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### Aspen Christian College

Dallas Satellite Extension

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Dallas, TX

A Christian Theology of World Religions

John G Cunyus, Professor

### Course Calendar

Week One: Introduction

Week Two: Hinduism

Week Three: Buddhism

Week Four: Chinese Religions

Week Five: Judaism

Week Six: Christianity

Week Seven: Islam

Week Eight: Contemporary Religion

Week Nine: Review

Week Ten: Final Exam

### Textbook:

Flames of Faith: A Thumbnail Guide to World Religions

### Why Religion Matters



### What does the Bible say?

#### 1. First reference to alien gods:

**Genesis 3:4-5**

**3:4** But *the* snake said to *the* woman, “By no

means will you die by death! **3:5** For God knows that in whatever day you will eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and harm.”

#### 2. Emphatic Rejection in the New Testament:

##### 1 Corinthians 6:14-16

**6:16** Don't be led to *the* yoke with unbelievers, for what participation *does* righteousness *have* with iniquity, or what society *between* light and shadows? **6:15** But what assembly *is there* of Christ to Belial, or what portion of *the* faithful with *an* unbeliever? **6:16** But who *is the* consensus of God's temple with idols? For you are *the* living God's temple, as God says: “For I will live and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be *a* people to Me.”

#### 3. Why is the wariness against idolatry?

##### Deuteronomy 12:29-31

**12:29** When *the* Lord has destroyed nations before your face, whom you are going in to possess, and you take them over and live in their land, **12:30** take care that you not imitate them, after they have been overthrown by your entry, and you seek their ceremonies, saying, ‘As these nations served their gods, so

also I will serve.’

**12:31** You will not do that to *the* Lord your God, for all *the* abominations which *the* Lord turns away from in disgust they have done for their gods – offering sons and daughters and burning them with fire. **12:32** What I am commanding you, this much you will do for *the* Lord. You will neither add anything nor take away.

#### **4. Jesus provides the measure: Matthew 7:15-20**

**7:15** “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing – yet inside they are ravenous wolves! **7:16** You will know them by their fruits. They don’t gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, do they? **7:17** So every good tree makes good fruit, but *the* bad tree makes harmful fruit. **7:18** A good tree can’t make harmful fruit, nor can a bad tree make good fruit. **7:19** Every tree that does not make good fruit is cut down and thrown into *the* fire. **7:20** Therefore, you will know them by their fruits.

#### **Contemporary Approaches**

**Nihilism:** from the Latin *nihil*, meaning “nothing”. Belief in nothing; no permanent, enduring truth is accessible to the human mind.

**Relativism:** belief that all religious truth claims are equally valid (or invalid).

**Pluralism:** an irreducibly plural reality in human religion. Hinduism.

**Inclusivism:** The truth of Christ includes all other truth. Karl Rahner, 1904-1984. “Anonymous Christianity”.

**Exclusivism:** The gospel negates all other truth claims. Tertullian 160-225 AD “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”

#### **Further Biblical guideposts:**

##### **Peter to Cornelius**

**Acts 10:35** “. . . yet in every nation, *one* who

fears Him and works fairness is acceptable to Him.”

#### **Many and Various Ways**

**Hebrews 1:1-2** God, speaking of old to our fathers in *the* prophets in many and various ways, **1:2** has spoken in these last days in *the* Son, whom He appointed heir of all, through whom He also made *the* ages . . .”

#### **Logos Christology**

**John 1:1** In beginning *the* Word was, and *the* Word was with God, and *the* Word was God.

**Justin Martyr:** “All truth is Christian.” (100 AD - 165 AD)

#### **What is “religion”?**

Belief in a superhuman being or beings, esp. a personal God, controlling the universe and entitled to worship; the feelings, effects on conduct, and the practices resulting from such a belief; a system of faith, doctrine, and worship. (from The Concise English Dictionary, Fourth Edition; Hayward and Sparkes, eds.; New Orchard Press; Poole, England; 1988; pg. 96.)

*religare:* (from the Latin) tie out of the way; bind fast; *moor* (from Wm Whittaker)

“Religion is something that binds us – to ourselves, our family, our social group, our world, our universe. It binds the way we behave, the way we worship, the way we understand.” (Flames of Faith, Cunyus, pg. 4)

## Five Responses to World Different Religions (None of Which Is New)

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##### 1. Nihilism

###### Philippians 3:18-19

**3:18** *multi enim ambulat quos saepe dicebam vobis nunc autem et flens dico inimicos crucis Christi*  
For many walk – of whom I’ve spoken to you often, but now also I say weeping – *as* enemies of Christ’s cross, **3:19** *quorum finis interitus quorum deus venter et gloria in confusione ipsorum qui terrena sapiunt*  
whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is the* belly, and whose boast *is* in their confusion, who taste *the* earthly.

