



Religious Pluralism

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∞ Relativism ∞

Another word for 'relative' or 'relativism' one might hear is 'subjective' or 'subjectivism'.

∞ Relativism ∞

The opposite of subjective is objective.

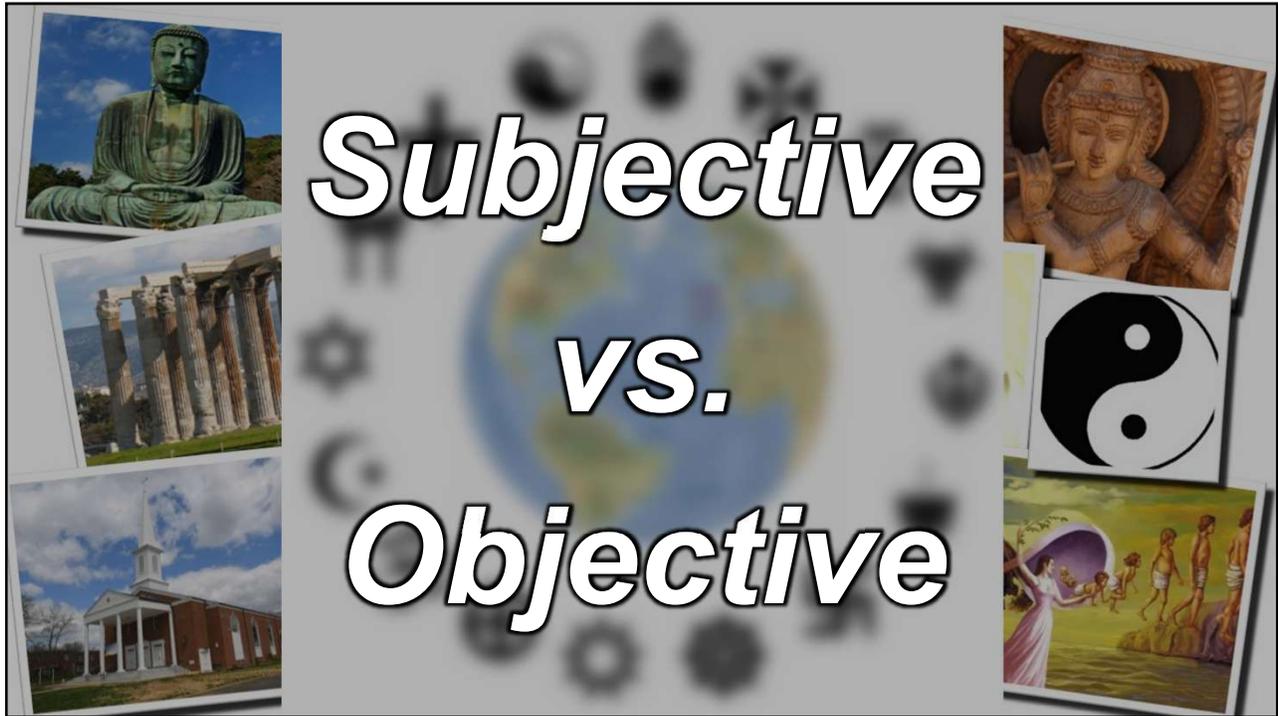
In a moment, we will explore the difference between subjective and objective.

Not all forms of relativism (more accurately here called subjectivism) are bad. Some subjectivism is completely normal.

Deep or shallow?







Subjective = The truth or falsity of a claim is with reference to the subject. It is dependent upon the subject's circumstances or opinion.

Objective = The truth or falsity of a claim is with reference to the object. It is not dependent upon the subject's circumstances or opinion.

Asparagus is tasty! = **Subjective**

Asparagus is a vegetable. = **Objective**

∞ Skepticism ∞

grants that there may be objective truth about X, but we cannot know what that truth is.

∞ Pluralism ∞

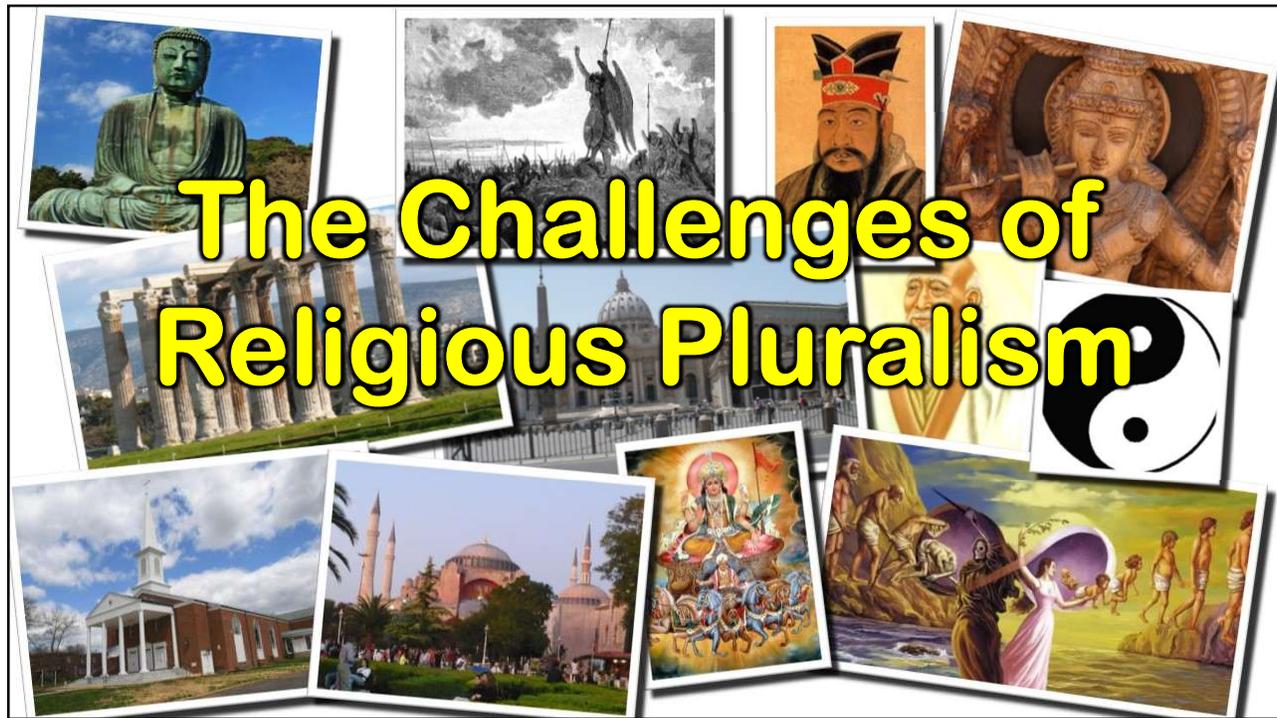
Relativism with respect to religion is sometimes called "pluralism" or "religious pluralism" or "religious diversity."

∞ Pluralism ∞

In some contexts, the expressions 'pluralism' or 'religious pluralism' or 'religious diversity' mean nothing more than that there are in fact various religions in the world.

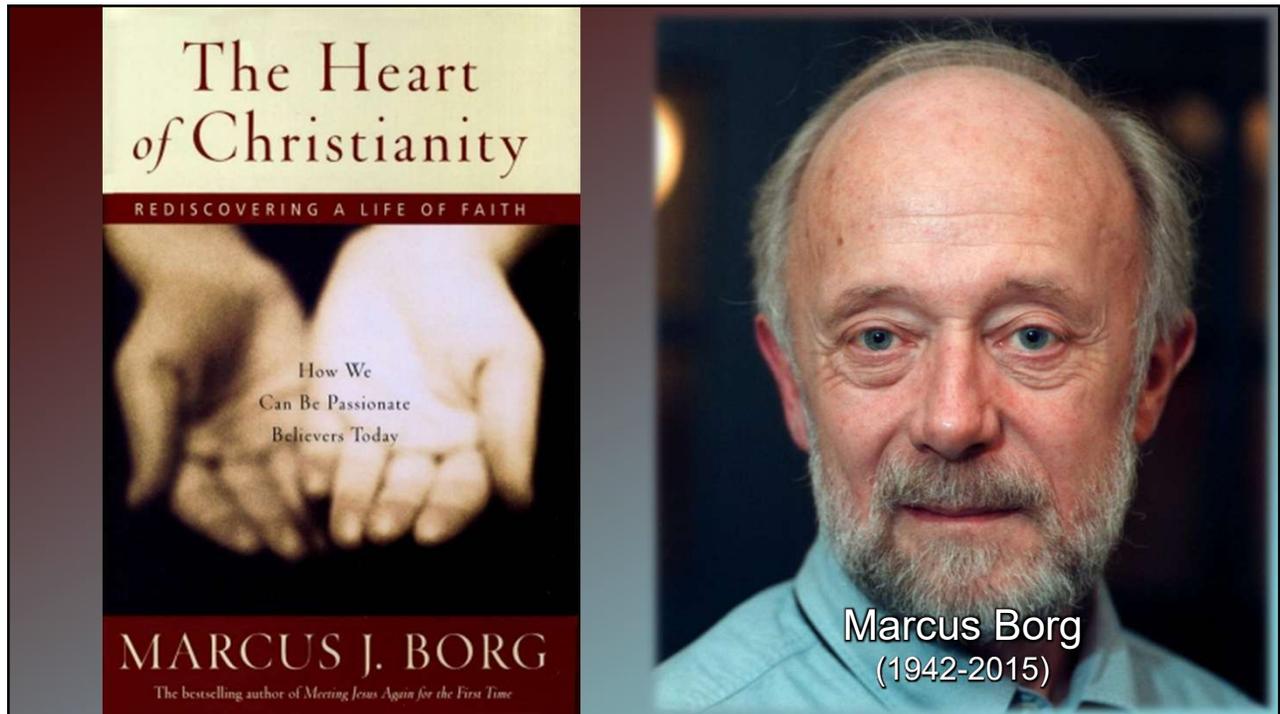
∞ Pluralism ∞

In other contexts, these expressions are use by those, generally held liberal and postmodern Christians or by non-Christians, that all religious beliefs are equally valid or legitimate.



Could it be that all religions basically lead to the same destination?

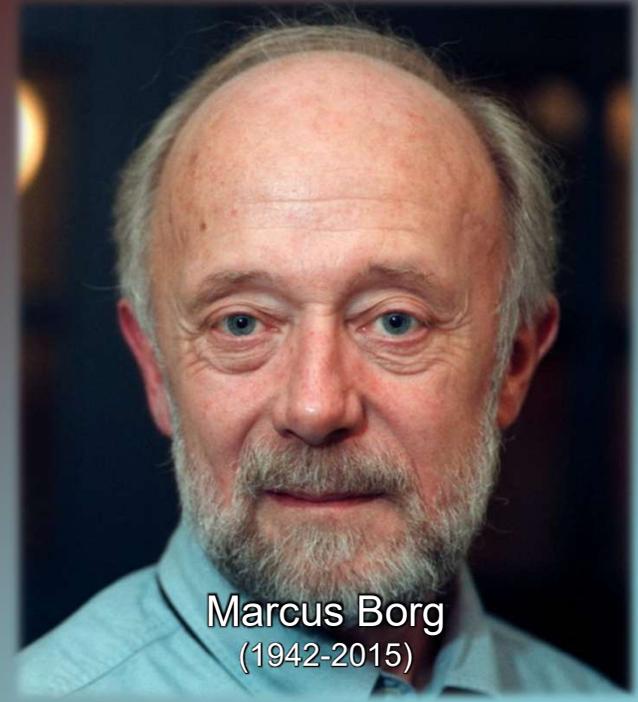
Are Not All Religions the Same at the Core?



"[Religions] all affirm a way, a path; and the paths are all recognizable variants of the same path, the same way. ...

The Way of the cross, the way of Lao Tzu, the way of the Buddha, the way of Islam, and the way of Judaism all speak of the same path: the path of dying to an old identity and way of being and being born into a new identity and way of being. All refer to the same transformation of the self."

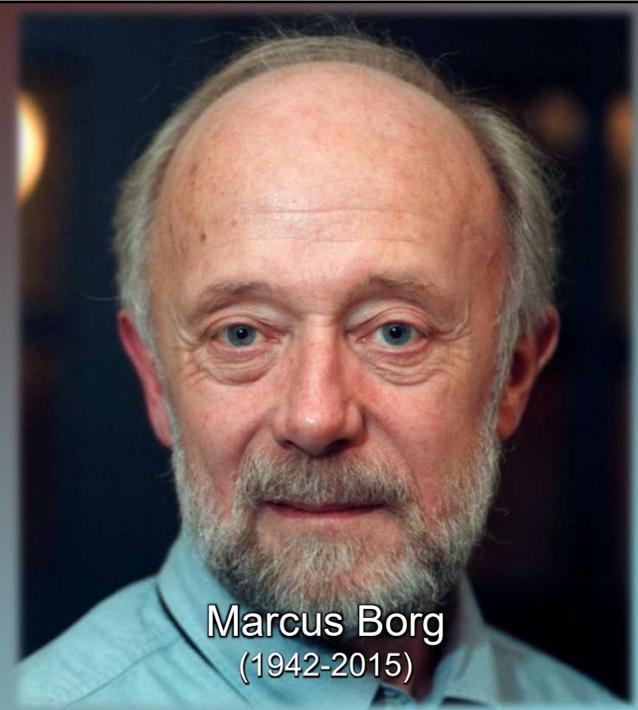
[The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2003), 216]



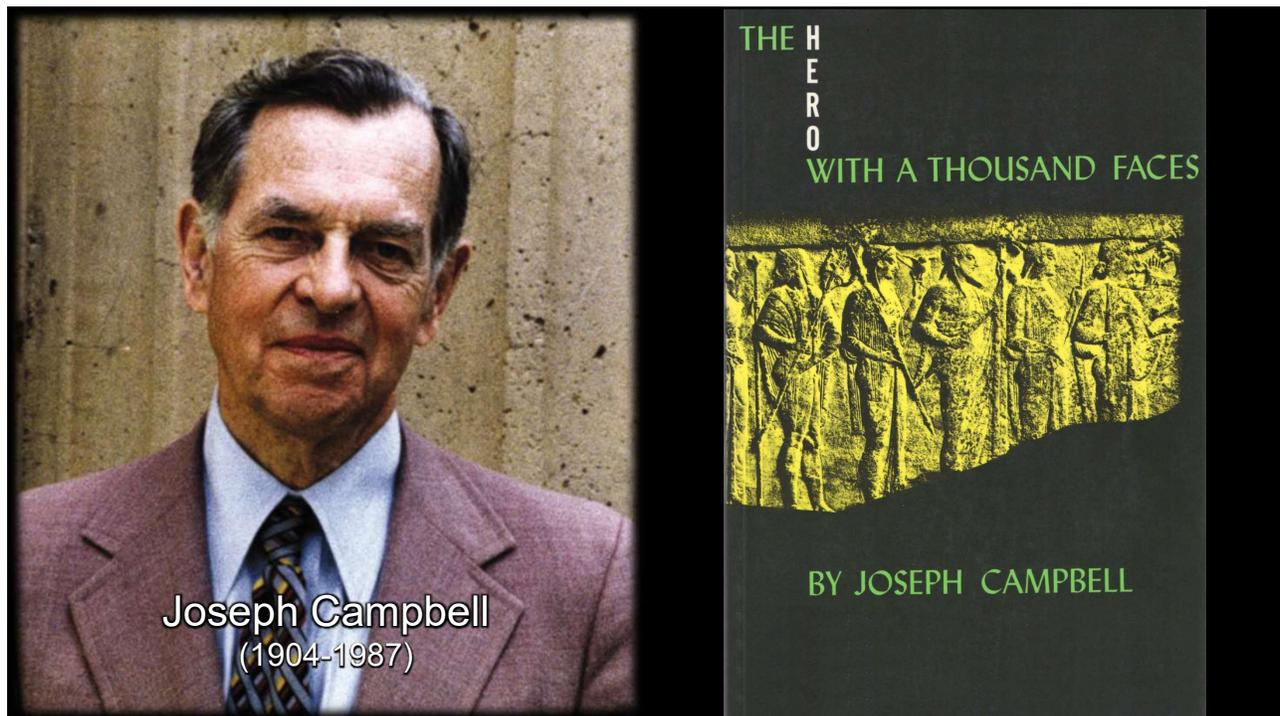
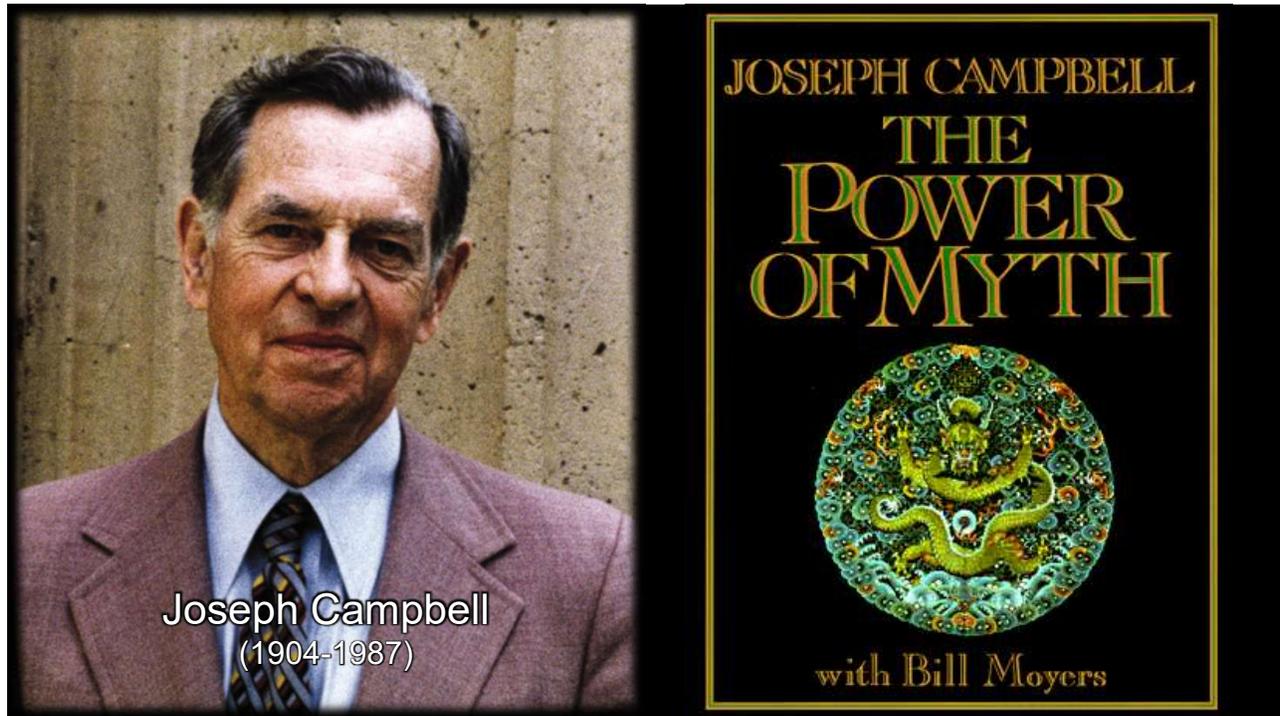
Marcus Borg
(1942-2015)

