

6.

God Who? (Did God Walk Among Us?)

Mahatma Gandhi supposedly said “I like your Christ. I don’t like your Christians; they are so unlike your Christ.”(1) I appreciate his poignancy. However, that sounds like Christ’s exemplary life and teachings produced a bad product. Most “Christians” aren’t Christ’s disciples any more than “fool’s gold” (pyrite) is real gold.

All world religions would deserve equal consideration if enough serious arguments in favor of these systems were presented. Instead, even people like Gandhi spoke more about Christianity than their own religion. Therefore the two major groups I primarily discuss are Christianity and anti-religion.

Jesus Who?

Jesus, called Christ, is the most famous person in history. Besides early Christian writings, non-Christian historians such as Josephus, Mara Bar-Serapion, and Lucian also documented his life.(2) Besides, the quantity of historical records existing for characters like Julius Caesar, Aristotle, Plato, Cleopatra, Pochontas, Archimedes, Charlemagne, Copernicus, Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and any Egyptian pharaoh is only a fraction of what is documented about Christ. Yet not only their having lived, but the accuracy of their historical records remains largely unquestioned. The sole difference is that Jesus forcefully taught many things and lived an extraordinary lifestyle that he expected others to emulate, making people very uncomfortable. Let’s examine Jesus’ claims about himself and other’s claims about him:

Jewish leaders saw Jesus’ claim that God was his father as blasphemously making himself God’s equal, and therefore sought to kill him (John 5:17-18). John 10:30-33 repeats this scenario.

Jesus declared himself an immortal preexistent being by claiming to have lived contemporaneously with Abraham, who lived thousands of years earlier (John 8:56-58). Jesus declaring himself Exodus 3:14’s great I AM was clearer than saying “I’m God,” since people worshipped a pantheon of gods. They might say “Which God?” Notice the reaction in verse 59.

Jesus accepted worship in all four gospel accounts, while an angel rebuked John for worshipping him (Revelation 19:10 and 22:8-9). Thomas declared Christ “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28-29). Jesus responded affirmatively.

Jesus claimed to complete the Father’s Old Covenant. That’s like declaring a great artist’s sculpture unfinished, and that you’ll complete it, essentially declaring that you equal the mind and ability of the project’s initiator. Jesus declared God’s project the Old Covenant unfinished, and himself its finisher.

Corinthians 10:9 KJV cites Numbers 21:5-8 where Yahweh punished people with serpents; it identifies Christ as Yahweh (or the LORD). Philippians 2:9: Christ’s name is above every name. Colossians 2:9 states: In him (Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Timothy 3:16 states that God was manifest in the flesh. Hebrews 1:8 declares Jesus God (Philemon and Hebrews chapter 1 give the context). Jesus Christ declares himself the Almighty in Revelation 1:8. Read the entire chapter for the context.

For extra-biblical witness, Ignatius’s *Epistle to the Trallians 7:16-17* (AD 105) states:continue in intimate union with Jesus Christ our God.....Irenæus (AD 180) called Jesus “our Lord and God.” (*Against Heresies 1:10:1*). Pliny the Younger, pagan governor of Pontus/Bithynia (AD 111-113) in his letter 10.96-97 *to Emperor Trajan* noted that Christians customarily sang hymns to Christ as a god, which he wasn’t too happy about (witness for the opposition) 3

Though very few non-Christian sources document Christ’s life, and they lack details, this should be expected. If what’s written about Christ is true, he would have had such a profound effect that witnesses would likely have become Christian believers. Especially resistant witnesses would likely

flee his presence. Therefore almost all non-Christian documentation would have been eliminated via conversion or repulsion.

Recommended reading: *Scripture Testimony to the Deity of Christ* by Samuel Green.⁽⁴⁾

He listed one hundred ways that Scripture portrays Christ as God. That Scripture portrays Christ as God is incontrovertible. It's claimed that Jesus Christ was of virgin birth; God incarnate who annexed human life. Jesus claimed god-ship and acted as God, disallowing other options. This claim is either true or false. Four possible alternatives exist:

DISTORTION? As just explained, there was no ambivalence in Christian Scripture or within other writings of the early Church as to who Christ was. That Jesus didn't flaunt his deity proves nothing since that would violate the nature of his meek and humble character. He came to set an example of a servant. And again, records of historical figures are unquestioned if there is enough information written about them to establish the truth. Yet Jesus of Nazareth has more written about him than a dozen other historical figures combined.