##### 2. Relativism

###### 2 Peter 3:3-4

**3:3** *hoc primum scientes quod venient in novissimis diebus in deceptione inlusores iuxta proprias concupiscentias ambulantes*  
knowing this first: that mockers will come in deception in *the* last days, walking according to their own lusts – **3:4** *dicentes ubi est promissio aut adventus eius ex quo enim patres dormierunt omnia sic perseverant ab initio creaturae*  
saying, “Where is *the* promise, or His coming? For since *the* fathers have slept, all *things* have continued so from *the* creation’s beginning.”

##### 3. Pluralism

###### Hebrews 1:1

**Hebrews 1:1** *multifariam et multis modis olim Deus loquens patribus in prophetis*  
God, speaking of old to our fathers in *the* prophets in many and various ways

##### 4. Inclusivism

###### Philippians 4:8

**4:8** *de cetero fratres quaecumque sunt vera quaecumque pudica quaecumque iusta quaecumque sancta quaecumque amabilia quaecumque bonae famae si qua virtus si qua laus haec cogitate*  
Of *the* rest, brothers, whatever are true, whatever pure, whatever righteous, whatever holy, whatever lovely, whatever of good report, if *there is* any power, if any

praise, consider these!

### **5. Exclusivism**

**Acts 4:12 4:12** *et non est in alio aliquo salus nec enim nomen aliud est sub caelo datum hominibus in quo oportet nos salvos fieri*

“And *there* is no security in another, for *there* is no other name given under *the* sky to men in which it is necessary for us to be made secure.”

## A Christian Theology of the World Religions

John Cunyus, Adjunct Professor, Aspen Christian College (Dallas Satellite Extension)

### Key Terms

**Religion:** *Belief in a superhuman being or beings, esp. a personal God, controlling the universe and entitled to worship; the feelings, effects on conduct, and the practices resulting from such a belief; a system of faith, doctrine, and worship.* (The Concise English Dictionary, Fourth Edition; Hayward and Sparkes, eds.; New Orchard Press; Poole, England; 1988; pg. 96.); all the adherents of a particular religious tradition, regardless of subgroup; for example: All Baptists are Christians, but not all Christians are Baptists. The word “religion” derives from the Latin verb, *religare*, meaning “to moor, to bind fast”.

**Denomination:** a **named sub-group** within a particular religious tradition; for example: **Shia** and **Sunni** are two named sub-groups **within Islam**; **Baptists**, **Catholics**, and **Quakers** are named sub-groups **within Christianity**.

**Roman Catholicism** understands itself to be the lineal descendant of the **Apostles**, tracing back to **St. Peter**, the first Bishop of Rome, in the **1<sup>st</sup> Century of the Christian Era**. The head of the Roman Catholic Church, the present Bishop of Rome, is known as the **Pope**. Roman Catholicism has a three-fold order of ministry, based on the **New Testament** terms, ἐπίσκοπος, (“bishop” in the AV; literally “overseer”); πρεσβύτερος (“elder” in the AV; “priest” in Catholic usage), and διάκονος (“deacon” in the AV; literally “servant” or “helper”). Roman Catholicism is by far the largest body numerically among Christians in general.

**Orthodox Christianity**, sometimes referred to as **Eastern Orthodoxy**, traces back to the various national churches established by Christians in the **ancient Greek-speaking provinces** of the eastern **Roman empire**, and beyond; the head of each Orthodox national communion is a **patriarch**; examples of Orthodox churches include **Greek Orthodox**, **Coptic Orthodox**, **Russian Orthodox**, **Syriac Orthodox**, and others; these churches often

trace themselves back to **the most ancient centers of Christian belief**, in areas now often dominated by other religious groups. Orthodox Christianity is the second-largest numerical subgroup within Christianity.

**Protestant Christianity** traces itself back predominately to the **16<sup>th</sup> Century** of the Christian Era; in that era, **Christian reformers** such as **Martin Luther**, **John Calvin**, **Huldrych Zwingli** “protested” against practices prevailing in Roman Catholicism at the time; Protestantism exerted its greatest initial influence in the countries of northern Europe,. Through their influence, it has entered the global culture. Protestant denominations include **Lutheran**, **Presbyterian**, **Anglican**, **Baptist**, **Methodist**, **Pentecostal**. Protestantism is the third-largest numerical subgroup within Christianity.