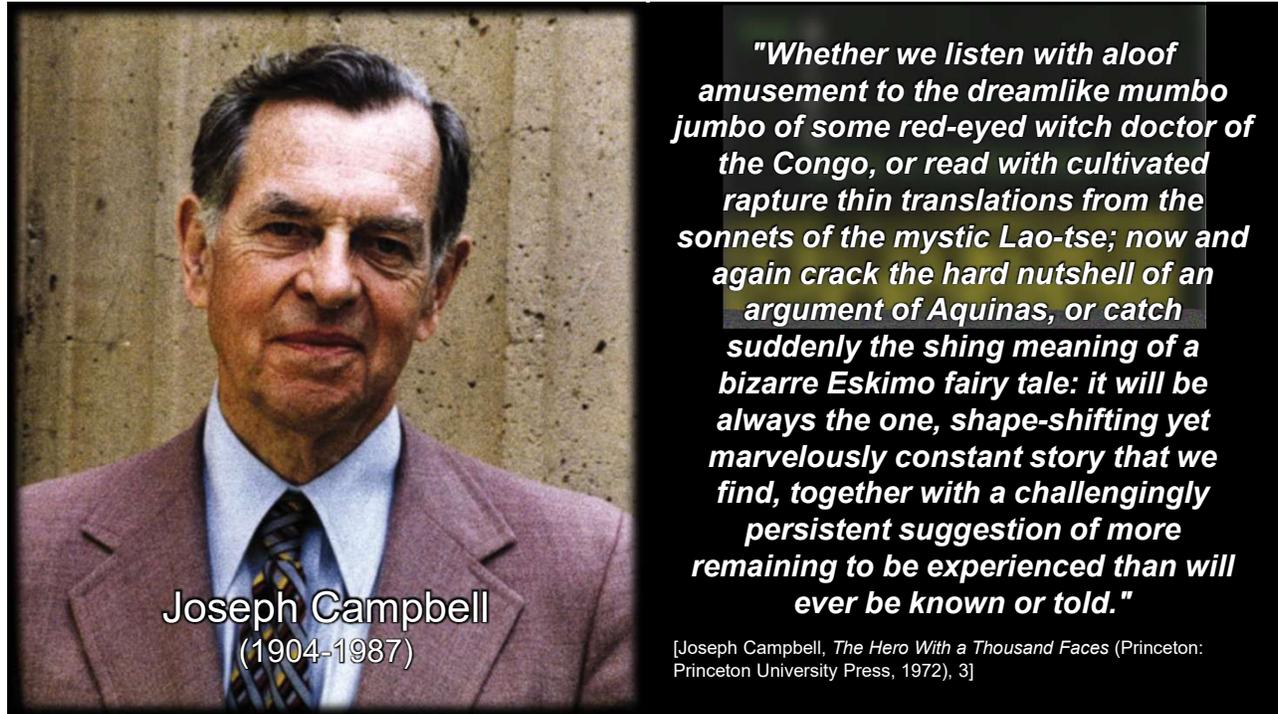
"The biblical understandings of salvation are focused on this world, not the next. Though salvation is central to the Bible, heaven as life after death is not. ... So what about an afterlife? ... To speak very personally, I don't have a clue about what happens after death. ... I see no way of deciding among these different ways of imagining what lies beyond death."

[The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2003), 216]



Marcus Borg
(1942-2015)



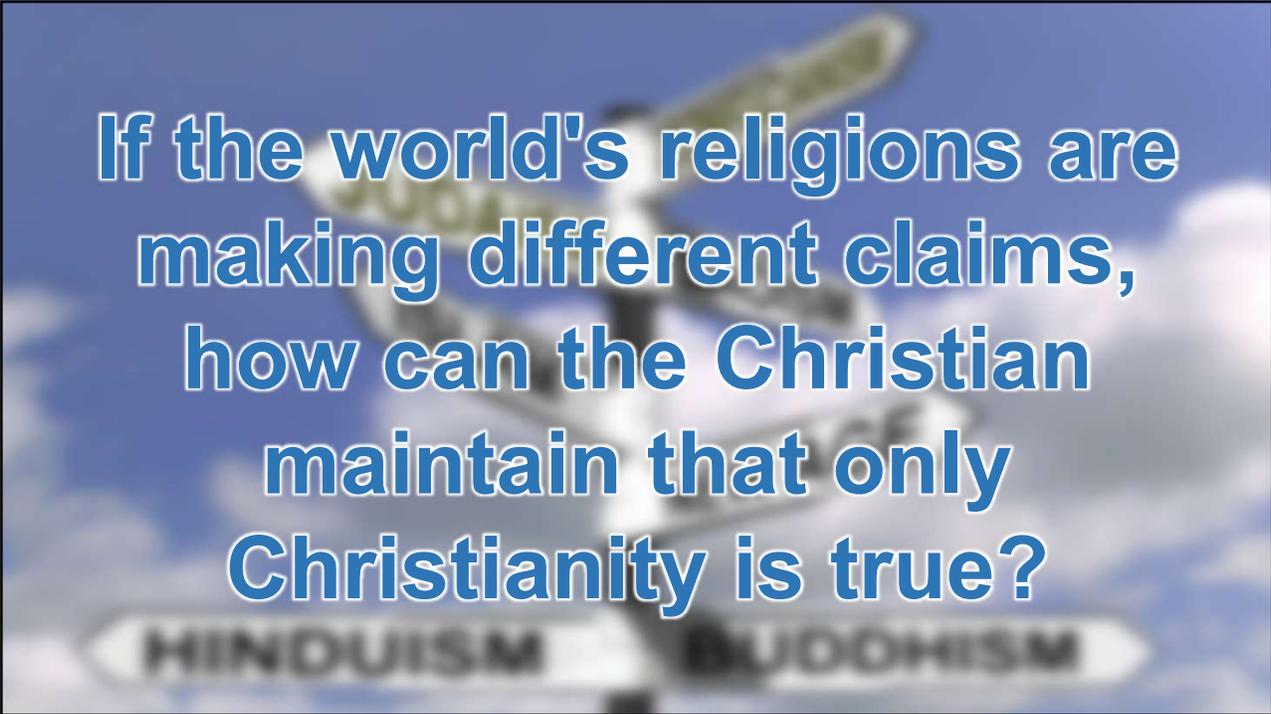


Joseph Campbell
(1904-1987)

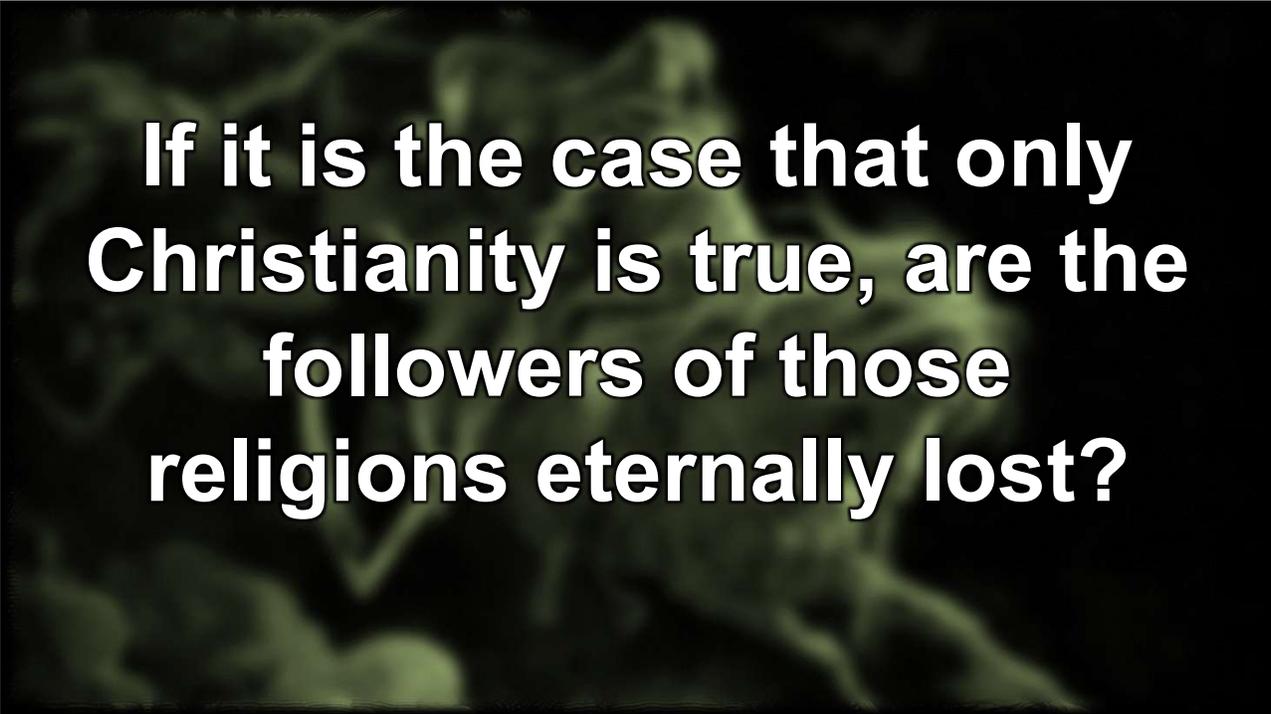
"Whether we listen with aloof amusement to the dreamlike mumbo jumbo of some red-eyed witch doctor of the Congo, or read with cultivated rapture thin translations from the sonnets of the mystic Lao-tse; now and again crack the hard nutshell of an argument of Aquinas, or catch suddenly the shing meaning of a bizarre Eskimo fairy tale: it will be always the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story that we find, together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told."

[Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 3]

Or is it the case that other religions are making claims that are incompatible with the claims of Christianity?

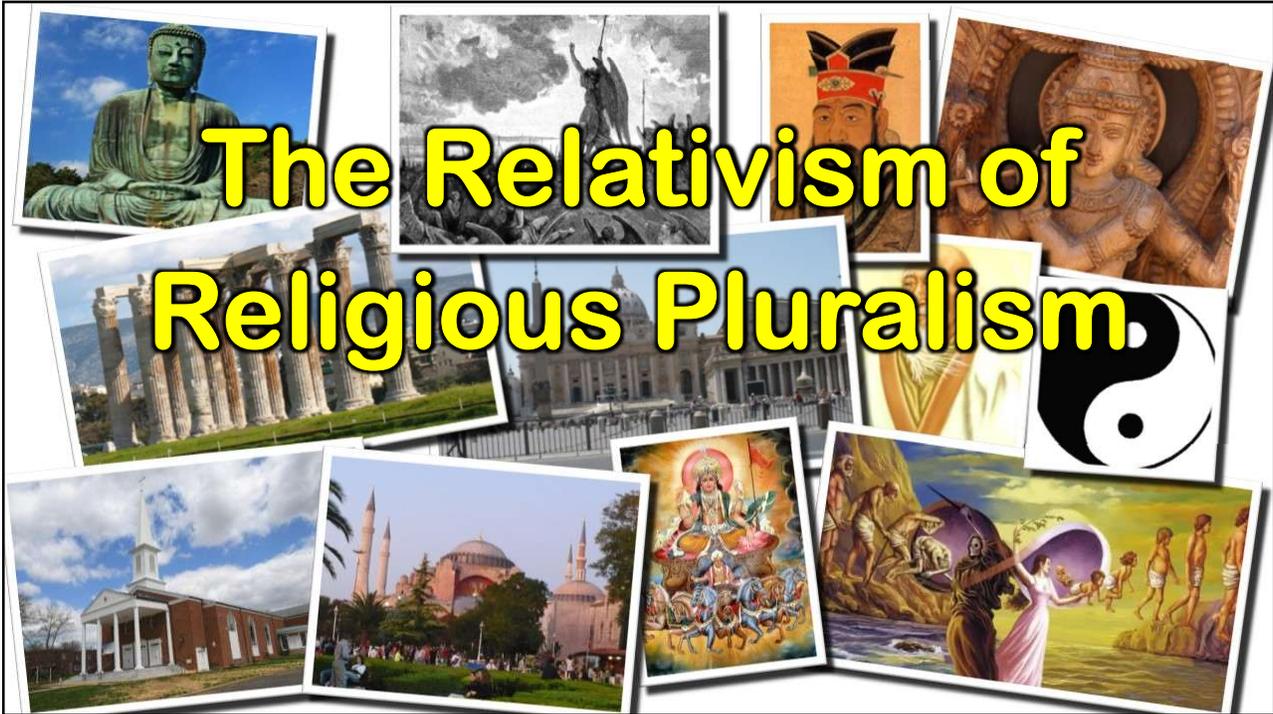


**If the world's religions are
making different claims,
how can the Christian
maintain that only
Christianity is true?**



**If it is the case that only
Christianity is true, are the
followers of those
religions eternally lost?**

What about those who sincerely follow a "false" religion and never had a chance to hear the Gospel?



Choosing My Religion

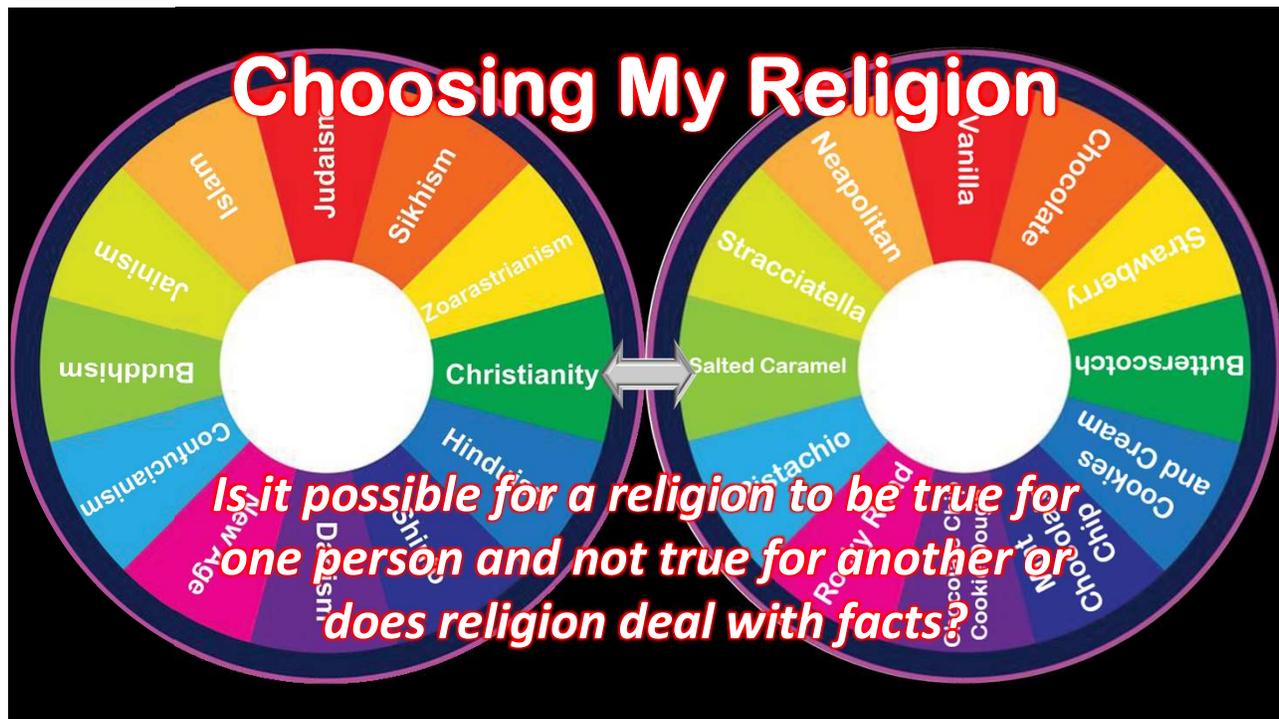
When choosing a religion, is it more of an issue of the truth of that religion...

