

Short History Of Different Religions

Christian History

We may define a Christian as anyone who commits themselves to following the person and teachings of the first century historical Jesus, who is often given the title of the 'Christ' (meaning God's anointed one). This definition however immediately invites controversy, because there are some who would insist that to be a Christian the person must also be baptised, others that they must believe in the Trinity, and others that no one is truly Christian until they have had a personal encounter with Jesus, and experienced their sins being forgiven. For the purposes of this article then, we will accept that anyone claiming to be a Christian is recognised as that. This keeps the field wide, allows us to be inclusive in our overview of the religion, and reminds us that there is a diversity of worldviews within Christianity. The core historical beliefs of Christianity are summed up in the Nicene Creed, which is recited by Christians of many denominations in their regular acts of worship. This Creed was drawn up in 325CE by the Council of Nicaea (a gathering of all bishops from across the world) as a statement of orthodoxy and as a defence against heresies. The Creed explicitly states the belief that God is Three-in-One, or Trinity, i.e. God the Creator and Father, Jesus as the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God at work in the world, all of whom are both worshipped and acknowledged as separate persons of the one triune God. The Creed also affirms the unity of the Church, baptism and repentance for the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgement, and everlasting life.

Muslim History

The word Islam is derived from the Arabic root 'salima' which means peace, harmony and submission. Islam, referring to the religion, is the submission of the creation to the will of God and its co-existence in peace and harmony. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) began to receive the last and final revelation from Allah in the year 610 CE. Over a 23 year period, the revelation was received and recorded in the form of the Qur'an. Today, Islam is a worldwide religion with over 1,220 million adherents. This is about 19% of the world's population and it is growing

rapidly. Without doubt, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is the key figure who has been the most influential for Muslims. In Islam, he is the Seal of the prophets sent by God and it is through him that the foundations of Islam were laid down. It is because of him that Islam flourished and nowadays is the fastest growing religion in the world even after 14 centuries. Khadijah, the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), is seen as the mother of Islam, as it is she who gave all she had in the way of Islam which initiated the success of the religion in the early days. She was an eminent woman who was highly respected by both men and women. She was the wealthiest woman in Arabia who was very powerful and influential. There is a difference of opinion between the two main sects in Islam (Sunni and Shi'ah) as regards the succession of the Prophet. The Sunni hold the companions (ashab) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in high regard and consider the first four as the rightly guided successors (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali). The Shi'ah Muslims believe that the first legitimate successor is Imam 'Ali, as they believe he was chosen by God as opposed to being elected by the people. 'Ayshah, daughter of Abu Bakr and one of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), is the lady who shaped Sunni Islam. She is held in very high esteem by Sunnis. His family (Ahl al-Bayt) are also very important to Muslims, especially Shi'ah Muslims, who regard the family of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the true authorities and successors after his demise. Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and wife of Imam 'Ali (the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)), was a lady of knowledge and piety. Men and women would seek guidance and knowledge from her on many Islamic issues. It is Fatimah who shaped Shi'ah Islam. Imam Hussein, the third Shi'ah Imam is considered, particularly by Shi'ah Muslims, as the saviour of Islam who sacrificed his life for the faith along with some of his family members and companions. There are also contemporary personalities who are regarded as being influential in Islam. Malcolm X was a convert and a promoter of civil rights. He was affiliated with the Nation of Islam until 1964 when he entered mainstream Islam but was assassinated in 1965. Imam Khomeini was the founder of the Islamic Republic in Iran (1979) after an uprising the Shah regime. His thought and movement was inspired by Imam Hussein (mentioned above). He was a political and a spiritual leader.

Hindu History

Hinduism is sometimes introduced as the world's oldest religion, at least 5000 years old on the evidence of ancient texts and archaeological remains, but it is also claimed by others to date from the conditions created by either Muslim or British rule, when arguably the resulting engagement with others ways of thinking and/or living prompted a sense of religious unity on the part of those now called Hindus. Another answer would be to say that, as the Sanatana Dharma (eternal religion), it is timeless and without beginning. However, whether Hinduism as a whole rather than specific expressions can be equated with Sanatana Dharma can be questioned. It could also be argued that as an invented label that does not correspond well with reality, Hinduism does not exist and never did, so cannot be said to have begun. Even if you do not know much about Hinduism, you are bound to have some preconceptions. It is worth stopping to think what these are and from where they have come. Various images may be conjured up: hippies in the 1960s when the Beatles travelled to India to meet the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi; International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) devotees wearing saffron and dancing in the streets, chanting 'Hare Krishna'; the Indian nationalist M.K. Gandhi, known as the Mahatma ('great self/soul'), in his round glasses, wearing a dhoti and striding out with a walking stick for support; the exotic colour and warmth of numerous books and films inspired by India and the British experience of the subcontinent.