DECEPTION? If Jesus knew he wasn't god while so claiming, he was lying and purposely deceiving his followers. If he was a liar, he was also grossly hypocritical by preaching complete honesty while living an outrageous lie. He also upheld the Judaic law, which condemned worshipping or even honoring any God besides Jehovah. Therefore, this view doesn't fit. Moreover, other religious leaders had known character defects, from minor ones, on up to adultery and murder while Jesus was known for perfect character. Besides, the motivations to lie: money, sex, and worldly comforts, were absent. Fame would be a possible motive, but the risk counteracted that. Jesus willingly died a torturous death for his beliefs.

DEMENTIA? Could Jesus have mistakenly considered himself God? Somebody who thinks he's God sounds like he needs psychiatric help and cannot function in society. No written record by any historian or other evidence even suggests that Jesus had any mental problem. And imagine a mentally deranged man being the most influential person that ever lived. If everyone heeded his teaching to treat others the way we'd want to be treated ourselves, we'd have a much nicer saner world.

DEITY? The nature of Jesus Christ must be one of four possibilities. We cannot deny his historical existence while accepting the existence of others and remain logical. We cannot quarantine his claim of deity while calling him a great moral teacher. Being sane while claiming deity would be criminal (as David Koresh). If brain damaged, he would be incompetent and should thus be ignored and avoided. If he was a great moral teacher, then he was also much more. There's no middle ground. Since he was the most noteworthy person of all time, we must decide. This tetra-lemma (a dilemma with four alternatives instead of two) was widely cited by numerous theologians throughout the centuries and has undergone several modifications.^{5,6}

The Christ Myth?

Details from the biographical records of Jesus of Nazareth and surrounding events correspond to ancient mythology. Skeptics claim that this refutes Christianity. However, comparative lists constructed by non-Christians exclude the differences between early Christianity and ancient mythology. Including the radical differences paints a different picture. Especially glaring is the fact that Krishna was said to have sixteen thousand wives, while Jesus never married. Besides, several stories from mythology are paraphrased and given Christian terms in order to make them resemble the Christian Gospel, when they actually don't.⁷⁻¹⁰

Moreover, Christianity's core foundational elements being identical to earlier events in mythology, such as a god becoming man, deicide, reanimating, and twelve disciples, is as natural as pagans and Christians both choosing to cuddle with kittens rather than venomous snakes and cacti.

History abounded with renowned philosophers who spent little time watching television, viewing internet porn, or playing video games. Rather, they applied their minds to theological profundities, naturally concluding that life couldn't exist without a creator. The next logical step would be observing that harmoniousness is natural and integral to life. Since an evidentiary creator has been deduced, along with natural harmoniousness, and nature is often embattled, logic says creation degenerated from the creator's plan. Degeneration then requires regeneration, reconnecting what's been degenerated, and must include both parties reconnecting. Since Creator and creation were disconnected, an advocate, both man and God, is the most logical conclusion.

If the advocate was less than man, such as a lizard, he couldn't understand how to rectify the broken situation. If the advocate was more than man, such as a colossal psychokinetic being whose bodily composition constantly fluctuated, he'd be incomprehensible and would not share the human experience. For this advocate to be both God and human, he must be born of a virgin woman, since males cannot bear children, and the other party must be God. A man blasting his seed skyward towards a heavenly female god is unreasonable, but a male god could sensibly send down miraculous seed. The man-god had to be male since women did not take leadership roles.

Dying for fellow men is logically the ultimate commitment, and conquering death, humanity's greatest fear and most permanent foe, by rising from it, is the greatest feat. If Christ did less than this, He would fail man's highest expectations and imaginings. If He did more than this, such as randomly altering everyone's molecular structure with cosmic radiation ala The Fantastic Four, He would be sidetracked from His purpose of redeeming and regenerating humanity.