A circular chart with 12 segments representing different religions: Judaism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Hinduism, Shinto, Daoism, New Age, Confucianism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Islam. A grey arrow points to the Christianity segment.

Choosing My Religion

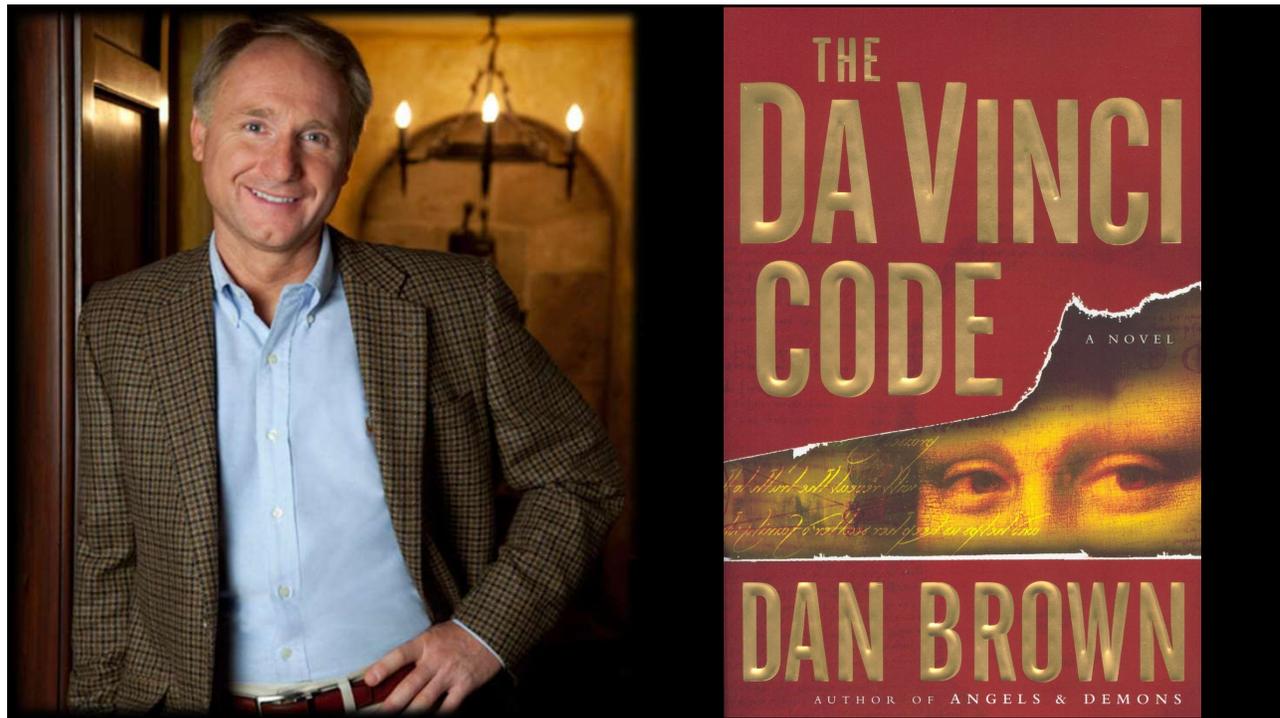
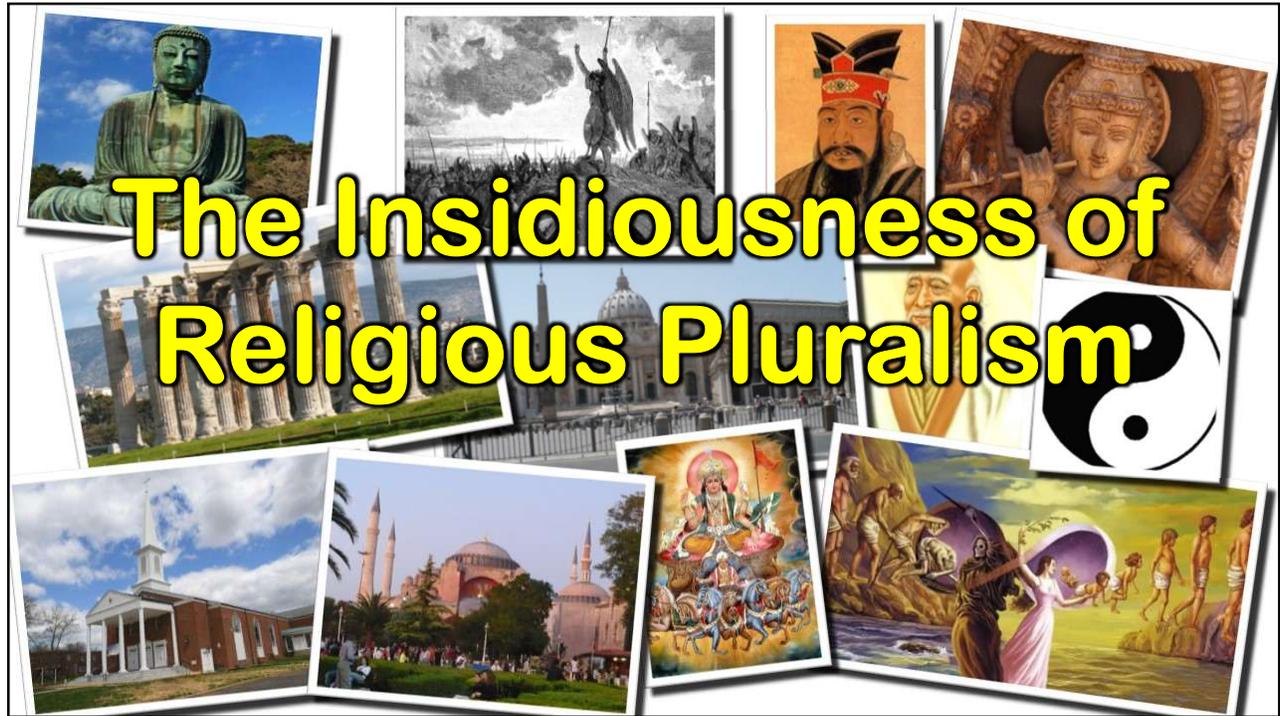
Or is it more like choosing a desired flavor of ice cream?

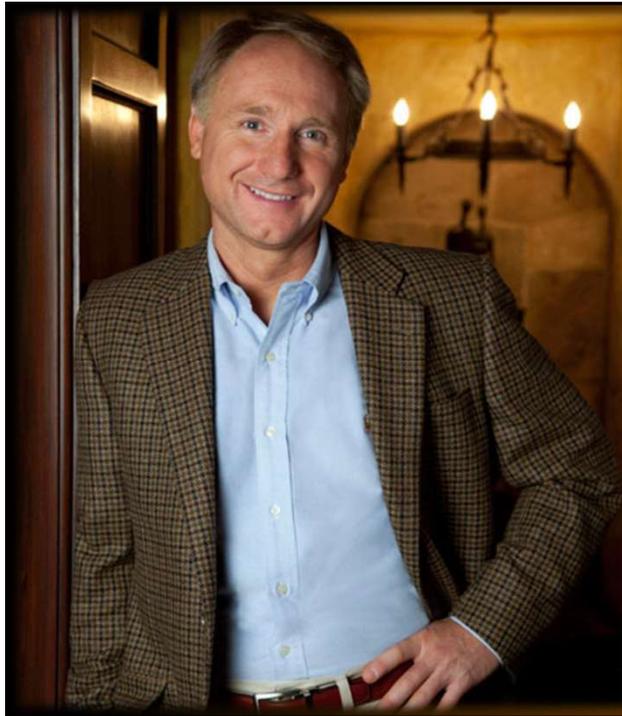
A circular chart with 12 segments representing different ice cream flavors: Vanilla, Chocolate, Raspberry Cheesecake, Cookies and Cream, Chip Chocolate, Mint Chocolate, Cookie Dough, Rocky Road, Pistachio, Salted Caramel, Stracciatella, and Neapolitan. A grey arrow points to the Salted Caramel segment.



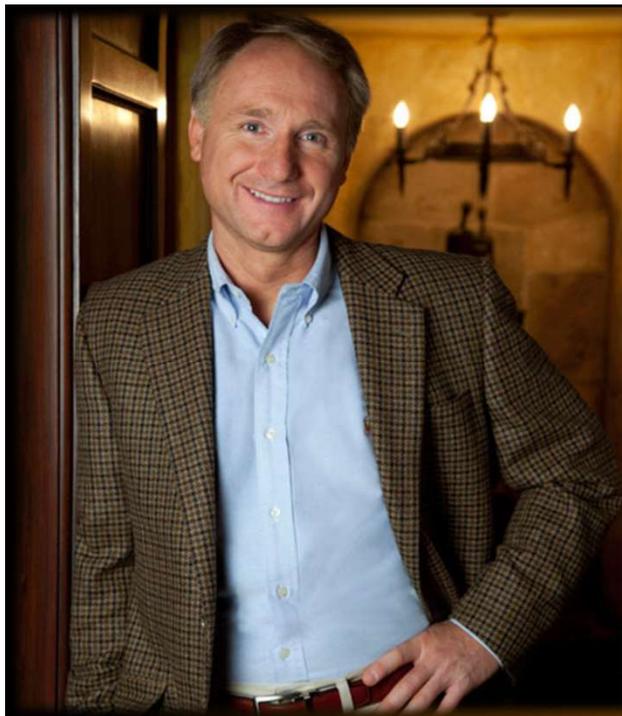
What about Religion?

- ❖ It **proclaims** specific truths, and, thus, obligates certain **beliefs**.
- ❖ It **proscribes** a way of life, and, thus, obligates certain **behaviors**.

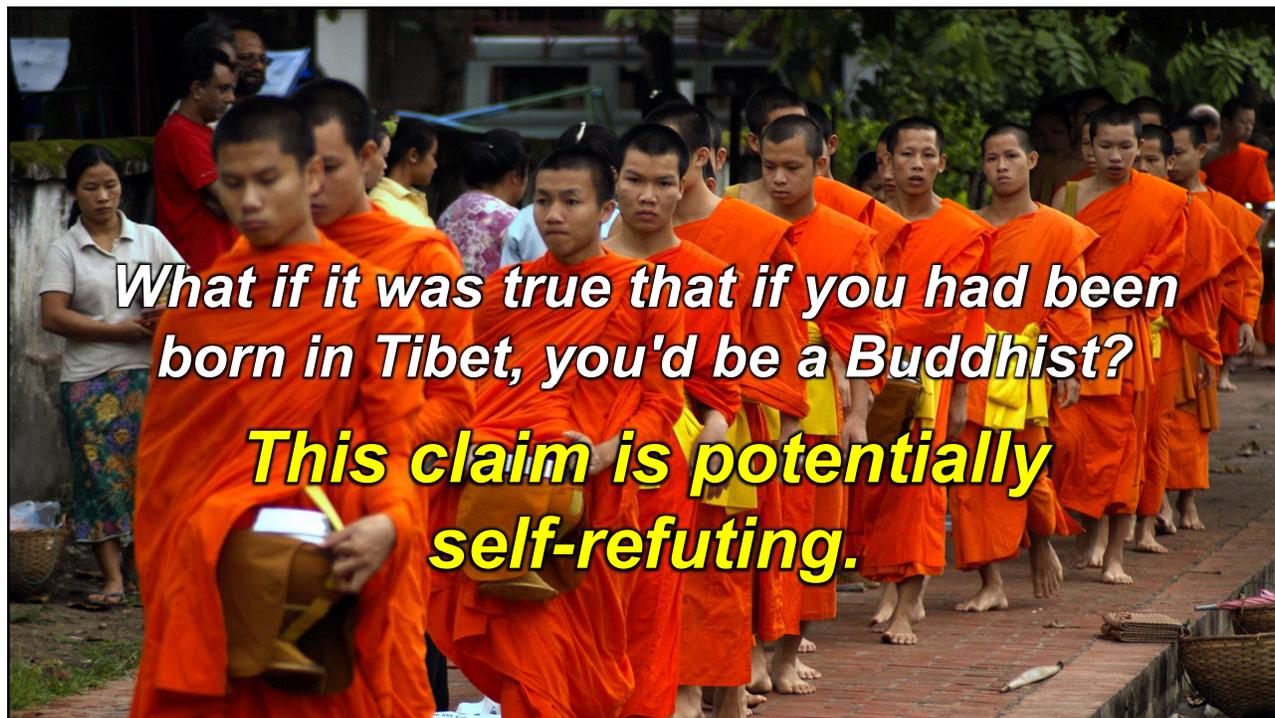
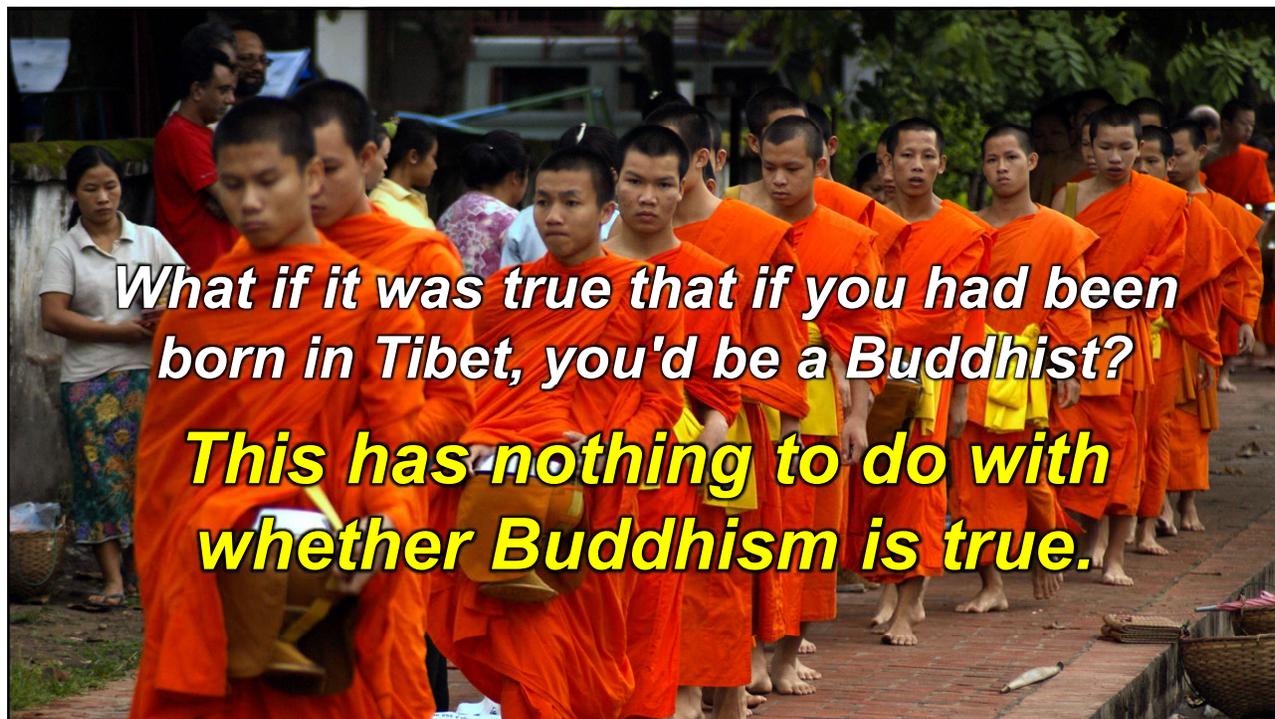




"I humbly submit that if all of us in this room had been born in Tibet, probably a lot of us would be Buddhist. I think the chance is pretty good."



"And I also think we'd hold on to that Buddhist philosophy with all the passion that some of us might hold on to our Christian ideals."



One could counter by saying that the only reason Dan Brown believes what he just said is because of where Dan Brown was born.

