. Light is inconceivable apart from darkness; order is meaningless without disorder; and likewise, up without down, sound without silence, pleasure without pain (Watts, pp. 45-46)

From the foregoing, deep-seated philosophical mysticism of Zen school of meditation of Buddhism is accurately reflected, revealing Zen to be a philosophy that negates a personal God. Secondly, it denies the reality of sin due to the absence of an absolute standard of revealed law and holiness. Thirdly, it rejects the necessity of personal redemption from the penalty of sin revealed in the Person and Jesus Christ, who is the Way (Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 266).

How the Belief System Contradicts the Christian Faith:

- Buddha was an atheist. The religion of Buddhism denies the existence of a Personal God. This denial according to the Bible reveals that they do know He exists but they continue in sin by suppressing this truth (Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1; Rom. 1:18-32). The denial of the existence of God means to the Buddhist that he/she has no moral obligation before God. Yet, they affirm absolutes in their Buddhist Creed, which reveals God's law upon their hearts (Rom. 2:14)
- Buddhism denies that the suffering in this life is the result of man's rebellion against God (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12-21; 8:20-21)
- Buddhism denies the reality of heaven and hell as a conscious state where the soul and body of the believer (heaven) and unbeliever (hell) will dwell forever
- Buddhism teaches rebirth (reincarnation), while the Bible teaches that it is appointed for man to die once (Heb. 9:27)
- Buddhists are their own saviors, salvation for them is through their good works not through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12)
- Buddhism is a religion spawned by demons that deceive its followers into thinking that the "Middle Path" of life will lead them to nirvana, but in fact will lead them to hell (Proverbs 16:25; Matt. 7:13-20; 1 Tim. 4:1-3)

For Additional Information:

Handbook of Today's Religion, Josh McDowell and Don Stewart.

Fast Facts on False Teaching, Ron Carlson & Ed Decker.

The Kingdom of the Cults, Walter Martin.