

APOLOGETICS 31 – WHICH GOD? – PART 4

THE CONDITION OF MAN

INTRODUCTION

Apologetics - ἀπολογία apologia

The definition of Christian Apologetics is “the information that enables a believer to provide a defense for why a doctrine is believed.”

1 Peter 3:15 – 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.

In our previous topics, we have determined that there is a supernatural, unseen creator. But which god is God? We have evaluated the major religions and have found that only Biblical Christianity provides a coherent, verifiable approach to creation.

Acts 17:26-31– According to this text, we see that the duty of man was to seek God, though he is not far from anyone. Furthermore, God is not a figment of our imagination and is not found or represented in images made by man. The responsibility of man is for each to reconsider what he thinks about God and especially of Jesus Christ, who will be the judge of us all. If one is not found to be in Him, having His righteousness, which is by grace, then that one is condemned. If one believes in Jesus, then that one will not be judged but has eternal life.

The question of the purpose of life, the duty of man, is addressed by every religion; that is the purpose of religion. Questions like: What is humanity's present condition? Have we fallen from the created status as a result of sin? Is there a barrier against our creator(s)? If so, how is this remedied?

ACCORDING TO HINDUISM

According to the Rig Veda, gods and humans were all part of the same entity. The physical realm was created by the sacrifice of the gods, and the ultimate goal of man is to return to that eternal spiritual state.

Hindus do believe that they are responsible to the gods for how they live their lives. The prayers people address to the gods denote a sinful human nature. Humans constantly ask for forgiveness for the sins they do, which are either errors in performing the right religious ritual, or faults against one's neighbor:

If we have sinned against the man who loves us, Have wronged a brother, a dear friend, or a comrade, The neighbor of long-standing or a stranger, Remove from us this stain, O King Varuna. (Rig Veda 5, 85, 7).

To the fire god Agni, who burns away sins through the fire ritual, people ask for forgiveness, but also for material welfare: Shining brightly, Agni, drive away our sin, and shine wealth on us. Shining bright, drive away our sin. For good fields, for good homes,

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for wealth, we made our offerings to you. Shining bright, drive away our sin. (Rig Veda 1, 97, 1-2)

According to the hymns of the Rig Veda, humans are personal beings dependent on the gods, and their destiny is eternal life in a celestial world. Here is how the worshipers of Indra express their longing for personal immortality:

Make me immortal in the realm
where the son of Vivasvat (Yama) reigns,
Where lies heaven's secret shrine, where
are those waters that are ever young.
For Indra, flow you on, Indu!

Make me immortal in that realm
where movement is accordant to wish,
In the third region, the third heaven of heavens,
where the worlds are resplendent.
For Indra, flow you on, Indu! (Rig Veda 9,113,8-9)

According to most Hindus, the components of human nature are the physical body, asu, and manas. Asu is the vital principle (different from personal attributes), and manas is the sum of psycho-mental faculties (mind, feeling, and will). They believe that both the body and the soul are preserved after death.

May nothing of thy manas, nothing of the asu, nothing of the limbs, nothing of thy vital fluid, nothing of thy body here by any means be lost (Atharva Veda 18,2,24).

What is sin?

Sin is a result of ignorance; a process develops in the spiritual world similar to the law of action and reaction that works in the physical world. This is karma, the law of action and retribution according to one's deeds.

It was thought that in the same way sacrifices bring good results to the one who performs them, all his other acts also need a reward. This mechanism prevents humans from entering the celestial world after death or limits their stay there, forcing them to come back in this life and reap the fruits of their deeds. As a result of karma, any action has an effect on its performer. The practical way one reaps the fruits of his or her deeds is reincarnation. It teaches that we live further lives as humans or, according to how badly we acted and how gross our ignorance was in detaching from the material world, as animals or plants.

Is there redemption, reconciliation, or atonement?

No. The only way one can obtain good status is by doing good.

"One becomes good by good action, bad by bad action." "As is man's desire, so is his will; as is his will, so is the deed he does, whatever he does, that he attains."

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"Some souls enter into a womb for embodiment; others enter stationary objects according to their deeds and according to their thoughts."