Since everyone knows that water is naturally purifying, no wonder ancient cultures endowed washing in water with spiritual meaning. God choosing to make Christian baptism spiritually empowering would flow with natural human yearnings; making a mental connection between physical and spiritual cleansing. Throughout history, the number twelve has dominated human thinking. There are twelve inches in a foot, twelve in a dozen, days and nights have twelve hours, and hours and minutes have sixty, a multiple of twelve. Having twelve disciples naturally avoided endless argument over how many disciples there should be.

Thirdly, the most important and indispensable component of Christianity is love. It's considered so important that Christians are supposed to love God with every fiber of their being and love everyone else. Without love, Christian scripture says, "you're nothing." Instead of lumping together Christianity and mythology, lump ancient Egyptian, Mediterranean, Greek, Roman, and Norse mythology with atheistic philosophy since none are founded on love.

Besides, Christ is so universally recognized as a historical figure, year numbers are based on his birth (which were slightly altered via changes between the Gregorian and Julian calendars). In sharp contrast, other character's accounts are universally understood as non-historical.

To recapitulate, A) excluding what's dissimilar between Christianity and paganism paints a false picture, B) a logical domino effect begs the same scenario as historical Christianity, C) the all-important concept of love makes Christianity unique, and D) Christ is clearly historical while the pagan stories are clearly myths. Finally, although paganism predated Christianity, it is predated and trumped by God who created the human brain from which paganism sprung. So this desperate attempt to debunk Christianity fails completely.

Other Identities and Beliefs

There's absolutely no record whatsoever of anyone believing that Jesus was archangel Michael before 1875. And if God wanted to preserve any important documentation by His providence, He could have

done so. Rather, “Christ is NOT to be regarded as an angel-----as a Gabriel or a Michael” (Tertullian’s *On The Flesh of Christ Chapter XIV*; AD 210). The same with seeing Jesus as Adam reincarnated; more private interpretation which is warned against (II Peter 1:20). Other elaborations on the earliest views of Jesus Christ can be found in *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* edited by David W. Ber- cot. Besides, New Testament scripture and the early fathers refute the idea that Jesus was a pantheist.

Positive qualities exist in varying religious traditions, which could even enrich one’s Christianity. However, if Jesus was God as claimed, then the original Christianity He espoused would logically be 100% correct. Likewise, on whatever point another religion contradicts Jesus, it would automatically be wrong (and sinful) especially since no other major religious leader even claimed divinity. Besides, other religious leaders had notable character defects. Mohammed was a violent man and a polygamist, the original Buddha abandoned his wife and child, King David and Moses committed adultery and murder, Zoroaster was a priest for a polytheistic religion until he converted at age thirty, and Confucius admitted that he had self-doubt until age forty, and was merely a student of wisdom.

Some complain that my views are one-sided by not giving every belief equal time. However, there are hundreds of different religions. Even spending three months studying each one would be impossible. With Jesus’ claim to deity, the highest moral teachings of anyone, and his magnanimous character which is recorded as perfect, he shines as a brilliant beacon like none other.

Nostradamus and Other Seers Verses Christian Prophecy

Astrologer Michel de Nostradame (1503-1566) published quatrains (four line verses) that became world famous as prophecies. His prophecies were much different than biblical prophecies, which were straightforward and fulfilled without error, showing their supernatural origin. Besides being focused on disconnected secular events, not connected events of religious significance, Nostradamus presented himself as one of the occultist prophets, who generally sought to clothe their predictions in cryptic language to “veil their true meanings from the ignorant and reveal them only to the wise,” so they claimed.

Nostradamus complained about “being surrounded by enemies of literature without a particle of true learning amongst them.” Well might he then make his prophecies nearly impenetrable. Denied predictions of a more obvious kind, readers were now tempted to use his verses as one might read tea leaves, reading anything they fancied into them. “I’m human; I can err; fail, and be deceived,” he wrote, contradicting his earlier claim of inerrancy. The policy therefore, was to make it impossible to prove whether he’d been right or wrong in the first place.