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**A Christian Theology of the World Religions**  
Aspen Christian College  
John Cunyus, Professor

Final Exam

**Religion:**

1. Define *religare*. \_\_\_\_\_.

**Hinduism:**

1. Hinduism is the predominant religion in what country? \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Who are the principal Hindu gods? \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What binds all orthodox Hindus into one religious perspective? \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What is the deepest reality of any individual, in Hindu thought? \_\_\_\_\_.
5. True or False: Human beings are able to choose whether to be reborn after death.
6. True or False: Salvation for a Hindu means going to heaven after death.

**Buddhism:**

1. Who was the founder of Buddhism? \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Buddhism styles itself as the rational Middle Way between \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The Four Noble Truths are: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. True or False: Buddhism regards the ego as a fundamental reality.
5. True or False: Original Buddhism regarded the Buddha as a god.

**Chinese Religion:**

1. True or False: Traditional Chinese thought believes in the separation of church and state.
2. What are the three main traditions of Chinese religion? \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. True or False: Chinese religion stresses the stark division between light and darkness.
4. Confucianism's core idea is \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ of character.
5. Taoism stresses \_\_\_\_\_.

**Judaism:**

1. Judaism traces its roots to \_\_\_\_\_, whom God called to leave his home and country.
2. Israel's great lawgiver was \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The Hebrew Bible became a \_\_\_\_\_ for the Jews during their exile.
4. What is the Hebrew name for the first five books of the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_
5. The three major forms of Judaism today include \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Christianity:**

1. Who is the founder of the Christian Church? \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What are the three main divisions of Christianity in the world today?  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What is the name for the Christian view of God's three-fold nature?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
4. Eschatology is the study of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The canon, or official list of New Testament books, was formally closed in  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**Islam:**

1. The word Islam means \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Who is the founder of Islam? \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What is the holy book of Islam? \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What are the two main divisions of Islam? \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What is the name of Islamic gathering places? \_\_\_\_\_.

**Consumerism:**

1. Whose invention of the printing press led to the first great information revolution in Europe?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
2. What revolution flowered in the aftermath of the invention of printing?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
3. Labor became a \_\_\_\_\_ to be sold as a result of the Industrial Revolution.
4. True or False: Consumerism views the individual ego as an illusion.
5. What is the predominant value of consumerism? \_\_\_\_\_.

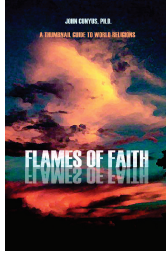
**A Christian Theology of the World Religions, Part Two**  
Aspen Christian College  
John Cunyus, Professor

**Course Calendar**

Week One: Hindu Theology: The Upanishads  
Week Two: Hindu Theology: The Upanishads  
Week Three: Hindu Theology: The Upanishads  
Week Four: Buddhism: A Path Beyond Suffering  
Week Five: Buddhism: A Path Beyond Suffering  
Week Six: Taoism: Tao Te Ching  
Week Seven: Taoism: Tao Te Ching  
Week Eight: Interfaith Dialogue: Buddhism  
Week Nine: Interfaith Dialogue: Islam  
Week Ten: Final Exam

**Course Books**

The Upanishads, translated by Juan Mascaro, ISBN: 9780140441635, Penguin Group, 1965  
A Path Beyond Suffering: Working the Buddhist Method, by John Cunyus, ISBN:  
978-0-9644609-6-6, Searchlight Press, 2008  
Tao Te Ching, translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, ISBN: 0679724346, Vintage Books,  
1989



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### The Upanishads.

Translations from the Sanskrit with an Introduction by Juan Mascaró;

Juan Mascaró, translator; Penguin Books; London; 1965

**Who:** Composed by anonymous ancient sages of what became Hinduism; passed along as oral teachings until reaching their final printed form.

**What:** Hindu holy books, along with The Vedas and The Bhagavad Gita; “Spiritual treatises”, in the words of Juan Mascaró; written in Sanskrit, the language of the ancient Aryan conquerors of India, a language which shares a common Indo-European root with Greek, Latin, German, English, etc; teachings, passed down via oral tradition until being written down; there are 112 Upanishads, according to Mascaró.

**When:** Between 800 and 400 BCE.

**Where:** India.

**Why:** To guide seekers to liberation.

#### **Notable facts:**

1. These treatises were not intended for “mass consumption”. Those who initially spoke them believed that only a few, particularly motivated persons were able to understand them.