∞ Genetic Fallacy ∞

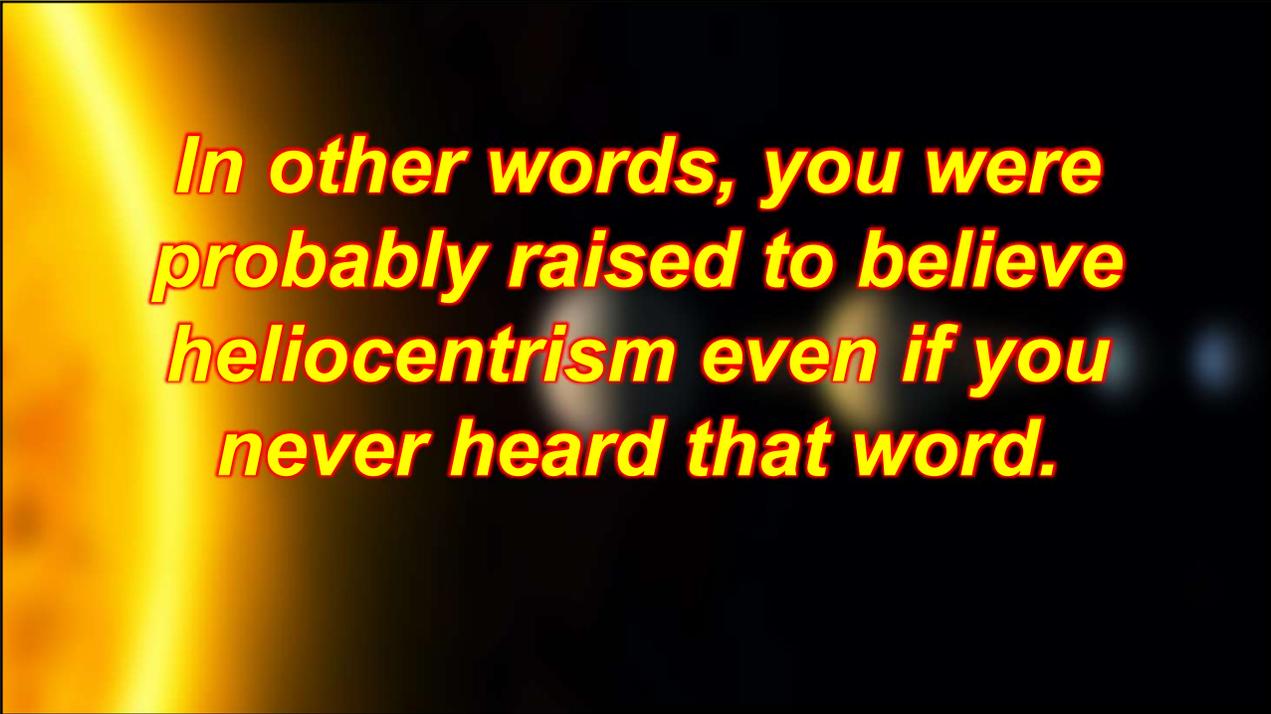
the fallacy of suggesting that the origin of a belief is relevant to the issue of whether the belief is true or false

Geocentricism ***VS.*** ***Heliocentrism***

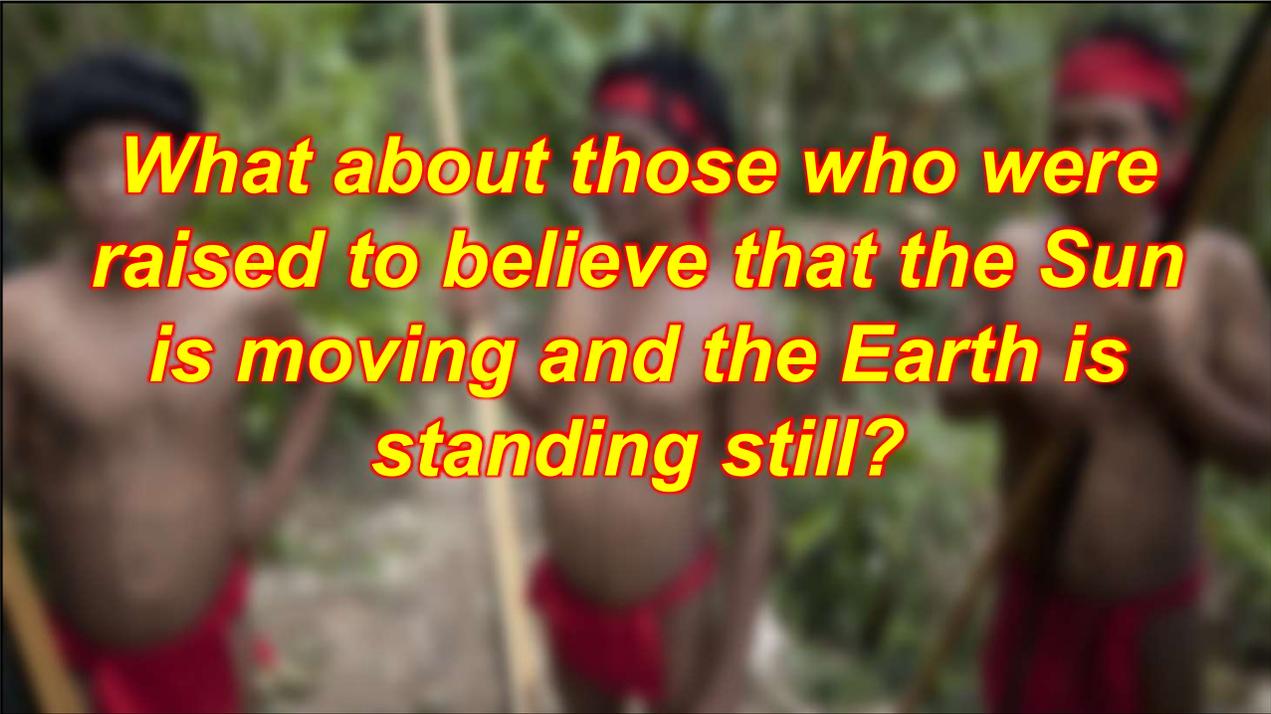
The old view that the Sun was the center of the universe and that it moved around the Earth (causing day and night) is known as Geocentricism.

The contemporary view that the Sun is the center of the solar system and that the Earth revolves around the Sun as the Earth rotates on its axis (causing day and night) is known as Heliocentrism.

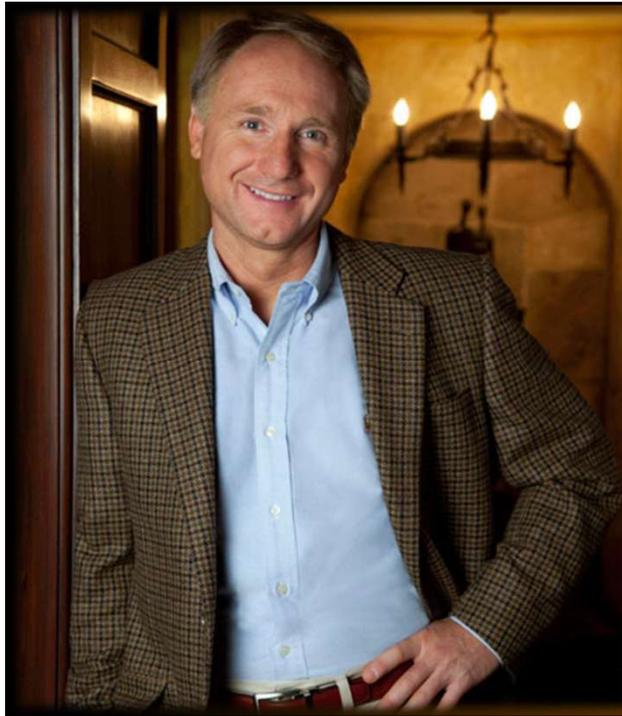
You were probably raised to believe that the Sun is standing still relative to the Earth.



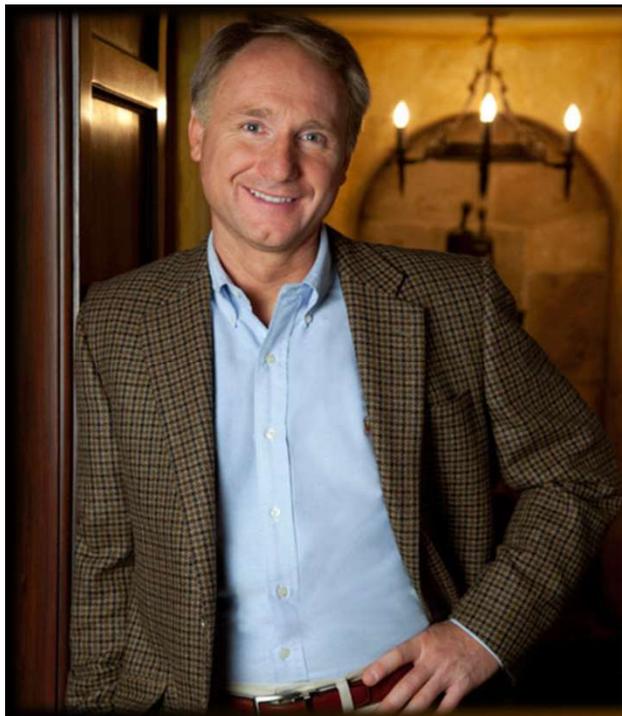
In other words, you were probably raised to believe heliocentrism even if you never heard that word.



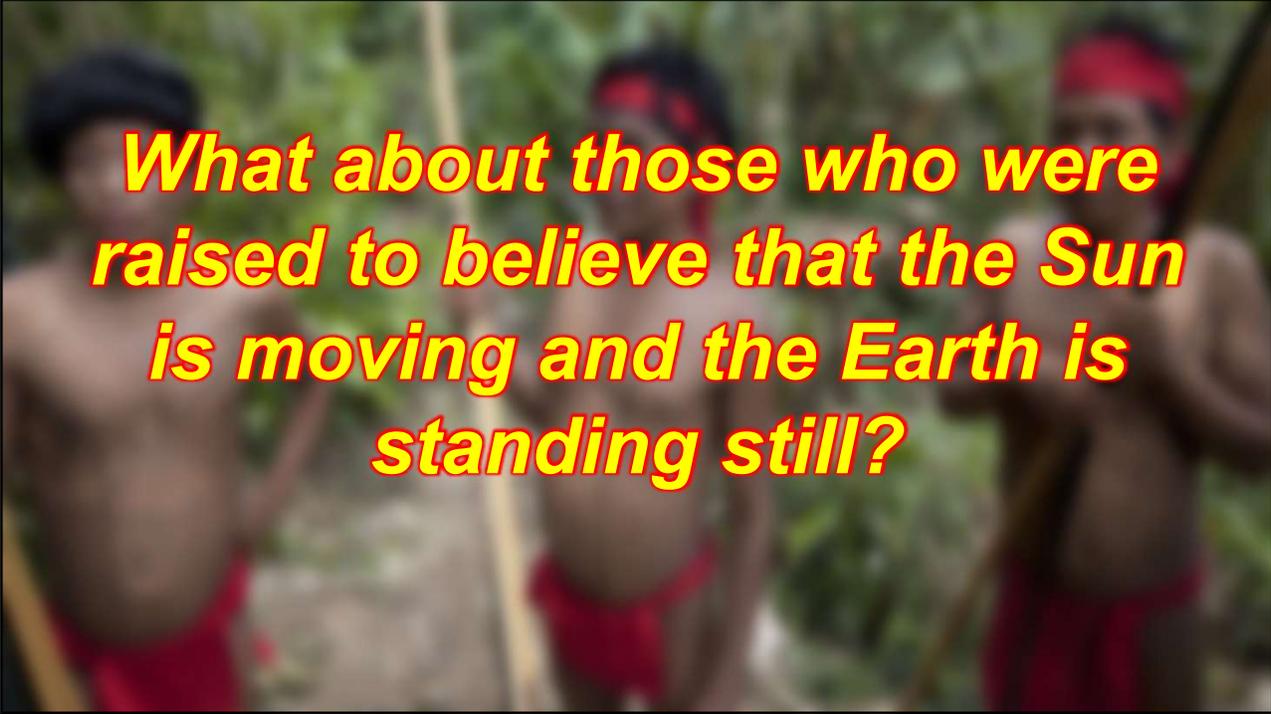
What about those who were raised to believe that the Sun is moving and the Earth is standing still?



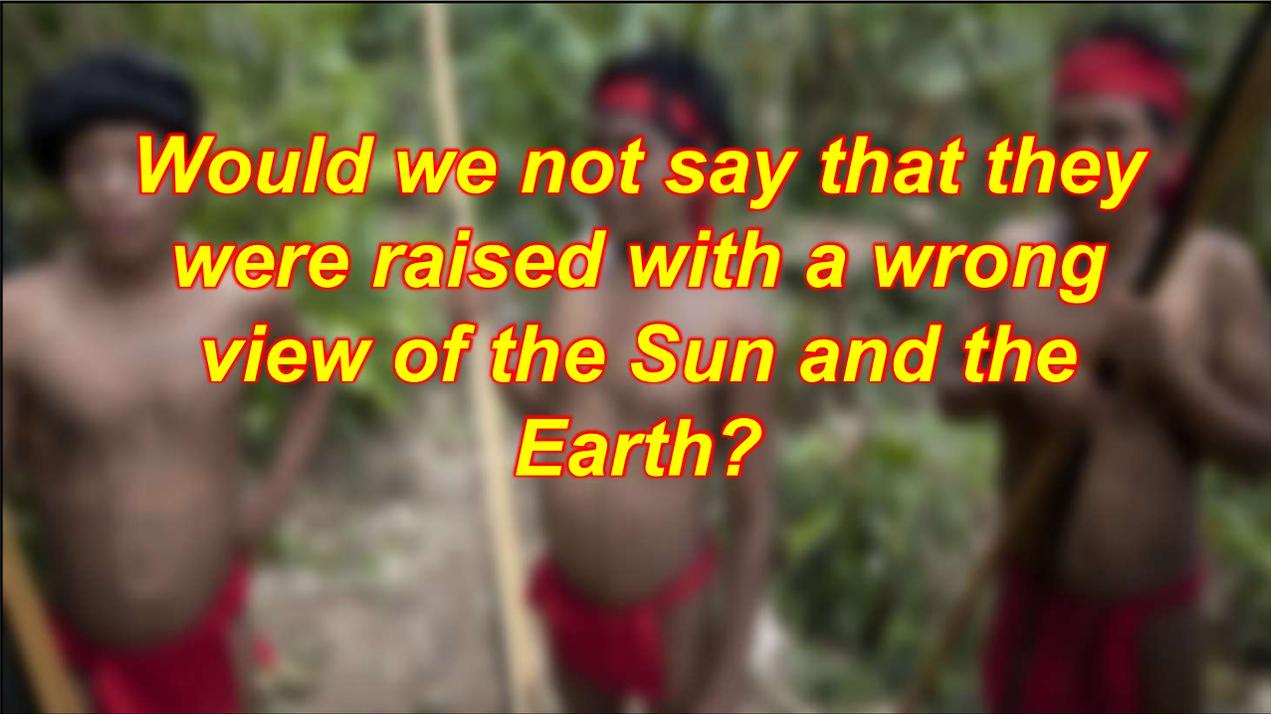
"I humbly submit that if all of us in this room had been born in the Amazon jungle, probably a lot of us would be Geocentrists. I think the chance is pretty good."



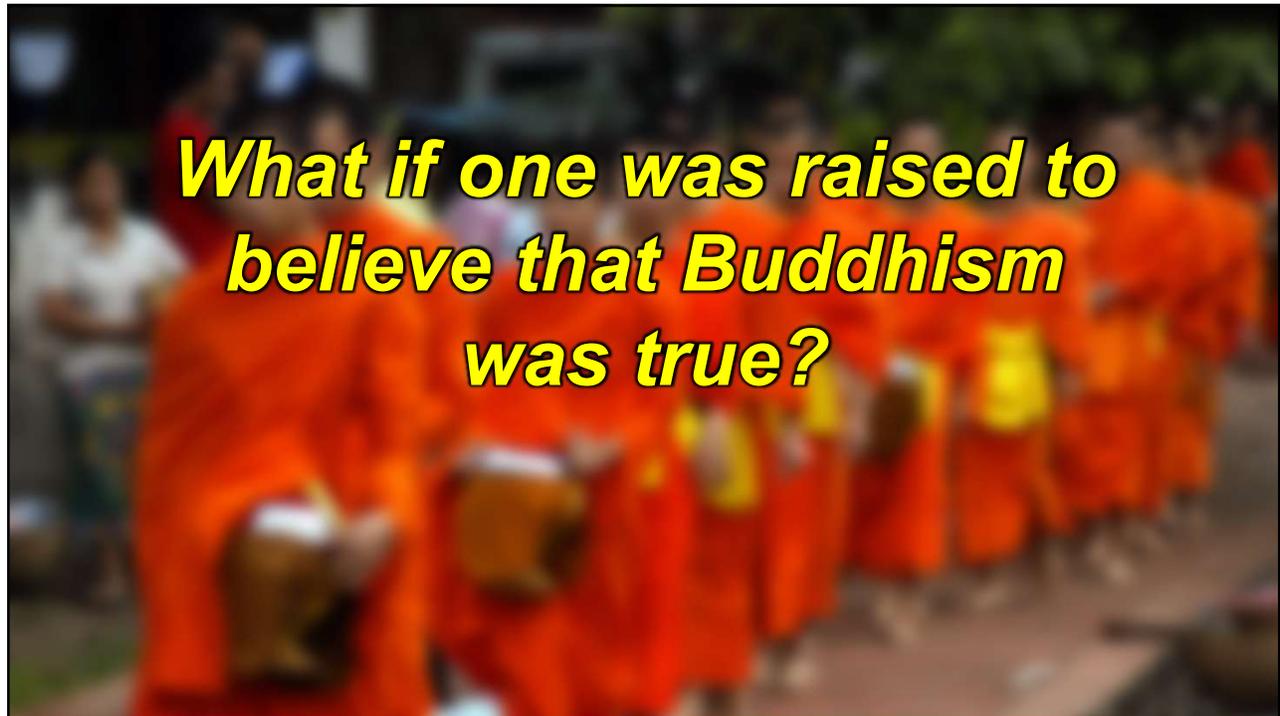
"And I also think we'd hold on to that Geocentric philosophy with all the passion that some of us might hold on to our Heliocentric ideals."