For this, word-play of every kind would be useful, resulting in the verses as they are now known: puns, anagrams, obsolete syntax and all. These features need consideration by anyone hoping to decode the “prophet.” Since a primary goal was obfuscation, this was considered legitimate. Nostradamus primarily wrote in French, which remains rich in confusing homonyms and whose true meaning emerges only from the context. He also split some words, and joined together others. On some occasions we’re faced with two equally possible meanings on the basis of phonics alone.

His alleged prediction about Adolf Hitler, that the recurring word Hifter refers to him; the word was in fact the classical name for the lower Danube, explaining why Nostradamus was prone to couple it with the Rhine (the two rivers having once formed the Roman Empire’s northeastern frontier). Most references merely take the form of generalized, though highly suggestive descriptions within even more highly suggestive contexts. Section IX. 49, for example, was seen as referencing Charles I of England’s execution since no other monarch was executed by Parliament as the verse predicted; the “wretch” described at VIII.76 is ersatz to Cromwell.

If the subjects in Nostradamus’s verses can be identified only in retrospect, what good are his predictions? The seer rarely names directly what he can allude to in obscure terms. Their very vagueness and lack of dating creates their popularity, making them easy to retrospectively quote after major dramatic events, and proclaim them fulfilled. If some of Nostradamus’s prophecy was specific-

ally fulfilled, his supporters could have spelled them out for us. Instead, a modern incarnation of this nonsense exists in alleged “Bible Codes,” creating even more obfuscation.¹¹⁻¹³

Today there are many false prophets, ESP readers, and mediums (of the same ilk). Even a broken watch is right twice a day. Let’s give no heed, spending no time or money on modern so-called prophets, necromancers, and assorted charlatans. I’m expending my energy to write against Nostradamus and such people because Christianity teaches that only God can predict the distant future with a high degree of accuracy. Many believe that all kinds of people have such powers. But it would follow that all such people speak on God’s behalf, which idea is antithetical to Christianity.

In sharp contrast, believing that Jesus Christ accurately fulfilled prophecy is indispensable to Christianity; Christ claimed that people would recognize him BY his fulfillment of prophecy. He was to be identified as nonviolent (Isaiah 53:9), having zeal for Godly matters which divides him from the community (Psalm 69:7-12), and for speaking in parables (Psalm 78:2). Daniel 2:31-44 and 7:2-27 predict a spiritual kingdom (the Church) arising in the Roman Empire’s era, gaining dominance in Rome, hastening Rome’s demise, and spreading throughout the world.

The Seventy Week’s Prophecy (Dan. 9:21-27) precisely predicts Jerusalem’s rebuilding in 457 BC, the start of Christ’s ministry, His death, and Jerusalem’s second destruction in AD 70. Zechariah 11:12-13 predicts the price of Christ’s betrayal as thirty pieces of silver, its casting onto the Temple floor, and its being used to buy the potter’s field. (See Matthew 27:3-9). These are just a few examples of the entire conglomeration of prophecies and fulfillments, which work together to paint an inescapable and clear picture.

Besides, some prophecies involved Christ suffering a torturous death, dissuading anyone from attempting to create self-fulfilling prophecy. Others who were antagonistic to Christ’s mission also fulfilled some prophecies. They wouldn’t purposely fulfill prophecy, rather they did it inadvertently.

What Separates Jesus Christ from Others?

There are seven factors: his claim to deity, his perfect character, his fulfillment of prophecy (all mentioned previously), his virgin birth, his working of numerous miracles of a charitable nature, his sacrificing worldly pursuits to focus completely on spirituality, and his arising from the dead.

Others claimed to be God, but trumpeted their claim for self-serving ends. Christ’s approach was the opposite; being humble, he hinted at his deity and combined it with his outstanding character to help others have faith in God the Father.

Others fulfilled prophecy, but did so in light of Christ’s mission. Christ’s apostles worked numerous miracles of charity, but through Christ’s power, never of themselves. Others arose from the dead, but everybody arose after Christ’s miracles and resurrection, and always arose in conjunction with Christ. Although the Buddha and Gandhi sacrificed worldly pursuits to focus on spirituality, Jesus went further; He even gave up His life. Others who gave up their lives lacked those other qualities.