2. Sanskrit Etymology of *Upanishad*, according to Mascaró: verb: *sad* – to sit; prefix: *upa* (related to Latin *sub*) – under; prefix: *ni* (as in English “beneath”)

1. A *Upanishad* is a lesson learned sitting at the feet of a teacher. Compare to the beginning of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount”: **Matthew 5:1** But seeing *the* crowds, he went up onto *a* mountain. And when he had

sat down, his disciples came near him.

**5:2** And opening his mouth, he began teaching them . . . The Sermon on the Mount, then, is a *upanishad*.

2. The Greek word used in Matthew 5:1 is καθίζω (*kathizo*), meaning: 1) to make to sit down 1a) to set, appoint, to confer a kingdom on one 2) intransitively 2a) to sit down 2b) to sit 2b1) to have fixed one's abode 2b2) to sojourn, to settle, settle down.
3. This Greek word is the root of the English word “cathedral”, which is the “seat” of a bishop.

#### **Key Quotes:**

##### **Introduction**

“ . . . the visions of the Upanishads are based on a consciousness of our own being in relation to the Being of the universe . . .” pg 15

“Each of us is a centre of life, a unique event in the universe . . .” pg. 15

##### **Isa Upanishad,**

to be read in its entirety.

##### **Kena Upanishad**

“Who sends the mind to wander afar? Who first drives life to start on its journey?” pg. 51

##### **Katha Upanishad**

(The story of Nachiketas’ dialogue with

Yama, the god of Death.)

“What lies beyond life shines not to those who are childish, or careless, or deluded by wealth. ‘This is the only world. There is no other’, they say; and thus they go from death to death.” pg. 58

“If the slayer thinks that he kills, and if the slain thinks that he dies, neither knows the ways of truth. The Eternal in man cannot kill. The Eternal in man cannot die.” pg. 59

“Awake, arise! Strive for the Highest, and be in the Light! Sages say the path is narrow and difficult to tread, narrow as the edge of a razor.” pg. 61

(Compare to **Matthew 7:13-14** Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: <sup>14</sup> Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.)

“The Creator made the senses outward-going: they go to the world of matter outside, not to the Spirit within . . . The foolish run after outward pleasures and fall into the snares of vast-embracing death. But the wise have found immortality, and do not seek the Eternal in things that pass away.” pgs 61-62

“If one sees him in this life before the body passes away, one is free from bondage; but if not, one is born and dies again in new worlds and new creations.” pg. 65

### **Prasna Upanishad**

(*Prasna*, in Sanskrit, means “life-force”)

“When that fire of life is gone, senses are absorbed in mind, and man comes to life again. His last thoughts lead him to Prana and, accompanied by the living fire of Udana and led by Atman, the Spirit himself, he goes to the regions deserved and desired in his imagination . . . He who knows the rising of life and how it comes to the body, how it

abides there in its five-fold division, and knows its relation to the inner Spirit, enjoys eternal life, in truth enjoys eternal life.” pg. 71.

*Prana* – breath

*Udana* – awareness

*Atman* – divinity

“Even as birds, O beloved, return to their trees for rest, thus all things find their rest in Atman, the Supreme Spirit.” pg. 72

“ . . . who speaks untruth withers like a tree to the roots; I will not speak untruth.” pg. 74

### **Mundaka Upanishad**

“Abiding in the midst of ignorance, but thinking themselves wise and learned, fools aimlessly go hither and thither, like blind led by the blind. Wandering in the paths of un wisdom, ‘We have attained the end of life’, think the foolish. Clouds of passion conceal to them the beyond, and sad is their fall when the reward of their pious actions has been enjoyed.” pg. 77

“This is the truth: as from a fire aflame thousands of sparks come forth, even so from the Creator an infinity of beings have life, and to him return again.” pg. 77

“There are two birds, sweet friends, who dwell on the self-same tree. The one eats the fruits thereof, and the other looks on in silence.” pg. 80

“The wise who, free from desires, adore the Spirit pass beyond the seed of life in death.” pg. 81

“As rivers flowing into the ocean find their final peace and their name and form disappear, even so the wise become free from name and form and enter into the radiance of the Supreme Spirit who is greater than all greatness . . . In truth who knows God

becomes God.” pg. 81

### **Svetasvatara Upanishad**

“In this vast Wheel of creation where all things live and die, wanders round the human soul like a swan in restless flying, and she thinks that God is afar. But when the love of God comes down upon her, then she finds her own immortal life.” pg. 86