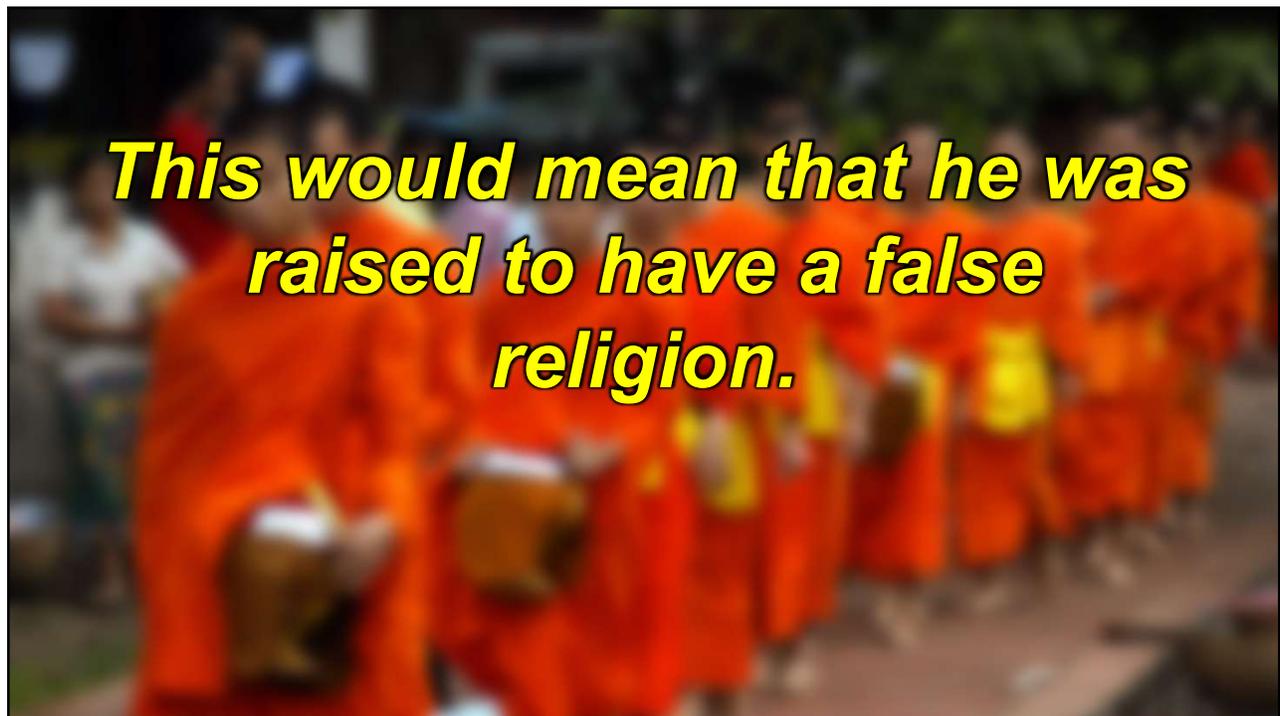
What about those who were raised to believe that the Sun is moving and the Earth is standing still?



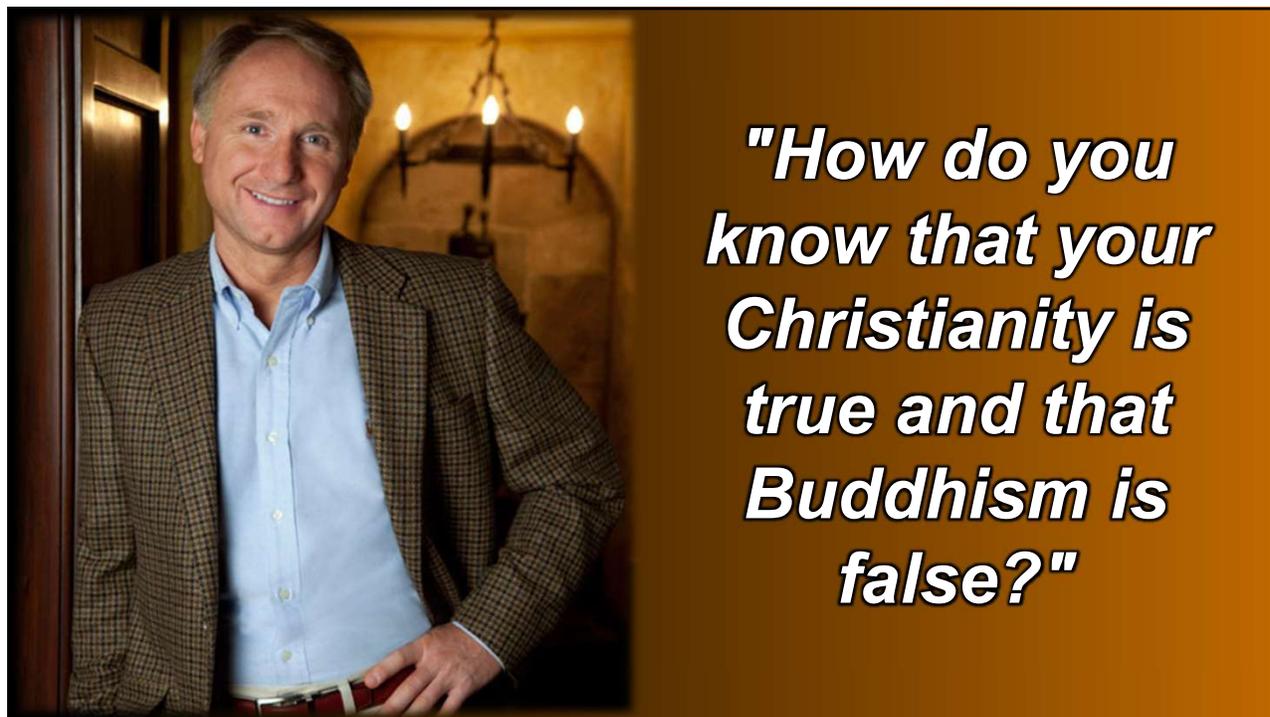
Would we not say that they were raised with a wrong view of the Sun and the Earth?

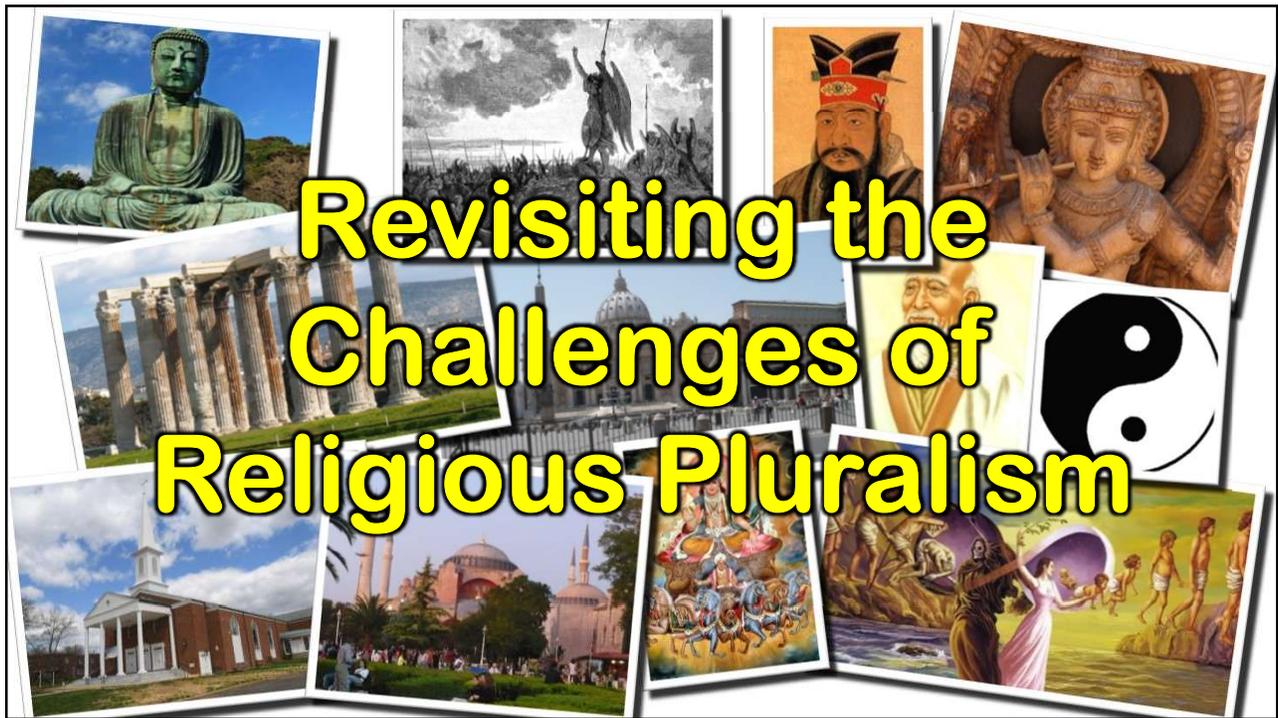
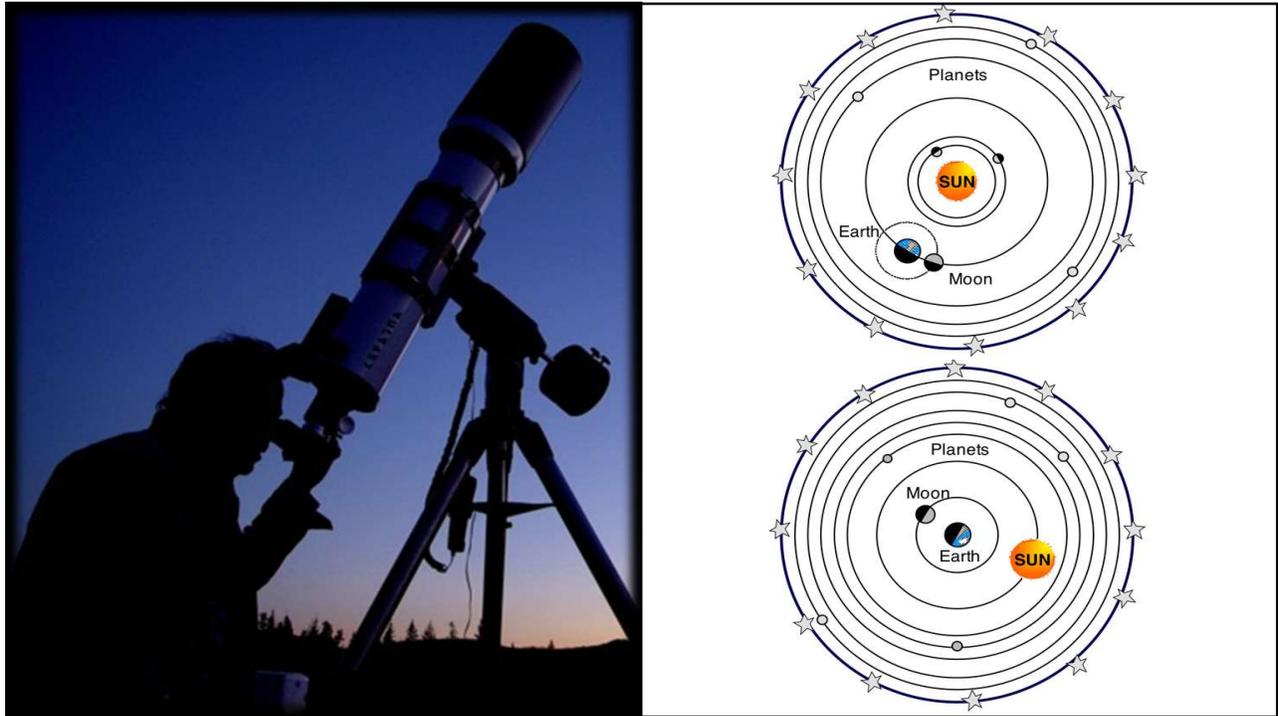


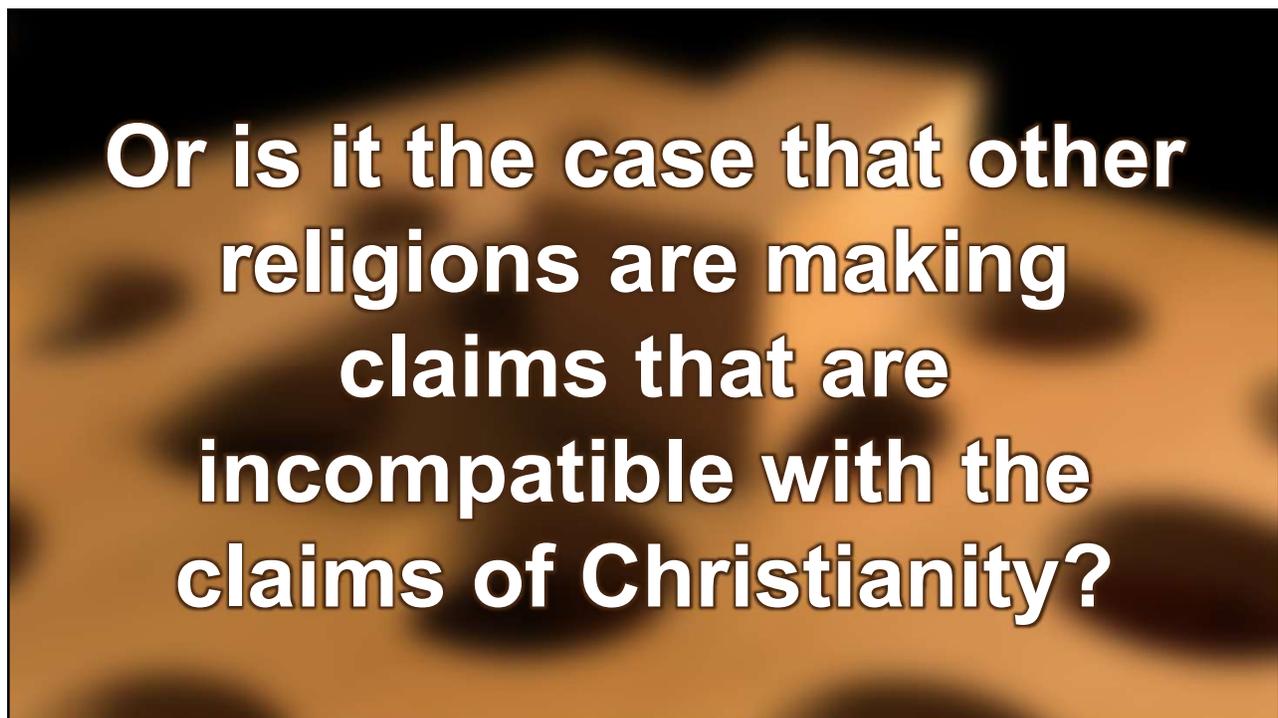
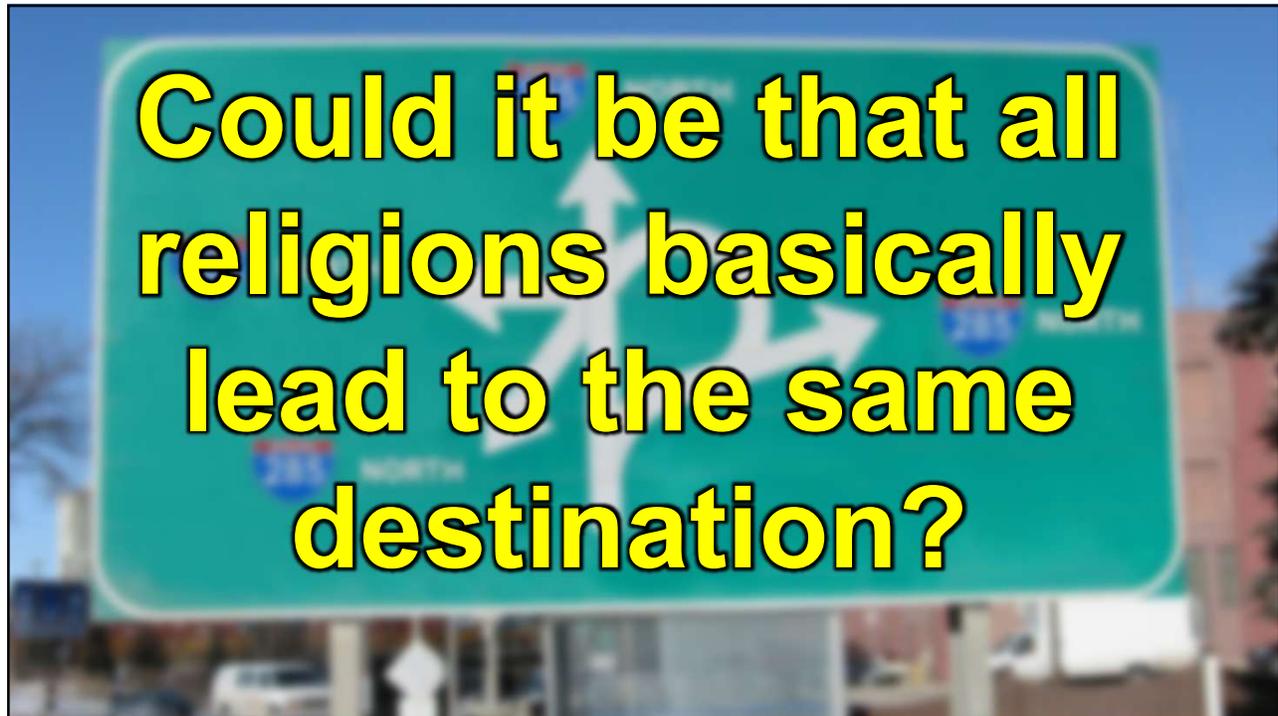
What if one was raised to believe that Buddhism was true?