The human condition in Hinduism is that of a fallen state, but the redemptive arc is that of a perpetual retry system. Only upon full enlightenment and a life that is perpetually good and perfect will one enter the final eternal state.

Even though they pray for forgiveness and make sacrifices, this is not a substitute for good karma. The Hindu system is a complete works-based system that believes a person can be good enough to obtain god-level honor and become one with "god."

ACCORDING TO BUDDHISM

Buddhism describes the human condition in very harsh terms:

Behold this painted body, a body full of wounds, put together, diseased, and full of many thoughts in which there is neither permanence nor stability. This body is worn out, a nest of diseases, and very frail. This heap of corruption breaks in pieces, life indeed ends in death. What delight is there for him who sees these white bones like gourds cast away in the autumn? Of the bones a citadel is made, plastered over with flesh and blood, and in it dwell old age and death, pride and deceit. (Dhammapada 147-150)

The reality of suffering is seen as motivation for seeking liberation is not a new element in Eastern Polytheistic Mystical Religions. But Buddhism goes further than the many forms of Hinduism. He denied there is a self as an unchanging entity that would define our nature, that would reincarnate and eventually attain liberation. This is called the no-self (anatta) doctrine. What we call a "person" is in fact, the product of five factors that depend upon each other and are themselves in a constant process of becoming. These five factors, called aggregates (skandha), are the following:

1. The body, also called the material form (rupa);
2. Feeling (vedana), the sensations that arise from the body's sense organs.
3. Cognition (sanna), the process of classifying and labeling sensory and mental objects, which enables us to recognize them.
4. Mental constructions (sankhara), the states that initiate action and give shape to our character (the will).
5. Consciousness (vijnana), the sense of awareness of a sensory or mental object, the aggregate that generates the illusion of a self.

The rejection of "self" is the most significant practical theology in Buddhism. All discussions and philosophical debates on the existence and definition of "self" have as the only result persistence in suffering, and are hindrances in attaining liberation.

Buddhism argues that the answers we would like to know about the character of the universe, the existence of a soul or a transcendent Ultimate Reality, start debates that lead us astray from our real problem, which is escaping from suffering (Majjhima Nikaya sutra 63).

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Buddhism discourages speculative thinking on these issues in order to concentrate all efforts on reaching nirvana, a state where they all lose importance, not because the answers are found, but because in nirvana, there is no one left to get them.

Regarding sin and the human condition, this is a very silly way of looking at the world and of God. If there is no self, who is actually suffering? Who is liberated? If there is no self, what is reincarnated from one existence to another?

In Buddhism, there is no reconciliation, no atonement, no accountability. Only the current suffering is reality, and one must lose their “self” in order to obtain peace and to return to the undescribed, impersonal, essence of god.

How do they know that?

ACCORDING TO TAOISM

Taoism states that humans must align their lives with nature. All instincts, feelings, and imagination must be allowed to manifest freely, imitating nature. Only in this way will the tyranny of selfishness and violence be defeated.

When the Tao is forgotten
Duty and justice appear;
Then knowledge and wisdom are born
Along with hypocrisy.

When harmonious relationships dissolve
Then respect and devotion arise;
When a nation falls to chaos
Then loyalty and patriotism are born.

If we could abolish duty and justice
Then harmonious relationships would form; (Tao-te Ching 18-19)

Human nature is a reflection of the universe. It is a small universe permeated by the Tao, with which it has to be in resonance (yin-yang). Like the universe itself, humans have an ascending life and a descending one, which ends in death. The ascending life is the spiritual one, which leads one to birth, the pinnacle of existence.

Physical life, unlike the spiritual one, is chaotic because humans do not know how to keep up their vital force. They die due to this ignorance before yin and yang can naturally separate and their being return to the Tao.

Like Buddhism, there is no real accountability to the gods for behavior; it simply recycles until everyone gets it right. However, in Taoism, the responsibility is to the society, and people must take retribution for disharmony.

Once again, we are faced with a belief that either through behavior or spiritual emphasis, one can attain the essence of God. There is no atonement, no reconciliation.