“When a man knows God he is free: his sorrows have an end, and birth and death are no more.” pg. 86

“Know that Brahman is for ever in thee, and nothing higher is there to be known.” pg. 86

“Even as a mirror of gold, covered by dust, when cleaned well shines again in full splendor, when a man has seen the truth of the Spirit he is one with him, the aim of his life is fulfilled and he is ever beyond sorrow.” pg. 88

“There is one in whose hands is the net of Maya, who rules with his power, who rules all the worlds with his power. He is the same at the time of creation and at the time of dissolution. Those who know him attain immortality.” pg. 89

“All this universe is in the glory of God.” pg. 90

“He knows all but no one knows him, the Spirit before the beginning, the Spirit Supreme everlasting.” pg. 90

“There is the never-born soul of man bound by the pleasures of nature; and there is the Spirit of man, never-born, who has left pleasures behind in the joy of the Beyond.” pg. 91

“When a man is bound by the three powers of nature, he works for a selfish reward and in

time he has his reward . . . and wanders on through life and death.” pg. 94

“If ever for man it were possible to fold the tent of the sky, in that day he might be able to end his sorrow without the help of God.” pg. 96

### **Maitri Upanishad**

“There is a Spirit . . . never-born, never-dying, everlasting, ever ONE in his own greatness.” pg. 99

“A part of Infinite Consciousness becomes our own finite consciousness . . .” pg. 99

“It is therefore by vision, by harmony, and by contemplation that Brahman is attained.” pg. 101

“*Samsara*, the transmigration of life, takes place in one’s own mind. Let one therefore keep the mind pure, for what a man thinks he becomes: this is a mystery of Eternity.” pg. 103

### **Kaushitaki Upanishad**

“You who give liberty, make me free from my sins.” pg. 105

“Know me, for this is the best for man: to know God.” pg. 106

### **Taittiriya Upanishad**

“Who denies God, denies himself. Who affirms God, affirms himself.” pg. 110

“Joy comes from God. Who could live if the joy of Brahman filled not the universe?” pg. 110

“If a man places a gulf between himself and God, this gulf will bring fear.” pg. 110

“Words and mind go to him, but reach him

not and return. But he who knows the joy of Brahman, fears no more.” pg. 110

### **Chandogya Upanishad**

“There is a Light that shines beyond all things on earth, beyond us all, beyond the heavens, beyond the highest, the very highest heavens. This is the Light that shines in our heart.” pg. 113

“Man in truth is made of faith. As his faith is in this life, so he becomes in the beyond: with faith and vision let him work.” pg. 114

“A man is a living sacrifice.” pg. 115

“There is a bridge between time and eternity; and this bridge is Atman, the Spirit of man . . . Evil or sin cannot cross that bridge, because the world of the Spirit is pure. This is why when this bridge has been crossed, the eyes of the blind can see, the wounds of the wounded are healed, and the sick man becomes whole from his sickness. To one who goes over that bridge, the night becomes like day; because in the worlds of the Spirit there is a light which is everlasting.” pg. 121

“Then Virochana went to the devils full of self-satisfaction, and gave them this teaching: ‘We ourselves are our own bodies, and those must be made happy on earth. It is our bodies that should be in glory . . .’ That is why when here on earth a man will not give any gifts, when a man has no faith and will not sacrifice, people say, ‘This man is a devil.’” pg. 123

“It is true that the body is mortal, that it is under the power of death; but the body is also the dwelling of Atman, the Spirit of immortal life.” pg. 125

“ . . . if a man is ruled by his body then this man can never be free.” pg 125

### **Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad**

“This universe is a trinity and this is made of name, form, and action.” pg. 127

“The source of all names is the word, for it is by the word that all names are spoken. The word is behind all names, even as Brahman is behind the word.” pg. 127

“The immortal is veiled by the real. The Spirit of life is the immortal. Name and form are the real, and by them the Spirit is veiled.” pg. 127

“Maitreyi said, ‘What should I do then with possessions that cannot give me life eternal? Give me instead your knowledge, o my lord.’” pg. 130

### **The Supreme Teaching**

“People see his field of pleasure, but he can never be seen.” pg. 135

“According as a man acts and walks in the path of life, so he becomes.” pg. 140

“While we are here in this life, we may reach the light of Wisdom; and if we reach it not, how deep is the darkness.” pg. 141

“ . . . there are not many but only One. Who sees variety and not the Unity, wanders on from death to death.” pg. 141

“Let him not ponder on many words, for many words are weariness.” pg. 142

