

The Abrahamic Religions:

An Introduction to World Religions

Christianity: Beliefs

Session Week 7

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Aim and Learning Outcomes – Week 7 Session

Aims

- This session aims to discuss the general background of Belief Systems in Christianity.

Learning Outcomes

- Students have some understanding of:
 - Christians' Belief Systems.

Christianity: Beliefs

- Christians are followers of Christ.
- Originally, after Jesus' death and resurrection, His followers called themselves:
 - 'Brethren' (Acts 1:16),
 - 'Disciples' (Acts 11:26),
 - 'Believers' (Acts 2:44) and 'those of the Way'.
- But the name 'Christians' was applied to His followers.
- The use of name appears to have first been used in Antioch.
- The use of the name 'Christians' became more widespread.
- Christianity is the religion founded on belief in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.
- It takes its name from Christ and its beliefs are practised in a variety of ways by believers.

Christianity: Beliefs

- A diverse, 2000 year old religion followed by almost one third of the world's population! Based on the life, teachings, death and resurrection of a first century Jew known as Jesus, believed to be the Christ (messiah, savior) by his followers (thus called "Christians")
- Jesus Christ
 - Born, bred, lived, and died a Jew in first century Roman occupied Palestine
 - Around age 30, took on a mission of preaching, teaching, and healing as an itinerant teacher
 - Had a following of 12 primary disciples and countless multitudes attracted by his miracles and words of wisdom
 - A political threat to Roman and Jewish authorities, is put to death through torturous crucifixion (a Roman punishment)

Christianity: Beliefs

- The “Christ” - born of a virgin in fulfillment of Jewish messianic expectation to be “king of the Jews”
- The “Son of God” – fully divine *and* fully human
- The savior of humanity – saving us from sin through his sacrifice on the cross
- Risen from the dead (resurrection) “on the third day” – overcoming death so that we too may have “eternal life”
- Ascended into heaven, residing with God “the father” to intervene on our behalf
- Will come again at the “end of days” to judge the living and the dead

Christianity: Beliefs

- The Gospels are written accounts of what Jesus Christ did, taught and achieved. They are most important source in the study of the Christian faith because they provide Christians with much of their knowledge and understanding of Jesus.
- Gospel means ‘Good News’, and the authors of the Gospels intended to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that His death and resurrection had brought salvation to the world.
- The central belief of Christianity is that Jesus Christ was crucified and then rose from dead, or was resurrected. Having come back to life, He reappeared to His disciples on a number of occasions.
- According to the Gospels, Jesus Christ’s teaching centred on the following ideas:
- People have the opportunity to enter the Kingdom of God, to accept God’s rule, and to live as God expects them to live. Because God is God of Love and like a loving parent, people should not be afraid of Him
- God will forgive people who disobey Him provided they have a change of heart – repent – and seek His blessing.
- Jesus Christ’s suffering and death are an opportunity for people to reject sin and to return to the truth relationship with God.
- Belief in Jesus Christ as God, Son of God and Saviour is central to being a Christian.

Christianity: Beliefs

- There are four main reasons why we as Christian think Jesus Christ is important, and we subscribe to them all:
 1. Jesus Christ is the risen Lord. His life on Earth was not the end of His existence. He ascended to Heaven and He is worshiped with the Father and Holy Spirit.
 2. Jesus Christ is Son of God. In Jesus God became human.
 3. Jesus Christ revealed the truth. Through the example of His life He showed people what God was like: compassionate and forgiving with a concern for all of humankind.
 4. Jesus Christ is a great and good Teacher. He provided humankind with a way of life and a set of values. His teaching is best summed up in Matthew 22:37: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart... and your neighbour as yourself”.

Continued...

Holy Trinity

- God the Father residing in heaven
- God the Son (Jesus Christ) Who “came down from heaven” to dwell among us, as one of us
- God the Holy Spirit (“Holy Ghost”)
 - The spirit of God residing within everyone who accepts the sacrifice of Christ and thus becomes a Christian
 - Communion with God the Father is through the Son and the Holy Spirit
- Saint Gregory also defended in his essay “On the Holy Trinity -To Eustathius” his belief of the Holy Trinity, and his thought in the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, and thus the unity of the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity (Meredith, 1995:108).
- Saint Gregory provides in his essay ‘On the Holy Spirit’ article a clear statement about the divine nature of the Holy Spirit. Lorenzen quotes:
 - “We confess that the Holy Spirit is of the same rank as the Father and the Son, so that there is no difference between them in anything to be thought or named, that devotion can ascribe to ascribe to a Divine nature” (Lorenzen, 1999:18).

Continued...

- Saint Gregory of Nyssa is using the baptism formula to show the divinity of the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit should be confessed with the Father and the Son.
- “Gregory explicitly refers to baptism in the name of the triune God: Since then in the Gospel are delivered the three Persons and the names through which the birth to believers occurs, the one who is begotten in the Trinity is begotten equally by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Porter and Cross, 2002:231).
- The truth that it is just by the Holy Spirit that the Father and the Son are glorified is also a reason for the divinity of Holy Spirit

Other Theological Beliefs

- Heaven and Hell:
 - Eternal life for those who are “saved by the blood of the lamb (Jesus)”
 - Eternal damnation for those who are not so saved
- World & Humans:
 - created by God, in God’s image, with free will;
 - originally good, but corrupted by sin/death;
- Church, Salvation, Eschatology:
 - Community of believers; Body of Christ; Resurrection of the Body; Eternal life
- Foundational Principles:
 - do good & avoid evil; love God, others;
 - develop an “informed conscience”

Reflection

Briefly explore what the core beliefs of Christianity are?

Reference

- Dowley, Tim (1977) *The History of Christianity* (Lion Publishing plc.)
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- Lorenzen, Lynne F. (1999) *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press)
- Meredith, Anthony (1995) *The Cappadocians* (London: Geoffrey)
- Porter, Stanley E. & Cross, Anthony R., eds. (2002) *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies* (London & NY: Sheffield Academic Press)
- Woodhead, Linda (2004) *An Introduction to Christianity* (Cambridge University Press)

Next Session

- We continue to discuss about Christianity: Practices