

One God, Many Gods

Discussion Series at Campus Lutheran
Facilitated by Pastor Kent and John Butcher

I. Why Should We Study Other Religions and Sects?

- a. **The Great Commission: Where is this found in the Bible? Significance?**
- b. **Unity of Christ: Ephesians 4:5-6**
- c. **1 Peter 3:15**
- d. **Ephesians 4:14**

II. Background to Study

There are over **1,588 religious** denominations, sects, faiths groups in America, including Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, not to mention Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists. There are, of course, many diverse world religions as Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism being the major ones.

- a. How Christianity fragmented
 - i. There were originally 3 religious groups during Jesus' time:
 - 1. Jewish Christians (led by James)
 - 2. Pauline Christians (led by Paul)
 - 3. Gnostic Christians ("gnostic" meaning that salvation comes through some secret knowledge)
 - b. Roman **Emperor Theodosious** (4th century) issued a series of decrees to suppress the rival religions, order the closing of the temples, and impose death on any who professed pagan religions (including the Gnostics).
 - c. **Pauline Christianity** (6th century) survived as a deeply divided Catholic church; **Gnostic** Christianity had been suppressed (at least at that time); **Jewish** Christianity died out (at least at that time).
 - d. 3 independent groups "competed" with Christianity in the world (See below):
 - e. 1054: **Great Schism divided** Christianity into 2 main groups:
 - i. Roman Catholics in Western Europe
 - ii. Eastern Orthodox in the East
 - f. 1517: **Martin Luther and humanists like Erasmus, among others**, triggered the Reformation in Europe because of various cultural, social, and political factors. The main problem was "greed" in all its forms, according to many historians of the period. (See Charles Nauert from UMC and his writings on the Reformation.)
 - g. **16th century to Present:** Protestants fragmented into more than a dozen families of denominations of individuals and faith groups. Now there are thousands of denominations in North America alone. Denominations like

the Baptists have divided into hundreds of faith communities; even the Lutherans have disagreed over interpretation of Scripture and how to worship.

III. The World Religions—An Overview

i. Islam (570 A. D.)

1. Mohammed and his belief in the one God, **Allah**. He received revelations from Allah and taught them to his followers; recorded now in the Koran (Qur'an); moved to Medina during his flight (Hijirat); The Shi'a, Sunnis, and Sufis were groups that resulted. Shi'a group dominates today.
2. Scriptures: **Koran** (114 Surahs (Chapters). Tradition includes the Torah of Moses and gospel of Jesus, which are corrupted, they argue.
3. Beliefs: 5 Articles of Faith—God, angels, Scripture, Prophet, Last Days
4. 5 Pillars of Faith—Creed, Prayer, Almsgiving, Fasting, and Pilgrimage

ii. Hinduism (more than 3000 years old)

1. Oldest and most complex religion
2. Aryan tribes moved to India from central Asia 3,000 years ago.
3. Caste system (Brahmins, Kshatriym, Vaishyas)
4. Belief in “reincarnation”
5. Salvation: merge with Brahman cult and reach Nirvana (escape from cycle of reincarnation); you must do works, develop knowledge, and practice devotion).
6. Scriptures: The Vedas (mantras, brahmanas, upanishads)

iii. Buddhism (560 B.C.)

1. Based on teaching of **Siddhartha Gautama** in India.
2. Practiced in China, Japan, Korea, SE Asia
3. Buddha as a child left his father's palace and saw “the 4 Sights.”
 - a. An old man suffering
 - b. A sick man suffering
 - c. A funeral (death)
 - d. A tranquil monk begging for food
4. Teachings: 4 Noble Truths; the 8-Fold Path, 5 Buddhist Precepts
5. Scriptures: Mahanyana and SE Asian holy writings; over 5,000 volumes.