Proof?

Skeptics wonder why there isn’t absolute proof to establish Christ’s deity and other theological claims. Yet there’s enough evidence so those who are open to loving God will respond and not so much evidence that believing in Him is compulsory.

Besides, many people complain that there are so many hypocrites. Now if belief were compulsory, as it is compulsory to believe in car crashes, Christendom might be completely overrun by hypocrites. Since there’s a loophole where “Somehow, some way, faith claims might be fallacious,” rogues can use that escape hatch (or garbage chute) to help make some type of separation.

Moreover, Romeo doesn't propose to Juliet in syllogisms or with scientific arguments. He doesn't bring a lawyer, produce undeniable videotaped evidence, or formulate mathematical proofs. Rather, by displaying the greatest love for her, he expected her to abandon her current life to follow him. We take so many chances on mere human relationships, which fail constantly, yet balk at a hope of something much greater; a tragedy indeed.

Was Christianity Exclusive?

Exclusivism is herein defined as the claim that Christianity is the only true faith and means of salvation. With such a serious, controversial, and emotionally charged topic, I'm limiting my personal commentary, so others cannot say that my position is self-originated or biased.

The following quotes, paraphrased from the New Testament Scriptures universally lauded by Christian believers, are bracketed: {Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23 (duplicate texts): He that isn't with me (JESUS) is against me.....}

{Luke 19:27: Mine enemies, who wouldn't be subject to me, bring them hither, and slay them...} Atheist Penn Jillette misconstrued this passage to argue against Christianity. Yet this part of Christ's parable has always been understood as symbolizing the angels destroying souls at the end of time who, after a lifetime of opportunity, willfully rejected Christ. He never suggested that sinful people kill anyone on His behalf. Compare Luke's parable, which starts at verse 12, with Matt.13:47-50.

{John's Gospel 3:18: Believers in him (JESUS) aren't condemned: but disbelievers are condemned already, because they haven't believed God's only begotten Son.}

{Jn.3:36: He that believeth on the Son (JESUS) hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son won't see life; but God's wrath abides on him.}

{Jn.6:53: Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the Son of man's (JESUS') flesh and drink his blood, there's no life in you.} {Jn.8:24: If ye believe not that I (JESUS) am He (God) ye shall die in your sins.}

{Jn.14:6: Jesus said "I'm the Way, the Truth, and the Life: nobody comes unto the Father (God) but by me."}

{Jn.15:5b-6:without me (JESUS) ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me (JESUS) he's rejected as a withered branch which is cast into the fire and incinerated.}

{Acts 4:11-12: This rejected stone (JESUS) is become the chief cornerstone. There's salvation in none other: for there's none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.}

{Corinthians 16:22: If anyone doesn't love Jesus Christ, he's anathema (officially denounced and cursed).}

{Ephesians 4:4-5: There's one body, one Spirit, one Hope; one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism.....(Since several of these aphorisms exist, not just one, the Apostle Paul, by process of elimination, must be inferring that there's only one TRUE body, Spirit, hope, Lord, and faith.)}

{II Thessalonians 1:7-9:.....the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction.....}

{Hebrews 11:6: Without faith it's impossible to please him (God): for he that cometh to God must believe that he (JESUS) is (God and Savior).}

{John's First Epistle 4:2-3: Hereby know ye God's Spirit: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ has entered the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: this is that spirit of antichrist.....}

{John's Second Epistle verse 7: Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ has annexed flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.}

{ verses 9-10: Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in Christ's doctrine, hath not God. He that abideth in Christ's doctrine, he hath both the Father and Son. If any come unto you, bringing not this doctrine, don't receive him into your house, neither bid him Godspeak... }

If any aforementioned text, originating from the King James Translation, seems inaccurately represented or taken out of context, read the entire chapters from which those texts reside.

