

Why Catholicism?

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.

Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit you have taught the hearts of your faithful. In the same Spirit help us to relish what is right and always rejoice in your consolation. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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Why Christianity? Why Religion? Why spirituality? Why Atheism? Why Agnosticism?

Why practice the Catholic faith, why not choose to become a protestant Christian? Why not Judaism or Islam? What about the Eastern religions of Buddhism and Hinduism? Why religion at all? Why not practice New Age spirituality? Why not Atheism or Agnosticism?

If you define Religion as a World View -- Who am I, Where do I come from, Where am I going and How am I going to get there – then everyone has a religion (even the atheists and agnostics) because everyone has a World View.

So, in order to address these complex questions about religion and spirituality, we need to understand the nature of the human being. Is he a spiritual being? If so, how does he differ from the rest of the creatures on this planet? Where did this spiritual reality originate from?

What is the difference between the material physical world and the spiritual world?

The material world that we live in and experience with our 5 senses is a world of change. This change is visible not only in the world around us but in ourselves as we age. The Greek philosophers struggled with this phenomenon that the material world was constantly changing but yet the human person is capable of possessing certain abstract, unchanging and universal knowledge in a world that is physical, particular and constantly changing.

Abstract, unchanging, and universal knowledge is manifested in the discipline of Mathematics and language. Mathematics best illustrates this by providing us with certain, unchanging, and universal knowledge that we use in our science. 2 plus 2 is always 4 and is not bound to a particular location or time in history but is in a sense universal and spiritual (unchanging).

Written language is also a proof of the spiritual world. Language is composed of signs that are conventional and man-made. Letters form words and words relate to concepts in the mind and these concepts are conveyed by language. Language allows us to communicate the history of the past to the generations of the future thereby transcending time which is a condition of the material world.

So, the ancient Greeks understood that the physical and spiritual worlds exist and that in order to access the spiritual world, the mind needs to begin in the physical world. All knowledges begins with the senses.

Jesus always taught about the spiritual world by referencing the material world. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed.

This is the underpinning of the sacramental system. How does grace (something spiritual) interact with the spiritual soul of an individual? By the mediation of the physical, the bread, wine, oil or the laying on of hands by the priest or bishop.

What is a soul? Is the human soul a spiritual soul?

The Church teaches that the soul is the principle of life in a material being. Therefore plants, animals and human beings have souls because they are material beings. The soul of a human being is radically different than that of an animal and plant. The soul of the human being possesses two powers or faculties that the animal/plant does not, Intellect and Free will.

The human intellect is a power that allows us to reason. Reasoning is discovering two truths or facts and being able to deduce a third truth or fact. For example, if angle A equals angle B and Angle B equals angle C, we can reason that angle A must equal Angle C. The ape in the zoo cannot reason.

Animals also do not possess the gift of free will. Animals are instinctual and look to sustain their lives by eating, sleeping, and reproducing. When the animal feels hungry, he will eat, when tired he will sleep and when the urge to mate is greater than the urge to eat or sleep, the animal will seek to mate.

We as humans can experience a great desire for food especially when we are fasting. In the animal world when the desire to eat exceeds the desire for sleep or mating, the animal satiates his hunger by eating. Humans because of free will can choose to fast, which is something in the spiritual order that transcends the physical.

To have the ability to reason and make free choices indicates that man possesses something within himself that is not material and subject to change, he possesses something spiritual that can transcend the physical. The human soul is spiritual and can exist apart from the body.

What is the definition of a person?

A person is defined as a being endowed with intellect and will. Animals are not persons they do not possess intellect and free will. Angels are persons because they possess the gift of intellect and free will, even though they don't possess a body, they are still persons.

So, if we possess intellect and will and they are spiritual powers and we did not create or endow ourselves with these powers, where did they originate from? If the effect cannot be greater than the cause, then the cause must possess these spiritual gifts. God is the cause of these spiritual powers and God also possess these powers, therefore God is a person. Christianity claims that God is in fact three persons in one divine Godhead. A mystery known to us only by Revelation.

What about Atheism and Agnosticism?

The human person is a spiritual being as indicated above. God is the cause of the spiritual powers that we possess and God also is a person. Atheism denies God's existence and Agnosticism is not sure if God exists but claims that we cannot know for certain if He exists. The Catholic Church has consistently taught that man using his reason alone without the help of Divine Revelation can know with certitude that God exists, that human beings have an immortal soul, and that man is morally culpable for his actions.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. (Romans 1:19-23)

How do the eastern religions understand a personal God?

Hinduism originated @ 1500 B.C. Buddhism began @ 500 B.C. Both religions are really more philosophies in the sense that what they teach stems from human reasoning rather than Divine Revelation. For example they both teach reincarnation and draw this teaching from the circular view of nature whereby things grow and die and then come back to life.

Hinduism's main theological belief centers on one divine and omnipotent being called Brahman, a god who is unknowable. All living reality one day dies and is then absorbed back into Brahman. Hinduism accepts a multiplicity of different gods as the many faces of Brahman.

The Hindu scriptures declare that Brahman (the impersonal God) is beyond description, and can be understood only through direct spiritual experience.

In the religion of Buddhism there is no belief in a personal god.

What is New Age Spirituality?

New Age Spirituality is a Westernization of the Eastern Religious tradition without any ascetism. New Agers will be quick to remind you that they are spiritual but not religious. Religious implying some type of structured communal worship and set truths of the faith (dogmas or doctrines) that need to be adhered to. They know that there is a spiritual life but are certain that they themselves will determine what they need to do to ascend themselves.

