

The Blind Men and the Elephant

John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887)

It was six men of Hindustan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The *First* approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a WALL!"

The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho, what have we here,
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a SPEAR!"

The *Third* approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a SNAKE!"

The *Fourth* reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he:
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a TREE!"



The *Fifth*, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a FAN!"

The *Sixth* no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a ROPE!"

And so these men of Hindustan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
**Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!**¹

"The story of the **blind men and an elephant** originated in the Indian subcontinent from where it has widely diffused. It is a story of a group of blind men (or men in the dark) who touch an elephant to learn what it is like. Each one feels a different part, but only one part, such as the side or the tusk. They then compare notes and learn that they are in complete disagreement. It is a parable that has crossed between many religious traditions and is part of Jain, Buddhist, Sufi, Hindu and Bahá'í lore. The tale later became well known in Europe, with 19th century American poet John Godfrey Saxe creating his own version as a poem."²

Our present study will examine the non-negotiable truths of the biblical *Story*. We will then look at the distortion of the truth by those who dismiss the biblical *Story*. Their dismissal of the biblical narrative causes and creates relative religious emotion and structure. It is apparent that such a bold claim is only possible if there are absolutes that enable other non-conforming ideas to be judged.

In addition, we will examine the origin of biblical Christianity and its mutations throughout the centuries. All in all, this should be one interesting study. We will begin by asking ourselves the question, "Why study World Religions?"

I. Why Study WORLD RELIGIONS?

Why Should I Study Religion? – University of Northern Iowa³

Studying religion gives you the opportunity to explore some of the deepest and most significant ideas and values that have emerged in human history.

1. Religion has been one of the most persistent forces in the history of humanity.

With the rise of science, some think that religion is outdated, but it continues to exert its influence in profound ways throughout the world today. Think, for example, of the ongoing tensions in the Middle East, the debates over evolution, questions about abortion and the death penalty; how people think about these controversial issues reflects their religious convictions.

2. Religion asks the deepest, most important questions about human existence.

Where do we come from? Why are we here? What happens to us after we die? Why do people suffer? How should we act? How can we live good lives? How can we understand people with beliefs that conflict with our own? What is the ultimate meaning of life? Different religions provide a variety of answers to these questions. The study of religion gives you the opportunity to explore the range of answers to these profound questions, and allows you to consider your own beliefs and values.

3. People act out of their religious beliefs everyday.

Exploring the range of religious world views at work in the past and present is crucial for understanding what people do and why they do it.

4. Religion affects all aspects of human existence.

It is difficult to study history, anthropology, sociology, political science, literature, music, art, theater, psychology, education, or economics without understanding how religious views and ideals function in culture. If you are interested in any of these areas, you might also want to consider a religion major or minor.

Full Definition of *religion*

1. *a* : the state of a religious <a nun in her 20th year of religion>
b (1) : the service and worship of God or the supernatural
(2) : commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance
2. a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices
3. *archaic* : scrupulous conformity : conscientiousness
4. a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith⁴

Even the non-religious recognize the affect religion has on life. Listen to the following two statement by such people.

“Religion is like slow poison, and just as poison is killing your body, in the same way religion is killing your soul. There is only one difference: religion is masquerading as medicine, and while you think it is there for your own benefit, it is secretly killing you. And before you become aware of it, religion has turned you into a lifeless being.”⁵

“Mostly religion, Christianity specifically, suppresses critical thought. In essence, it makes people less intelligent by telling them that faith is just as good, or better, than arriving at a conclusion through deductive reasoning and evidence. To me, that is Christianity’s most offensive crime. It’s what causes otherwise good people to think cruelty or inequality are moral.”⁶

Are we better off without religious pursuit?