This would mean that he was raised to have a false religion.







***Are Not All
Religions the
Same at the Core?***

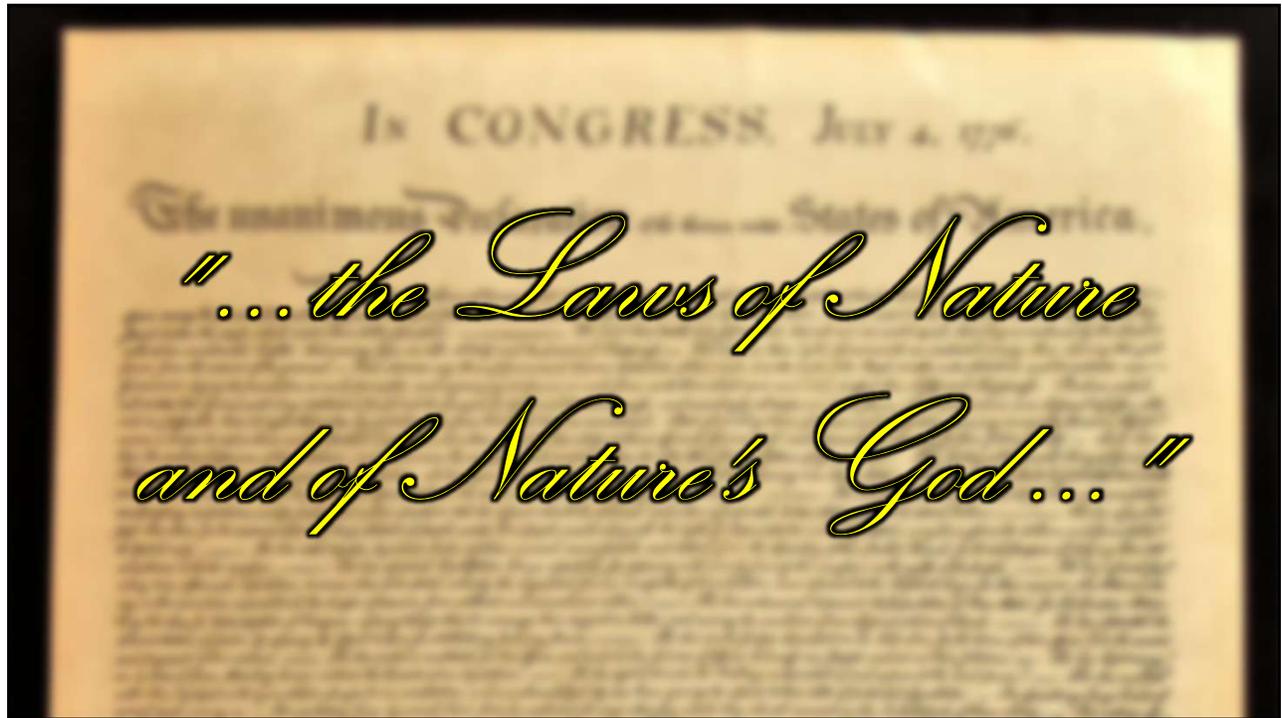
***Core Beliefs
vs.
Peripheral Beliefs***

Peripheral Beliefs

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. — We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while they are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future Security. — Such has been the patient Sufferance of these Colonies, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World. — He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good. — He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing Importance, unless suspended till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. — He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large Districts of People, unless those People would relinquish the Right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to Tyrants only. — He has called together legislative Bodies at Places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the Depository of their Public Records, for the sole Purpose of fatiguing them into Compliance with his Measures. — He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly Firmness his invasions on the Rights of the People. — He has kept for long time after such Dissolutions, to cause others to be elected, whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large; for their Assent, the State may in the mean time, exposed to all the Dangers of Invasion from without, and convulsions within? — He has endeavoured to prevent the Population of these States, for that Purpose obstructing the Trade for Transportation of Persons, refusing to pass other to encourage their Migrations hither, and raising the Conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. — He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers. — He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the Tenure of their Offices, and the Amount and Payment of their Salaries. — He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our People, and eat out their Substance. — He has kept standing Armies without the Consent of our Legislature. — He has endeavored to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power. — He has combined with other States to subject us to a Jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: — For quartering large Bodies of armed Troops among us: — For retaining them, by a pretended Trial, from Quartering for any Misdemeanor which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: — For cutting off



"What are the things that men consider right? Kindness on the part of the father, and filial duty on that of the son; gentleness on part of the elder brother, and obedience on that of the younger; righteousness on the part of the husband, and submission on that of the wife; kindness on the part of elders, and deference on that of juniors; with benevolence on the part of the ruler, and loyalty on that of the minister; —these ten are the things which men consider to be right."

Book of Ritual 7.2.19



Confucius
(551-479 BC)

Buddhism

"Supporting one's father and mother, cherishing wife and children and a peaceful occupation; this is the greatest blessings."

Sutta Nipata 262

Buddhism

*“Whoso in this world destroys life,
tells lies, takes what is not given,
goes to others’ wives and is addicted
to intoxicating drinks, such a one
digs up his own root in the world.”*

Dhammapada, 246-247, 61

Hinduism

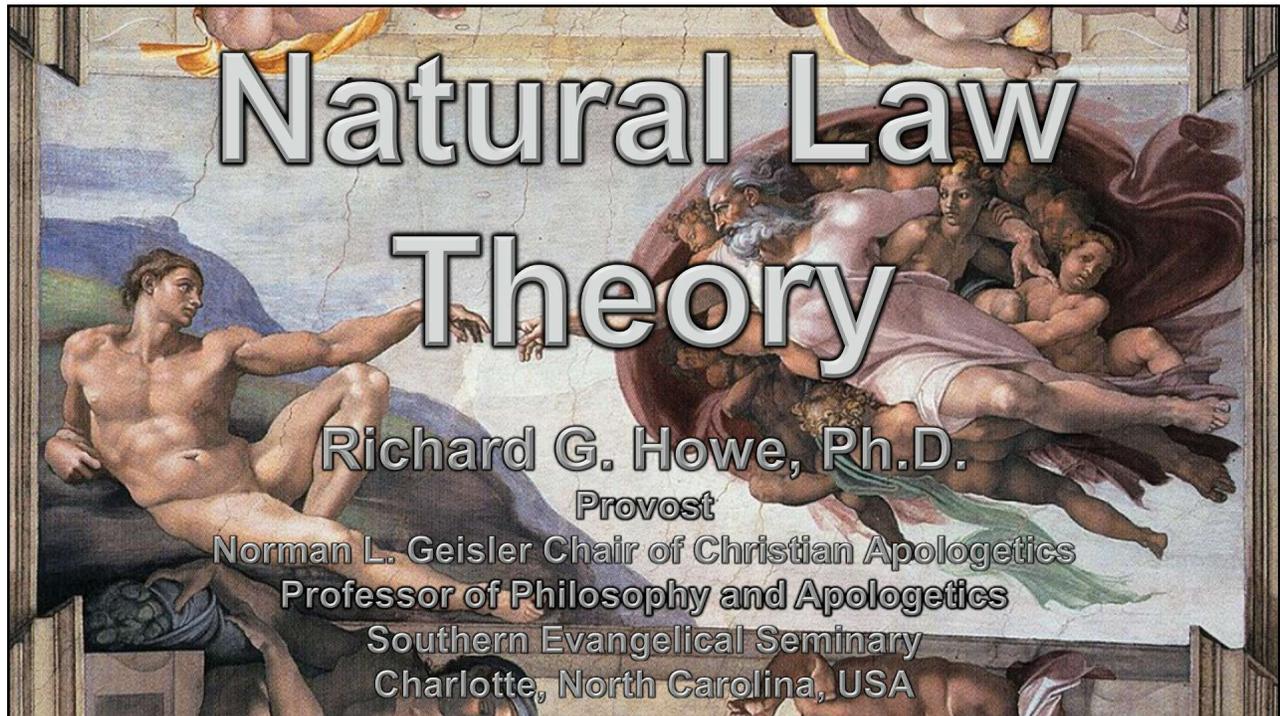
*“He who commits adultery is
punished both here and hereafter;
for his days in this world are cut
short and when dead he
falls into hell.”*

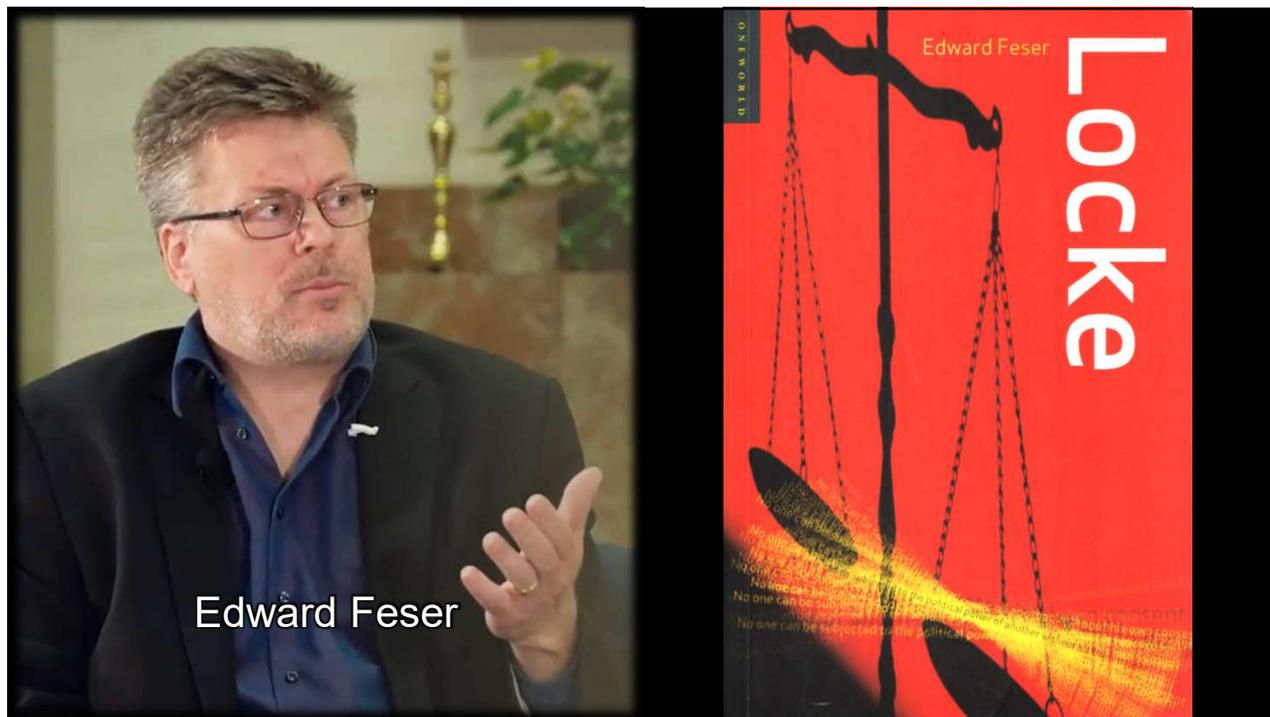
Vishnu Purana 3.11, 265

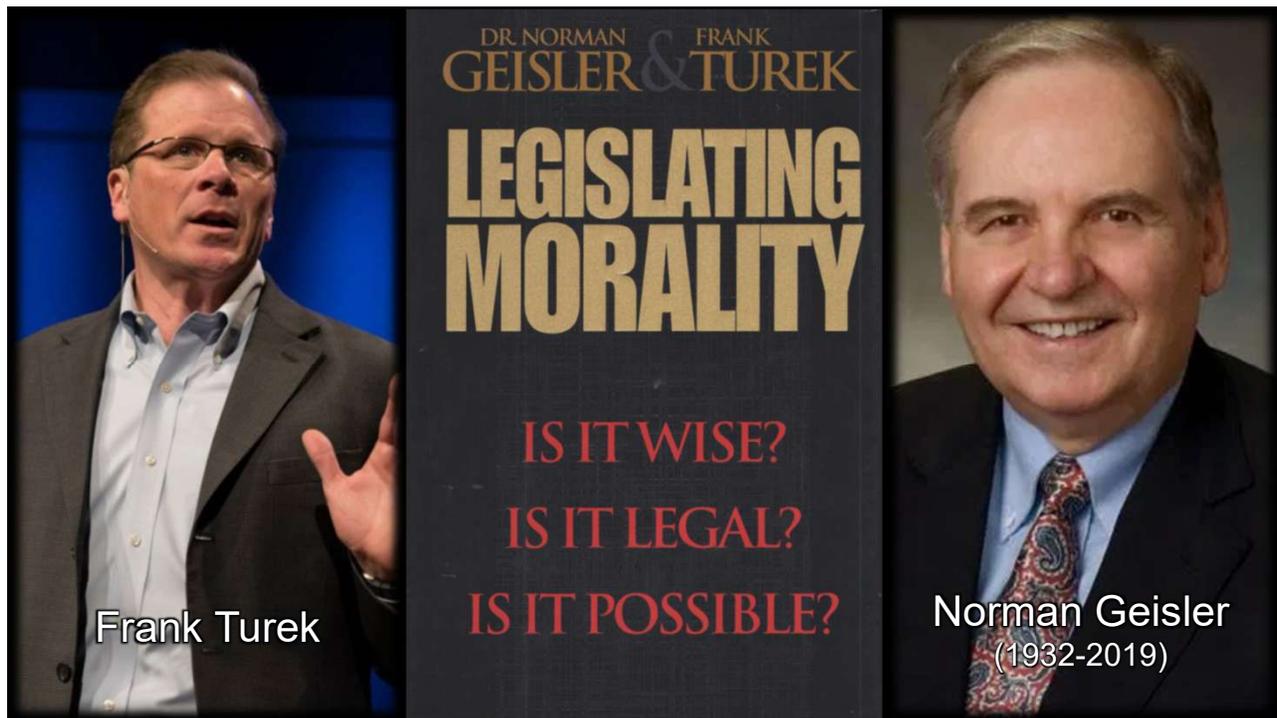
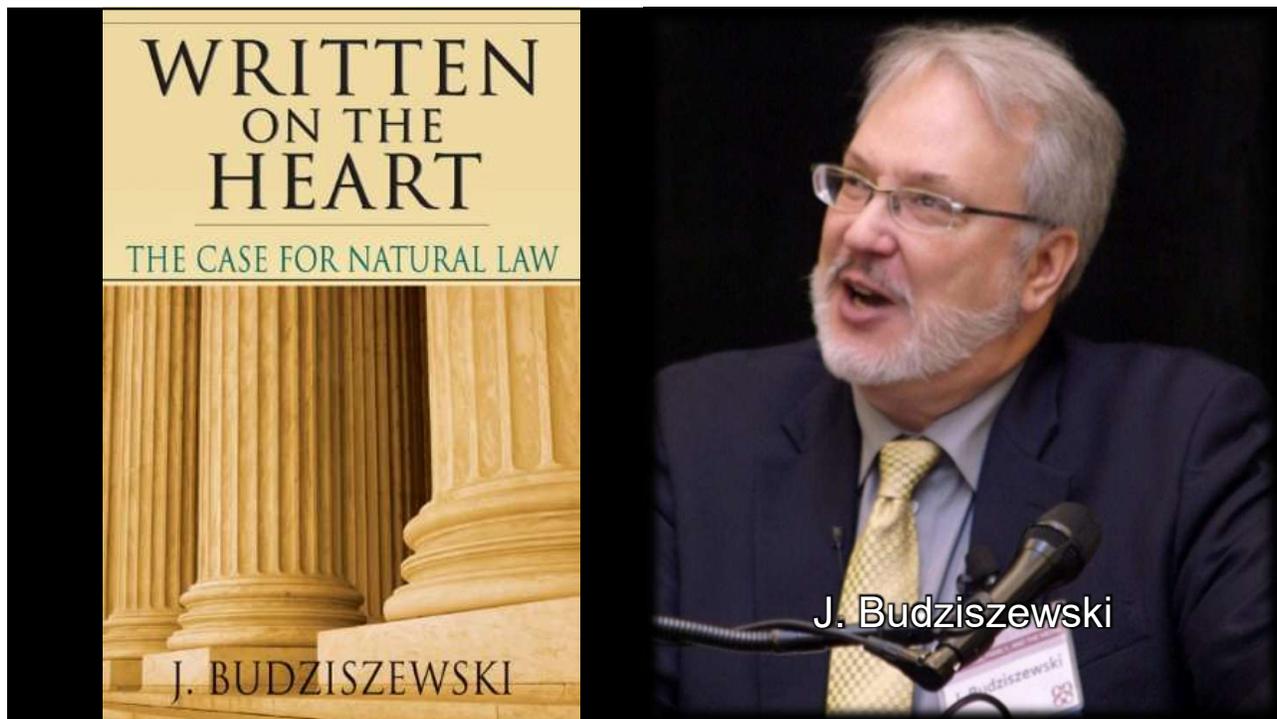
Hinduism