Classical Christianity holds that the spiritual life, the life of the soul is conditioned by God's grace. The spiritual life needs an outside source of power or fuel in order to progress. Jesus the master and ruler of the spiritual world said, "Without me you can do nothing". The Church teaches that grace that comes to

us from God directly is called actual grace and grace that comes to us by the sacraments is called sacramental grace. Nonetheless it is God moving us in the spiritual life.

The early Church dealt with the heresy of Pelagianism which taught that we can save ourselves without the need of God's grace. New Agers are related to this type of thought process, that Jesus was an ascended master that teaches us the way to ascend ourselves.

What are the three monotheistic/Abrahamic religions? What are their claims? Can they all be true?

The Old Testament scriptures speak of a man named Abraham in the 12th chapter of the book of Genesis. Abraham had two sons, one named Ishmael from his concubine Hagar and another son Isaac from his wife Sarah. Ishmael is the progenitor of the Arab people and therefore of the prophet Muhammad and the religion of Islam. The Muslim religion rightly asserts its connection to the patriarch Abraham.

The question is whether God intended to reveal himself through the line of Ishmael or Isaac? We see that Isaac had two sons, Esau, and Jacob. God blessed Jacob and Jacob's name was changed to Israel and Israel had 12 sons and this lineage became the nation of Israel with 12 tribes. So God chose this particular bloodline family to reveal himself, not the bloodline of Ishmael.

The Old Testament story of Israel begins with Abraham who lived @ 2000 years B.C. This storyline lays the foundation of salvation history the speaks of the coming Messiah. Christians believe that Jesus fulfills these Old Testament prophesies and is not only the Messiah but the Son of God, Modern Judaism denies Jesus as the Messiah and that he is Divine, Islam which appeared around 600 years after the birth of Jesus denies that Jesus is God. Islam has no claim on participating in salvation history. Muhammed the prophet received his instruction by means of an angel speaking to him.

It is interesting to note that Jews deny that Jesus rose from the dead but that the Apostles stole the body.

Islam claims 600 years later that Jesus was taken off the cross and up to heaven and instead an impostor was put on the cross and that an imposter died, not Jesus.

So the Jews claim that Jesus died but did not rise from the dead and Islam claims that Jesus did not die but was taken up to heaven bodily.

So as you can see the three Abrahamic religions have a common origin but significantly different teachings about God and reality.

If Jesus is God than Judaism, Islam and all other religions although having some correct teachings and beliefs that can be deduced from the natural law, contain also false teachings and deficiencies.

The bodily Resurrection of Jesus is an historical fact. To believe that Jesus is God is an act of Faith, but not a blind leap of faith. Jesus saved his greatest miracle, the resurrection from the dead as his final manifestation of his Divinity.

What is salvation history?

God revealing himself to his people over time. Abraham 2000 years BC; Moses 1500 years BC; King David 1000 years BC; the Prophets 500 years BC.

Revelation of God deepens over time with fullness of Revelation manifested with the Son of God-Jesus.

What is the key to understanding salvation history, and the Old Testament?

The two key principles of understanding salvation history and the Old Testament are Covenant and Liturgy.

What is a Covenant?

A Covenant is a Sacred Family Bond. It is Sacred because God is involved as a participant. In a Covenant there is an exchange of persons. (I am yours, you are mine, you are part of my family).

A Covenant differs from a Contract. A Contract is an exchange of property. (This is mine, this is yours).

A Covenant involves a formal, solemn and binding pact between two or more parties. A Covenant is made by swearing an oath. In oath-swearing a promise is transformed by invoking God's Holy Name for assistance or blessing (I swear by Almighty God to tell the whole truth.....so help me God.)

What are the five covenants of the Old Testament?

The Marital Covenant – Adam and Eve -- Sabbath

The Family Covenant – Noah and his Family -- Rainbow

The Tribal Covenant -- Abraham and his tribal family -- Circumcision

The National Covenant – Moses and the 12 tribes -- Passover

The Kingdom Covenant – David and the Kingdom of Israel -- Throne

The New Covenant – Jesus and the Catholic Church – The Eucharist

What is the covenant of the New Testament?

Jesus institutes the New Covenant on Holy Thursday at the Passover meal with his disciples.

Take this, all of you, and drink from it: for this is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.

Jesus uses the word "Covenant" only once in the New Testament. He commands us to worship Him by celebrating a Passover meal. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is a Passover Meal.

What are the seven Jewish feast days? What days are required a pilgrimage to Jerusalem?

Feast of Unleavened Bread

Feast of Trumpets

Feast of Passover

Day of Atonement

Feast of First Fruits

Feast of Booths

Feast of Weeks

What is the difference between the synagogue and the Temple?

The Temple is located in Jerusalem and is the only place where sacrificial offerings are to be made to God. Only priests are permitted to offer the sacrifice. The Liturgy would take place twice a day where a lamb would be sacrificed at 9:00am and 3:00pm every day.

The synagogue is place of worship located in towns across the countryside where Jews can read the scripture and pray.

How does the Catholic Mass harmonize the Temple service, the Synagogue Service, the Passover meal, and the New Covenant established by Jesus?

The Mass –

Liturgy of the Word – Synagogue

Liturgy of the Eucharist – Temple /Passover Meal

Covenant –

Swear an Oath

Offer Sacrifice

Share a Meal