The essence of any religion lies solely in the answer to the question: why do I exist, and what is my relationship to the infinite universe that surrounds me? (Leo Tolstoy, 1879)⁷

Religion is the definition of man’s relationship to the origin of everything, and of the purpose acquired as a result of this relationship, and of the rules of conduct that follow from this purpose. It defines man’s relationship to God as of a part to a whole. From this relationship follows man’s purpose, and man’s purpose leads to the practical rules. (Leo Tolstoy, 1879)⁸

Religion, or at least religious inquiry, is something that virtually all humans have in common. In all corners of the world and in all eras of history, **people have wondered about the meaning of life, how to make the best of it, what happens afterwards, and if there is anyone or anything "out there."**⁹

II. What is an ABSOLUTE?

“In general, absolute truth is whatever is always valid, regardless of parameters or context. The *absolute* in the term connotes one or more of: a quality of truth that cannot be exceeded; complete truth; unvarying and permanent truth. It can be contrasted to *relative truth* or truth in a more ordinary sense in which a degree of relativity is implied.”¹⁰

III. What is a WORLDVIEW?

Article 1 of 3 – “What in the World is a Worldview?”

“Everybody has one. A person may be educated or uneducated, liberal or conservative, rich or poor, nonbelieving or God-fearing, but all people act and live in certain ways because they are guided by particular worldviews. Given its importance, just what exactly is a worldview?”

In the simplest terms, a worldview may be defined as how one sees life and the world at large. In this manner it can be compared to a pair of glasses. How a person makes sense of the world depends upon that person's "vision," so to speak. The interpretive "lens" helps people make sense of life and comprehend the world around them. Sometimes the lens brings clarity, and other times it can distort reality."¹¹

The **American Scientific Affiliation** offers this thought.

"A **worldview** is a theory of the world, used for living in the world. A world view is a mental model of reality – a framework of ideas & attitudes about the world, ourselves, and life, a comprehensive system of beliefs – with answers for a wide range of questions."¹²

Q - How does our Worldview and the study of World Religions coalesce?

IV. WORLD RELIGIONS

"One of the most important and well-documented shifts taking place over the past decade is the steadily rising share of people who are religiously *unaffiliated* – from 16% in 2007 to 23% in 2014."¹³

Article 2 of 3 – **Religion decline helps the Democratic Party**

Article 3 of 3 – **"Religion versus Christianity"**

V. "A Bone is a Bone"

Every religion attempts to answer the questions woven into our very DNA. Everyone, everywhere and at all times seeks to understand the *Story* surrounding them.

"One of the most common criticisms of atheism is that life can have no meaning without God-belief. I've always found this argument puzzling, because even if true it does absolutely nothing to prove the existence of God. What the believer is saying is that God-belief gives him or her the *feeling* that life has meaning. Well, that's great, but your feelings don't prove anything. In fact, while believing in God helps some find meaning, thanks to a fine new book called *A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy and Meaning in a World Without God*, believers and nonbelievers alike have strong evidence that the godless can and do enjoy lives of rich meaning."¹⁴

"Our Hearts are Restless

"Behind Augustine are a succession of desperate searches for fulfillment: excessive pleasures, false religions, philosophy, dissipation and distractions—futilities that left him so weary of himself he could only cry out, 'How long, O Lord, how long?' At the very moment when he uttered that cry, circumstances led his eyes to a passage in Romans that showed him he could

be freed from sin. Shortly afterward, he was baptized. Now, a decade since his baptism, after long musing upon the transformation that took place in him when he finally believed, he begins a unique autobiographical and philosophical prayer to God, a book which will become one of the most original and famous works in all of literature, the world's first psychological "autobiography." The Confessions will be his testimony of God's interaction with a soul that has found rest in its Creator. Heart bursting with the reality of God, he addresses his manuscript directly to the Lord as one long prayer and meditation—a prayer and meditation that will take him five years to complete. He dips his quill and begins, 'Great are you, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is your power, and your wisdom is infinite.' In contrast to God, he muses, what is man? Yet there is a connection between the two. Humans, such a small part of creation and short-lived as they are, still find a need to praise God. In spite of sin, each feels the longing to reach out to his Creator. Why is this? He realizes it is the doing of God. 'You have made us for yourself, and **our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.**' That line summarizes the theme of Augustine's life and will not be bettered in all the writings that lie ahead of him, in which he will wrestle with the deepest issues of theology."¹⁵

VI. *The Story*

God created us so that we might know and experience the joy He has within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and this joy is only known the presence of His son. The **non-negotiable** truths, the **absolute** truths are the following:

- God
- Creation
- Rejection
- Redemption
- Re-Creation
- Worship

VII. A Way of Explaining the Mysteries of Life

- How the world was created
- Why it was created
- Why there is life and death
- What happens when people die
- Why there is suffering

VIII. Why WORLD RELIGIONS

- a. Noah and His Three Sons and Global Expansion

There was a time when the truth was localized. Everyone was hearing the same thing and had the same information. Yet, despite this, the two still had disagreement as to its interpretation [i.e. Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel].

b. Elephant and the Blind Men

Again, religion is simply the blind man attempting to read the *Story* in the absence of God’s Word.

IX. WORLD RELIGIONS Percentages

Rank	Country	Area Sq. Km.	Population Today 2016
	World	510,072,000	7,448,508,375
1.	China	9,596,960	1,383,456,634
2.	India	3,287,590	1,329,814,669
3.	USA	9,826,630	324,570,474
4.	Indonesia	1,919,440	261,142,835
5.	Brazil	8,511,965	209,889,210
6.	Pakistan	803,940	193,577,875

Religion	Adherents	Percentage
Christianity	2.2 billion	31.50%
Islam	1.6 billion	22.32%
Secular	≤1.1 billion	15.35%
Hinduism	1 billion	13.95%
Buddhism	376 million	5.25%
Judaism	14 million	0.20%

X. Question

- Is how we read the *Story* relevant?
- Does it really matter or do all roads lead to God?
- If we did not have special revelation, then everyone’s opinion would be equally valid.
- Special Revelation tips the scales in understanding the *Story*.

The issue has as its conclusion heaven and hell. Matthew 16 is direct, “Who do you say I am”?

XI. Why Can’t We Just Get Along

Is it possible for us to be objective and absolute? Is the message of tolerance and coexisting the message of some/most?

XII. Bottom Line

- Matthew 16:13-20, “Who do you say I am?” Matthew 7:13-29, “The narrow road.”
- The Bible tells us how we are to read and understand the *Story*.

XIII. Our Approach - Polemic versus Apologetic

“**Polemics** refers to the practice of challenging and refuting doctrinal errors or providing correctives within the same belief system (or religion). This may be contrasted with apologetics which attempts to defend one's beliefs to outsiders. Polemics, therefore, may be viewed as dialogue internal to Christianity, and apologetics as dialogue to defend Christianity to non-Christians.”¹⁶

“Apologetics is used quite often as a form of pre-evangelism, to provide answers to valid questions a seeker might have concerning the truth of Christianity. It is used to remove roadblocks in the way of someone coming to a saving faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Apologetics and polemics are opposites of one another -- two sides of the same coin. Whereas apologetics is to clarify truth claims one holds to be true, polemics is used to argue against the truth claims of another. It is to give a reasonable, rational defense of why you believe ideas held by others as true are in fact not true. It is to tear down the false truth claims of someone or something else.”¹⁷

XIV. Starting the Study - Oldest to Youngest

TIMELINE				
BC			AD	
±2000 Judaism	±1750 Hinduism	±500 Buddhism	±0 Christianity	±570 Islam

XV. Our Intent - “Connect the Dots”

Our study of religion and life are not opposing ideas. All of life is connected. We know this because all of life is from God, sustained by God, and for God.