Buddhist History

One way of answering 'what is Buddhism?' would be to say that Buddhism is one of largest and most influential religious traditions in the world, sharing with Christianity and Islam the vision of spreading to the whole of humanity rather than being limited to a particular ethnic or national group. In the nineteenth century it was estimated that Buddhism was a major influence on 40% of the world's population. Even after the upheavals of the twentieth century, especially the adoption of non-religious Marxist/Maoist ideologies in China and several other countries where Buddhism was previously important, it is claimed by most sources (such as Wikipedia, adherents.com, worldpopulation.com) that there are about 500-535 million adherents, or somewhere between 7-10% of the world's population. An alternative view is that there could be really more like 1.6 billion or 22%, mainly reliant on counting much larger numbers of Chinese people as Buddhists,

and counting people who include some Buddhist practices in their lives (buddhaweekly.com). Perhaps the figure is somewhere between the two, and of course, it depends on who you count as a Buddhist and the methods of collecting the data. Most textbooks would say that Buddhism began about 2,500 years ago in India with the teaching of a man who became known as ‘the Buddha’ (‘the enlightened one’), in other words, the person who woke up to the truth about life. His name was Siddhartha Gautama (Sanskrit) Siddhattha Gotama (Pali). Although he is often called ‘the’ Buddha, he is also called Shakyamuni Buddha (‘wise man of the Shakya people’) to distinguish him from other Buddhas, especially in Mahayana Buddhism, where there are many. That he was a real historical person is rarely disputed nowadays given the evidence, but his exact dates are a matter of some debate. Various Buddhist traditions have differing dates for his life such as 624-544 BCE, 566-486 BCE, or 448-368 BCE. Western scholars used to favour the middle date, but more recent evidence tends to favour the later one.

Sikhi History

For Sikhs the Ten Gurus are the foundation of Sikhi and the main sources of Sikh inspiration. The Gurus are considered by Sikhs to be spiritually perfect and morally correct. Sikhi began with the teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), who came from Talwandi, near Lahore (now Pakistan). Guru Nanak’s teachings were composed in the context of, but distinguished from, the Hinduism and Islam of his day. An example is that he names Azrael as the angel of death. This is a name found in the Book of Tobit for a personality important both in the Old Testament and the Qur’an. At the same time, he talks about Yama, a god of death mentioned in Hindu and Buddhist scriptures. Guru Nanak emphasised meditation on the One (Naam Japna) and taught that all human beings were equal, regardless of caste or creed. As well as preaching against prejudice and unjust discrimination, he put his words into action by starting the institution of the langar, where people sit together to eat for free without any distinction. He was followed by nine further Gurus: – Guru Angad (1504-1552) – Guru Amar Das (1479-1574) – Guru Ram Das (1534-1581) – Guru Arjan (1563-1606) – Guru Hargobind (1595-1644) – Guru Har Rai (1630-1661) – Guru Harkrishan (1656-1664) – Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675) – The final human Guru, Guru Gobind Rai (1666-1708) formed the Khalsa and was renamed Guru Gobind Singh Ji. Sikhs today continue to follow his example in

joining the Khalsa. The final Guru in terms of teaching is the holy text of the Guru Granth Sahib itself. The Khalsa also has the status of Guru as it implements the teachings into ever-changing contexts. This status was designed and demonstrated by Guru Gobind Singh.

Jewish History

The main figures associated with the foundation of Judaism are those who appear in the Jewish Scriptures. Perhaps the most significant of these are: – Adam and Eve – Noah 56tr442(although these three all predate the establishment of the Jewish people) – Abraham – Moses – David Adam and Eve: whether regarded as historical personages or mythical concepts Adam and Eve appear at the beginning of the Biblical accounts. The first Creation account in Genesis 1 says that Adam and Eve were made by G-d at the same time: And G-d said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” And G-d created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26-27). The account in Genesis 2 suggests that at first G-d made a human being but, having being unable to find a partner for this human, created a female from the human’s ribs and at this point the original human becomes male. [This subtlety is lost in the translation from the Hebrew.] The Lord G-d planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed ... And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. So the Lord G-d cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This one at last Is bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, For from man was she taken” (Genesis 2:8, 20-23). The story of Eve being tempted by the serpent and taking the fruit from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil and eating with Adam is well-known. They are exiled from the Garden and lose their (presumed) immortality. Whilst Judaism sees this as the Fall it does not accept the later Christian interpretation of Original Sin arising from this event. Noah: Noah is significant because he places his trust in G-d and accepts G-d’s commands to build the ark and fill it without question. Abraham:

Abraham is often known as the Father of Judaism. It was Abraham's faith in G-d, having been brought up in the polytheistic society of Ur, that initially singles him out. Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there (Genesis 11:31). Abram (later Abraham) made three Covenants with G-d. Genesis 12, 15 & 17). Perhaps the most significant is the Covenant of Circumcision in chapter 17: When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous." Abram threw himself on his face; and God spoke to him further, "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of a multitude of nations. And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you; and kings shall come forth from you. I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come. I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God" (Genesis 17:1-8). Moses: Known as the teacher of Judaism, Moses followed G-d's commands and led the Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness of Sinai. It was here that he received the Ten Commandments from G-d which form the Sinai Covenant. Although Moses frequently complains about the tasks G-d sets him, he nevertheless obeys all the commands he is given.