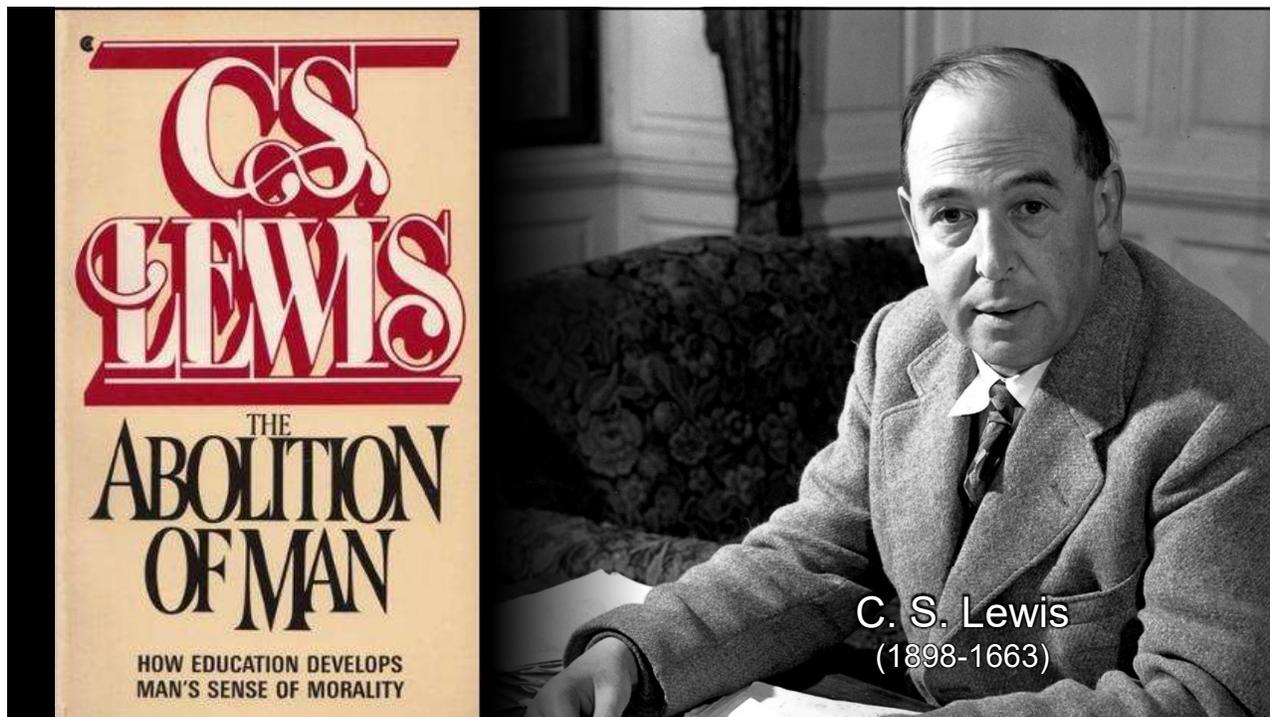
“A man who commits violence should be regarded as the worst evil-doer.”

Laws of Manu, 8.345, (1991), 188

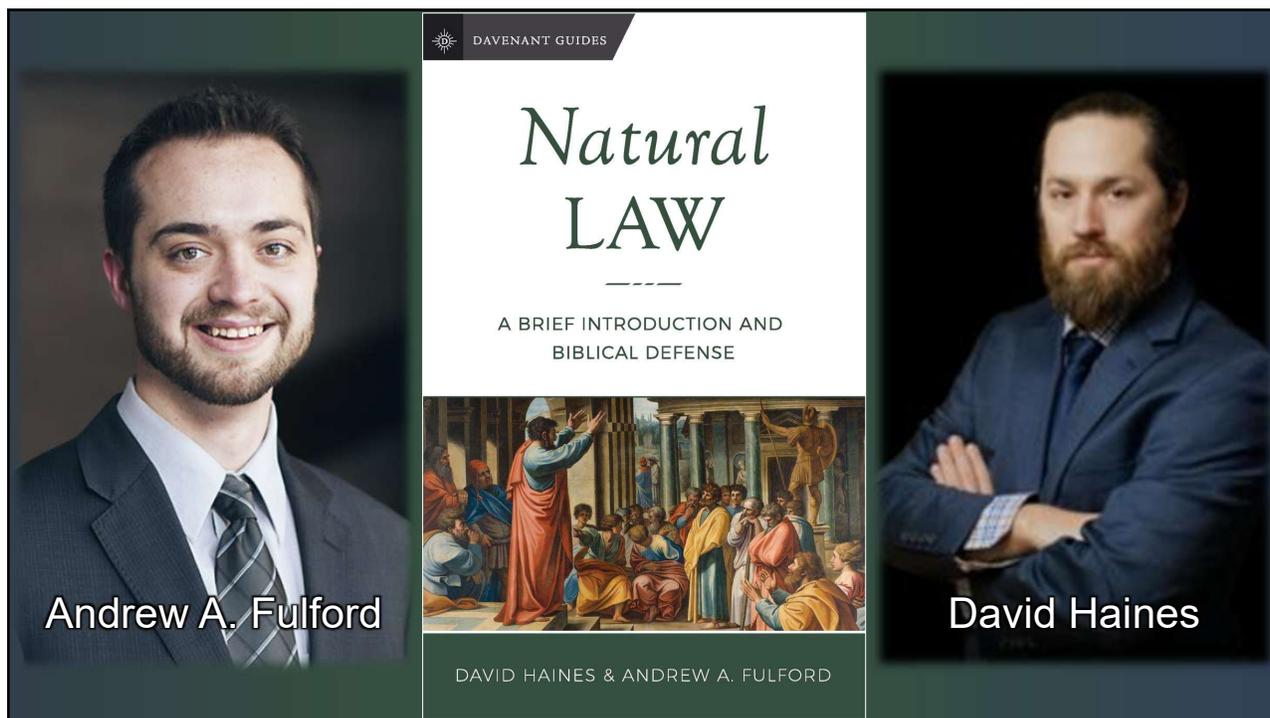






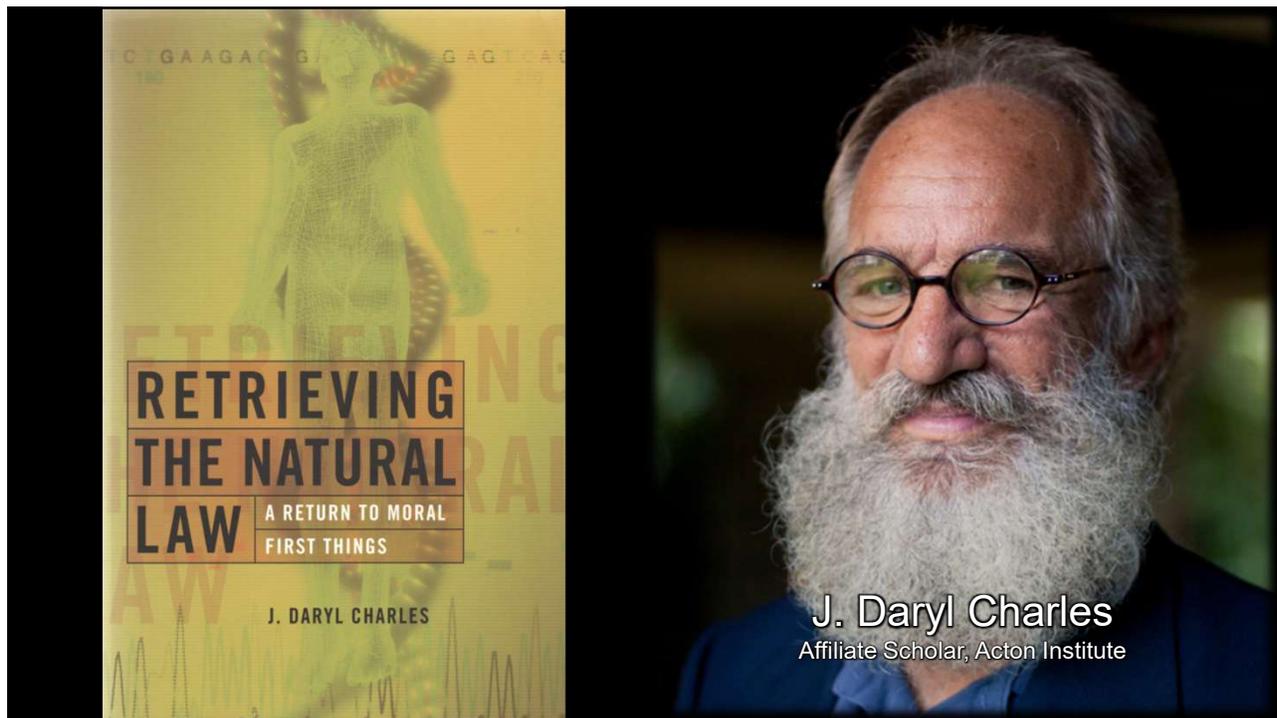
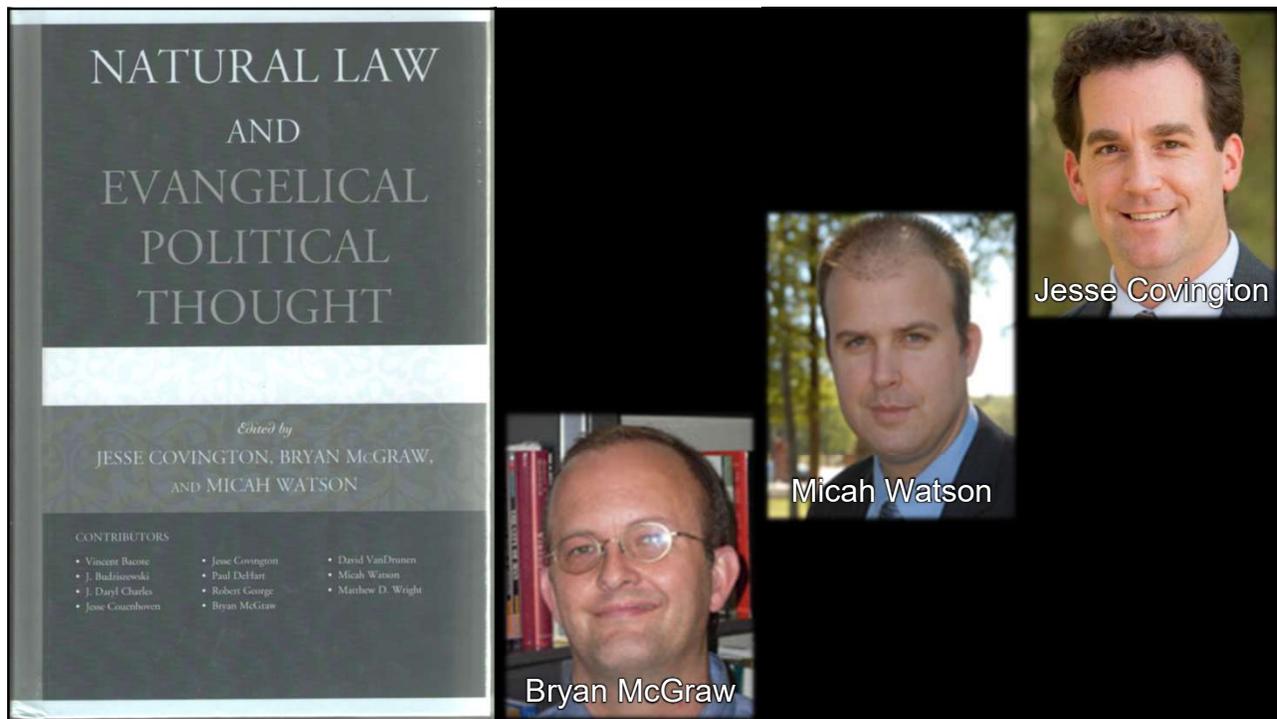


C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)



Andrew A. Fulford

David Haines



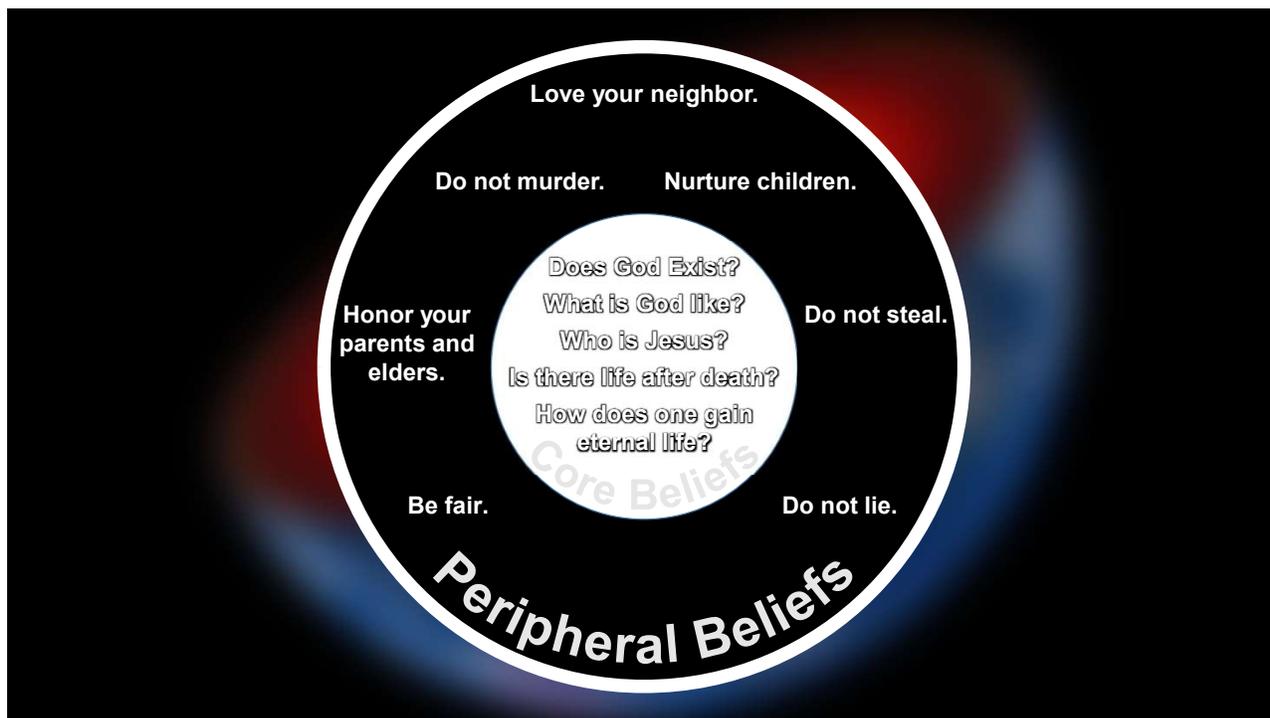
REDISCOVERING THE
NATURAL LAW IN REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

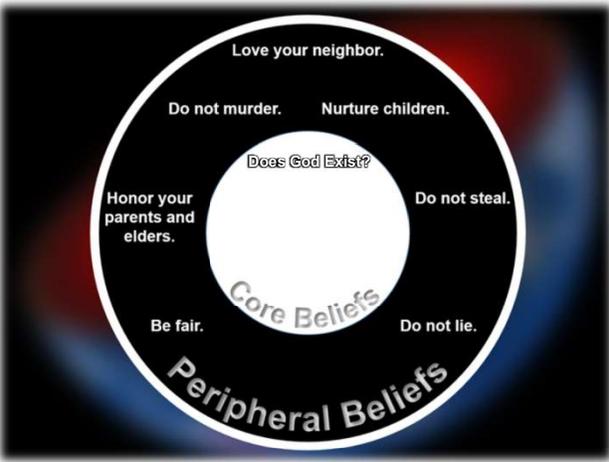


Stephen J. Grabill



Stephen J. Grabill
Acton Institute and
Grand Rapids Theological Seminary





Buddhism: Theravada Buddhism has no God. various schools of Mahayana Buddhism (e.g., Tibetan Buddhism) have many gods.

Hinduism: Early Vedic Hinduism was very nearly monotheistic. Upanishadic Hinduism is pantheistic. Bhakti Hinduism is polytheistic.

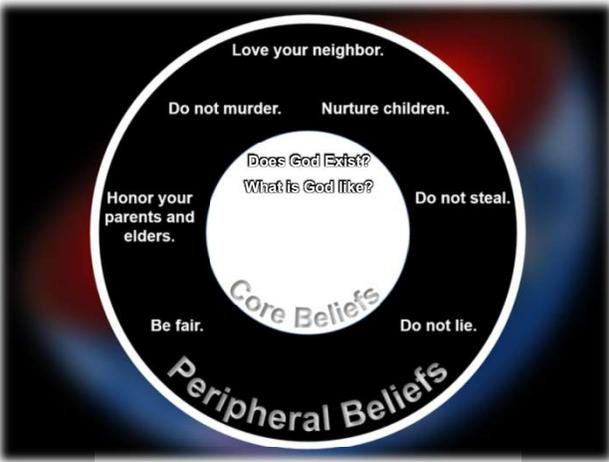
Confucianism: Confucius's teachings contain no gods, no religious worship, and no revelations.

Judaism: There is only one God.

Islam: There is only one God.

Christianity: There only one God.