A Treatise on Re-Baptism Section 12 AD 257: "All those, by denying the true Christ and introducing or following another-----although there is no other at all-----leave themselves no hope or salvation; not otherwise than they who have denied Christ before men, who must needs be denied by Christ."

Arnobius Against the Heathen Book II Section 65 AD 305: ".....'Unless then, my opponent says, I shall be a Christian, I cannot hope for salvation.' "It is just as you say.....The Almighty Master of the world has determined that this should be the way of salvation,----this the door, so to say, of life; by Him alone is there access to the light: nor may men either creep in or enter elsewhere, all other ways being shut up and secured by an impenetrable barrier."

Those Who Never Heard

Since many have never had the opportunity of hearing Christ's message, absolute exclusivism would be tantamount to arbitrarily creating people either saved or lost, incompatible with a God of Love. Paraphrasing a Greek Orthodox website: Everyone can participate in the "spermatikos logos" (seed of reason). Alien nations were given the "natural law" innate in human conscience and are simply expected to live according to His image in that respect. Everyone being made in God's image and likeness means that His image is indelibly imprinted within their personhood. Therefore, carrying God's image, everyone has access to revelation and salvation, God being omnipresent (**John 1:9**). As sunbeams give the physical world life and energy, God's Son, the Logos, illuminates everyone entering the world." (14)

Little children and severely mentally handicapped people are also covered under special grace. They are illuminated by their God-given conscience, and see God through His creation. However, those with adequate intelligence who have had adequate exposure to Christianity must attempt to follow that full revelation.

Missionary work is still commendable because Christ considered it a Christian work and duty to spread His truth, which also betters human lives. But putting a person's eternal spiritual destiny entirely in human hands would be unconscionable. It is God who ultimately saves or condemns. Another possibility of receiving Christ's message in isolated regions is by miraculous means, such as spiritual visions, by truth-seekers.

In the prenatal state, infant's mothers automatically sustain them. Likewise, people may automatically receive spiritual life in this present life, precursor to the next. So those who didn't believe because of inadequate exposure to the Gospel could be saved by God's grace. Regardless, **grace** is ultimately what saves every creature. Yet those who incessantly reject God's will expressed through Christ (the Way, Truth, and Life) ipso facto cut themselves off. This wouldn't negate contingent exclusivism; exclusivism would still be true if everybody who was ultimately saved was saved by Christ and nobody else. Although everyone who never heard the Christian message or who cannot comprehend it can be saved simply by obeying their conscience and their limited understanding of the truth, their conscience should compel them to seek as much truth as they can find. So there's no loophole.

I never knew anyone who would die for me. Moreover, if someone's life or limb is in jeopardy, most people won't even offer assistance. Since Jesus died for us, stick with Jesus' teaching. And Christianity DOES pay the bills; Christianity facilitates the creation of stable households which allows its members to thrive, while those from broken homes often end up with nothing. Moreover, Jesus Christ paid a bill so astronomical that we never could.

If you found this introductory essay enlightening, do further research on this subject matter. As Jesus said: “Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.” (Matthew 7:7-8)

The Christian Message

Originally, God created the entire physical and spiritual universe. Creation was completely in harmony with His wishes. However, God gave higher life forms free will, since without choice they could never love Him. They'd be merely flesh robots. And almighty God needs nothing but His creature's love, proven by their obedience.

Yet creatures chose to reject and disobey God, severing this relationship and creating a permanent spiritual rift and tendencies toward misbehavior, which affects everyone. God lovingly sought to repair the broken relationship. To accomplish this He sent His Holy Spirit to unite with a devout woman, who gave birth to God's Son, who was both God and man.

This God-man, Jesus of Nazareth, lived a perfect life, thus fulfilling God's standard for humanity. He was killed for His message (deicide) thereby becoming the ultimate sacrifice. By arising from the dead He conquered death, the rightful sentence for all sinful creatures. He became the Christ: supreme anointed one, and the necessary Mediator between God the Father and his broken creatures. Christ will come again as Judge. To be saved from our rightful condemnation and eternal death, we must turn our lives over to Him as much as our ability allows. See the plan of salvation: end of chapter 16.