<p>Introduction “What in the World is going on?!”</p>
<p>“The NeverEnding Story” - Judaism - Israel</p>
<p>“Whatever!” - Hinduism - India</p>
<p>“Ouch!” - Buddhism - India</p>
<p>“Taking My Ball And Going Home!” - Part 1 - Islam - Middle East</p>
<p>“Christianity’s Slice of the Pie” - Christianity: Its History - part 1</p>
<p>Christianity: Its Orthodoxy AND Orthopraxy - Parts 2 & 3 There is a definable means of measuring what is or is not biblical Christianity.</p>
<p>“Who’s on First” - The Five Patriarchates of Christianity - 4th - 11th Century Christianity initially existed around the Mediterranean Sea. As it grew so did a programmatic structure of overseeing the expanding work. Primary population centers became “key” players in overseeing the “Church.” The five primary centers were Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria. In time, there was a power play and the West [Rome] split from the East [Eastern Orthodox]. That schism exists today. Protestantism is a product of Western Christianity. The two “bookends” are Christianity becoming the state religion of Rome with Constantine [Edict of Milan 313] and the Great Schism of 1054.</p>
<p>“Humpty Dumpty’s Great Fall” - Part 1 - Romans Catholicism - 11th Century Here we focus on the development of Christianity with the city of Rome being its head.</p>
<p>“Humpty Dumpty’s Great Fall” - Part 2 - Eastern Orthodoxy - 11th Century Here we will note the development of Christianity that is represented by Greek or Eastern Orthodox.</p>
<p>“The Emperor Has No Clothes!” - Martin Luther / Lutheranism - 16th Century On October 31, 1516, the monk Martin Luther began a dialogue resulting in the dividing of Western Religion.</p>
<p>“Taking My Ball And Going Home!” - Part 2 - Anglicanism / Episcopalians - 16th Century Shortly after Martin Luther [1534], King Henry VIII of England broke with Rome and began Anglicanism. The Episcopalians are what Anglicans are called in the North American.</p>
<p>“Reduce, Renew, Recycle” - Mormonism / Jehovah Witness - 20th Century Here we will note two of the prominent usurpers to biblical Christianity.</p>

- ¹ http://www.constitution.org/col/blind_men.htm
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_men_and_an_elephant
- ³ <https://www.uni.edu/philrel/why-should-i-study-religion>
- ⁴ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>
- ⁵ <http://theunboundedspirit.com/the-negative-effects-of-religion-on-society/>
- ⁶ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/wwjtd/2014/05/40-harmful-effects-of-christianity/>
- ⁷ WR Defined <http://www.spaceandmotion.com/Theology-World-Religions.htm>
- ⁸ WR Defined <http://www.spaceandmotion.com/Theology-World-Religions.htm>
- ⁹ WR Defined <http://www.uri.org/kids/world.htm>
- ¹⁰ <http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/absolute-truth>
- ¹¹ <http://www.reasons.org/articles/what-in-the-world-is-a-worldview>
- ¹² <http://asa3.org/ASA/education/views/index.html>
- ¹³ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/08/27/10-facts-about-religion-in-america/>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/our-humanity-naturally/201402/atheism-meaning-and-the-absurdity-it-all>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/incontext/article/augustine/>
- ¹⁶ <http://www.theopedia.com/polemics>
- ¹⁷ <http://radicaltruth.net/index.php/learn/radical-truth-christianity/54-apologetics-and-polemics>

It was six men of Indostan To learning much inclined, Who went to see the Elephant (Though all of them were blind), That each by observation Might satisfy his mind. The First approached the Elephant, And happening to fall Against his broad and sturdy side, At once began to bawl: "God bless me! but the Elephant Is very like a WALL!" The Second, feeling of the tusk, Cried, "Ho, what have we here, So very round and smooth and sharp? To me 'tis mighty clear This wonder of an Elephant Is very like a SPEAR!" The Third approached the animal, And happening to take The squirm It was six men of Indostan, to learning much inclined, who went to see the elephant (Though all of them were blind), that each by observation, might satisfy his mind. The first approached the elephant, and, happening to fall, against his broad and sturdy side, at once began to bawl: 'God bless me! but the elephant, is nothing but a wall!' The second feeling of the tusk, cried: 'Ho! what have we here, so very round and smooth and sharp? To me tis mighty clear, this wonder of an elephant, is very like a spear!' The third approached the animal, and, happening to take, the squi this story of blind men and the elephant is used to explain the concept of Anekantavada or "many-sidedness of reality" and SyAdvAda or theory of conditioned predication (शुद्धबोध). It states that there are multiple aspects of truth and reality and it is not possible to explain the absolute reality with language (or words) as it can only be experienced. This story of blind men and the elephant consist of four blind men. Here, they do not argue with each other but came to a conclusion that animal is the same but they have perceived (शुद्धबोध) it differently. In Rigveda, it is mentioned that "Reality is one, though wise men speak of it variously". [Source]. In Buddhism