Does God exist?



Buddhism: The gods of Tibetan Buddhism are angelic and demonic beings.

Hinduism: Early Vedic Hinduism God = the "father of heaven;" Upanishadic Hinduism God = all; Gods of Bhakti Hinduism are finite

Confucianism: Being atheistic, there is nothing for God to be like.

Judaism: The one, true God created the heavens and the Earth and revealed Himself to Abraham and Moses.

Islam: The one true God created the heavens and the Earth and revealed Himself to many prophets, the last of whom was Mohammed.

Christianity: There only one God. This God is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What is God like?



Who is Jesus?



Buddhism: Some Buddhist see Jesus as one among many "enlightened ones" or Buddhas.



Hinduism: In Bhakti Hinduism, Jesus is one of virtually countless "gods" to whom one can attach himself in devotion for "salvation."



Confucianism: Given that there is no God, Jesus is nothing more than a man.



Judaism: Jesus was a well intentioned (if misguided or misunderstood) Jewish rabbi but was not the promised Messiah of Israel.



Islam: Jesus was one of the greatest prophets (born of a virgin and a miracle worker) but he did not die on the cross or resurrect from the dead.



Christianity: Jesus is the unique Son of God (God in the flesh) who died for the sins of the world.



Is there life after death?



Buddhism: Theravada Buddhism seeks to lead one to Nirvana which is extinction of desire. Pure Land Buddhism seeks to lead one to a heaven.



Hinduism: The Hindu afterlife (deliverance from reincarnation) varies from absorption into the pantheistic God to a paradise of delights.



Confucianism: Confucius's emphasis was on the ordering of society in this life. He avoided speculating about any afterlife.



Judaism: Modern Judaism focuses on the life that one lives in the here and now.



Islam: Heaven awaits those who are counted worthy by Allah. Hell awaits all infidels and those on whom Allah's favor does not fall.



Christianity: Heaven awaits all who believe the Gospel of Jesus. Hell awaits all unbelievers.



How does one gain eternal life?



Buddhism: In Theravada Buddhism, Nirvana is by the Eight-fold path. In Pure Land Buddhism one finds heaven by the favor of Amida Buddha.



Hinduism: One must break the cycle of reincarnation by working off one's Karma.



Confucianism: There is no afterlife to attain.



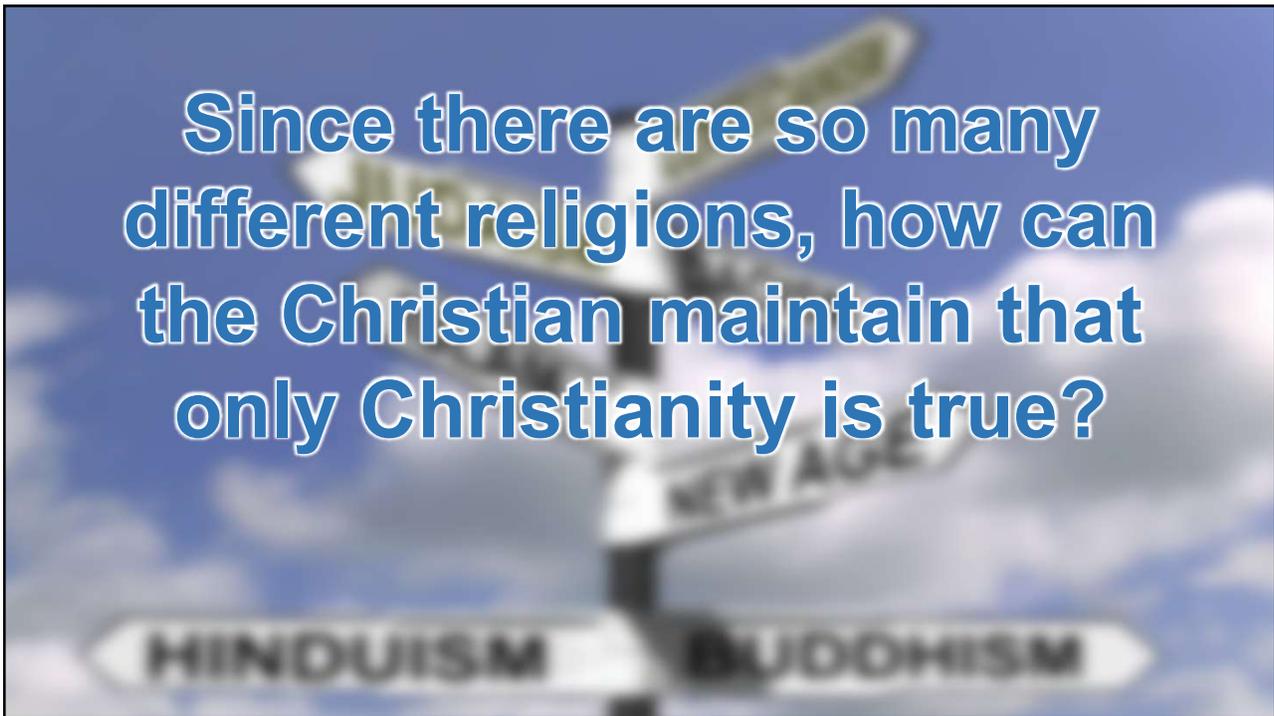
Judaism: There is little to no emphasis on any kind of afterlife in modern Judaism.

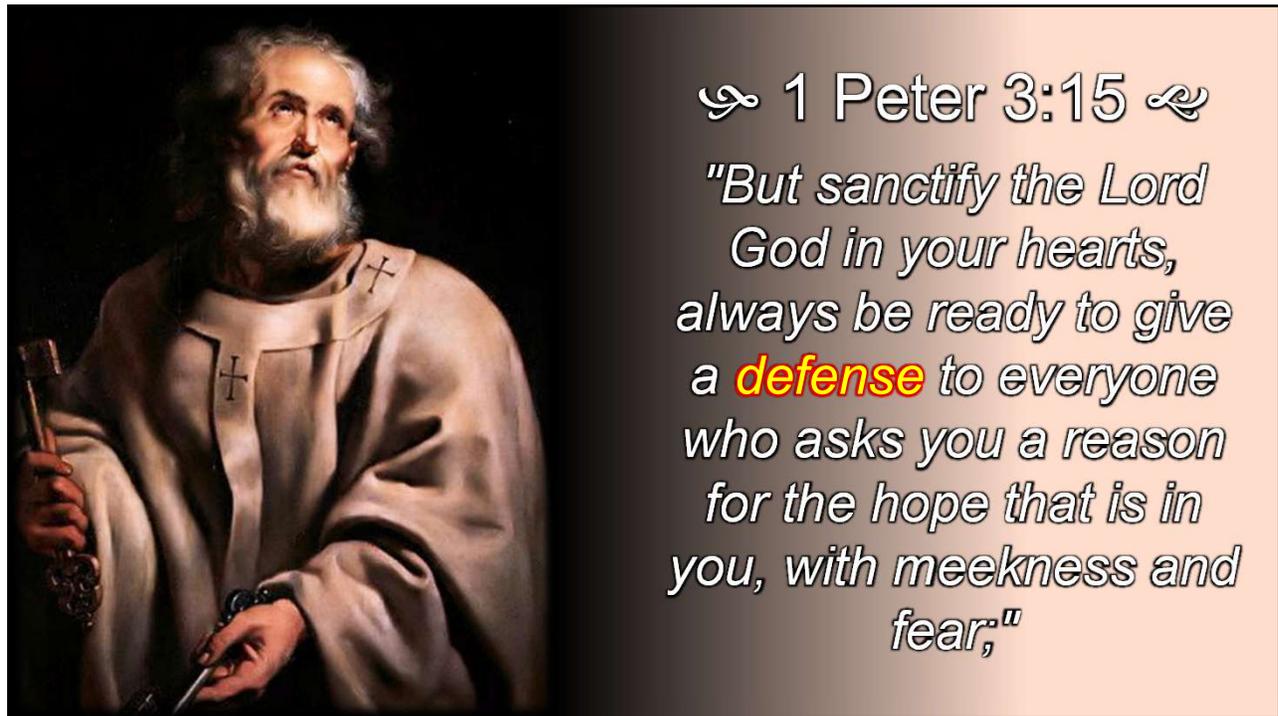
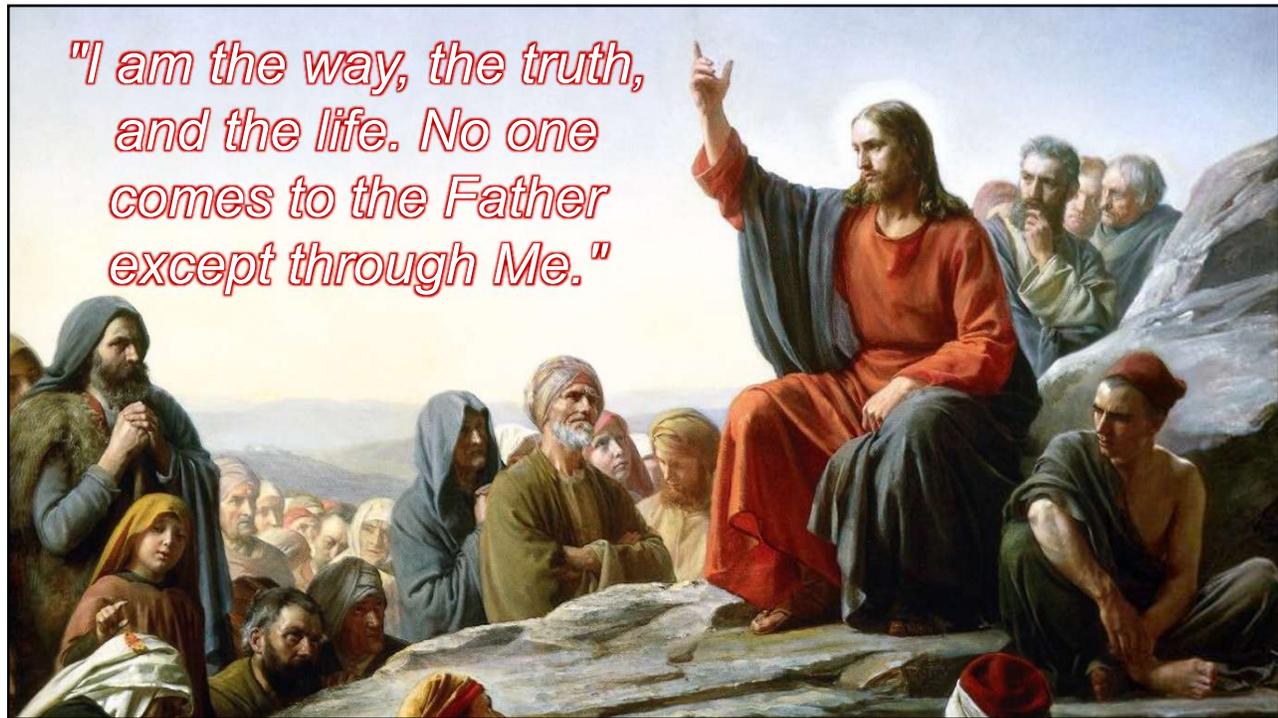


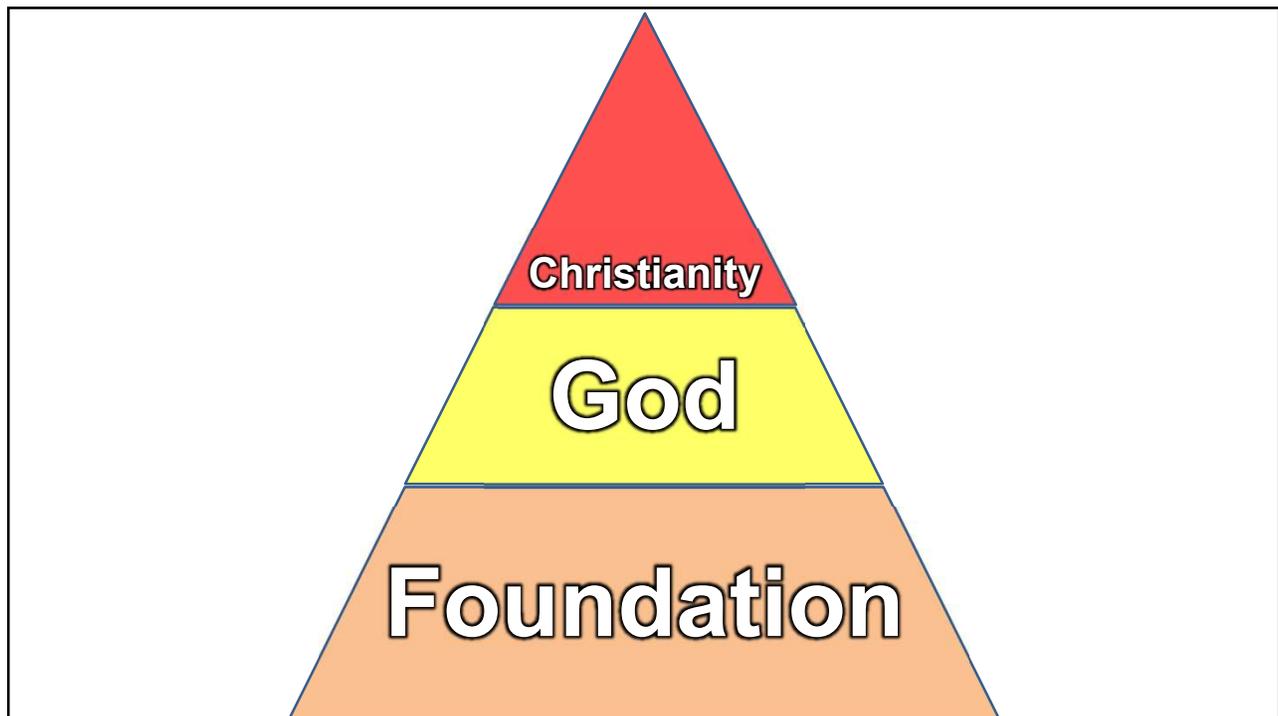
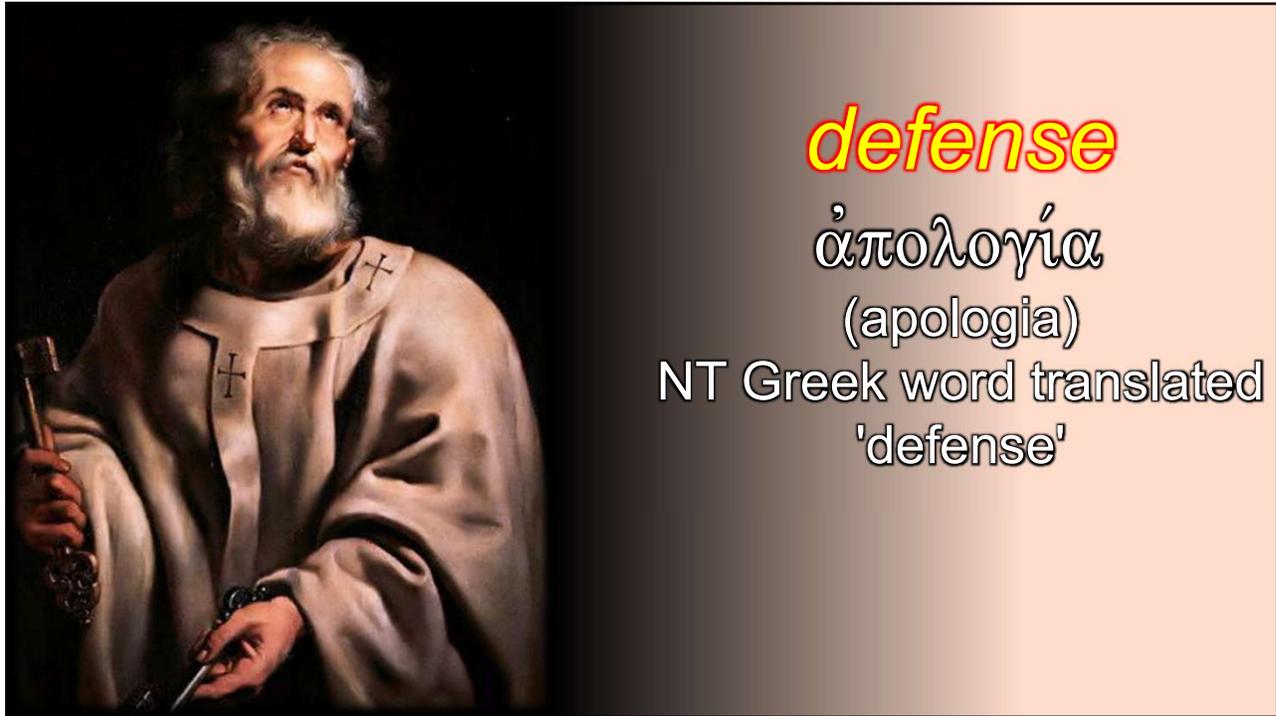
Islam: Heaven is gained by service to Allah. Only a few can have any assurance of avoiding hell.



Christianity: Eternal life is a gift that cannot be earned. It comes to those who trust God's provision in Jesus.







If it is the case that only
Christianity is true, are
the followers of those
religions eternally lost?

What About Those Who Have
Never Heard the Gospel?

Richard G. Howe, PhD

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Past President, International Society of Christian Apologetics