

Christianity: (The Religion of the West) Jesus

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Abstract: (i) Among all the living religions of the world Christianity is based on the creation and teachings of Jesus Christ as embodied in the Bible in three parts. (i) Genesis relating to creation (ii) The Old Testament regarding the birth, teachings and miracles of Christ and (iii) The New Testament which deals about the gospels of Matthew, Luke, John etc. who were responsible for spreading the religion. So, it is clear that the Bible is the only source of Christianity. (ii) Basic features - The basic features of Christianity are (i) Evil and Suffering (ii) Doctrine of the Immortality of souls (iii) Trinity in religion (iv) Creation of Man (v) Importance of Prayer (vi) The day of Judgment and also life after death (vii) Concept of Hell and Heaven (viii) The Final Destiny (ix) The Doctrine of God. These basic features are analyzed in detail in the Bible and there is no other source. It is almost like the religion of Islam wherein the teachings are based on only one book - "The Holy Quran" supposed to be the words of God which were spread by Mohammad, the Prophet.

Keywords: Bible, the Holy Book, Genesis, Old and New Testaments, Evil and suffering, Immortality of soul. The doctrine of creation of Man, God, Importance of Prayer

Before giving the details of Christian religion as embodied in the old Testament by the pioneer of Christianity, Jesus Christ. I felt that it is necessary to know something about Christ.

In Christianity, the son of God and the second person of the Holy Trinity was Jesus Christ. Christian doctrine holds that by the crucifixion and Resurrection he paid for all the sins of mankind, His life and ministry are recounted in the four Gospels of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), He was born a Jew in Bethlehem before the death of Herod the great who died as Roman Governor of Juaea. His mother Mary was married to Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth of his childhood after the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke nothing is known, except for one visit to Jerusalem with his parents. He began his ministry at 30 years of age, became a preacher, teacher and healer. He gathered disciples in the religion of Galilee, including the 12 apostles and preached the immanent arrival at the Kingdom of God. His moral teachings outlined in the Sermon on the Mount, and his reported miracles won him a growing number of followers, who believed that he was the promised Messiah. On Pass over he entered Jerusalem on a donkey where he shared the last supper with his disciples and was betrayed to the Roman authorities by Judas Iscariot, Arrested and tried, he was condemned to death as a political agitator and was crucified and buried. Three days later visitors to his tomb found it empty. According to the Gospels he appeared several times to his disciples before ascending to heaven.

Judas Iscariot was one of the 12 disciples with made a deal with the Jewish authorities to betray Jesus into their custody in return for 30 pieces of silver. He brought the armed guard to the garden of Gethsemane and identified Jesus with a kiss. He later regretted his deed and committed suicide. According to Matthew he returned the money to the priests before hanging himself.

Creation of Man

According to the Genesis (Beginning of the old Testament - The Holy Bible), God created Man in his own image on the final day of creation, In other words, he is to be taken as the greatest of all the creatures on earth. Then, God creating man in his own image signifies God's, special preference for man. God chooses man to be his fellow partner in the fulfillment of his final purpose of the establishment of the kingdom of good all over the world. God gave everything to man- insight, intelligence, sensitivity and all other such qualities. But above all he chose man to stand in a special relationship with himself, to be his fellow partner in the creation of values on earth. God made man essentially a spiritual being as himself. Besides this perishable body that man outwardly has as his being he has got a soul which is immortal. Death of the body is not the death of the soul. This conception of the immortality of soul is with the exception of Buddhism, Jainism and all other orthodox thinkers is believed by all the living religions of the world, The Bible clearly states - "Dust thou art to dust returnest was not spoken of the soul."

By nature man is capable of doing everything but he is nevertheless God's creature and is fully dependent upon Him. He has to follow Gods path of love and kindness, otherwise he will be straying from the path of God and will be regarded as a sinner.

Obedying the will of God is working for the good and disobeying him is committing sin. Adam, the first man or the original forefather of man committed original sin by disobeying Him. He therefore lost the grace of God and made his entire, descendancy victim of his Original Sin. Adams sin the Original sin, is sin for everyman and that sin is the main cause of human suffering. It is due to this sin that man was sent to the world to suffer. However, God as the loving father promised upon man his redemption from suffering and it is to fulfill this promise that he sent Jesus on

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earth to teach people the right path. By following the teachings of Jesus, therefore, man can get rid of suffering.

The Importance of Prayer

There is not a singular living religion except the religions like Buddhism, Jainism etc which does not give importance to prayer. The modes and timings are different. In Christianity Jesus himself has given the following prayer for everyday life

“Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive, them against
us,
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power,
And the glory forever.” (Amen)

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”(Matthew 6-14-15)

Besides a primary ethical life of love that is essentially required of every Christian, Christianity also believes in the efficacy of prayers to God in so far as man's redemption is concerned, God's grace is essential in Christianity by elevation of man and for winning the grace of the Almighty, prayers are important. Prayers may be individual or congregational. They are more often observed in Churches congregational prayers are mostly observed on Sunday. Christian Churches are devoid of any images or idols. They are simply taken as sacred places where people congregate for prayers to God. In my earlier days when I had been a student at Cambridge Classes in Nazareth Academy owned by the Kerelians, I once had an opportunity to attend the altar where the sisters used to kneel down before the image of the crucified cross. What a peace therein I felt! There was complete silence.

Christian prayers are petitionary as well as of other natures, such as those of adoration, confession, meditation, acts of will and surrender etc, Even such prayers may be regarded as petitionary are not for asking petty things of material nature. They are petitions asking for strength so as to lead a righteous life. How far this is true is unknown. A penitent heart and a sincere prayer to God in the name of Christ means victory over temptations and divine forgiveness of sins in the event of fall.

Evil and Suffering

The old Testament declares that God is omnipotent and omniscient. Nothing happens to the world without Him. Islam also holds the same view.

Suffering is due to sinning. Evil-doers are bound to be punished, if not in this world, then certainly in the next world. Thus God was to be praised for all things, whether

disaster or priority. In general, suffering awakens a man and serves him to think about God. This is clear from the story of the Prodigal Son. When the prodigal son began to starve because of the famine in the land, then his thoughts turned towards his father, He repented for his sins, and he was finally reconciled with his father. This is also the view of Ramanuja. Again suffering is said to be corrective.

“Happy is the man whom God reproves;
Therefore despite not the chastening of the Almighty” (Job 5-17)

For the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights. (Prov 3-12)

Further, God loves his creatures as a father loves his children and He is also powerful. Then why so much of evil and suffering in the World? Christianity first seems trying to meet the challenge by holding Satan, the devil to be responsible for evil. But obviously this plea cannot hold very sound, because the natural question will be whether Satan is well under God's control or independent If the second alternative is taken to be the answer, God certainly is saved from the responsibility of evil, but then he no longer remains powerful.

In the old Testament, Satan appears not as an independent embodiment of evil, but as a member of the heavenly court whose job is to provoke people towards evil and inflict suffering on them so as to test the sincerity and depth of their faith in God. But later on Satan seems playing a different role, the role of a rebel and he enters the garden of Eden to mislead Adam to the disobedience of God which proves to be the cause of all human suffering. Here, two factors in a combined fashion become responsible for evil the devilish provocation of Satan and the utter misuse of the free will granted to Adam. Although Satan's devilish nature is at the root of man's suffering it is not beyond God's control. This means that God himself allows evil to exist as a mark and means of discipline. “You must endure it as a discipline: God is treating you as sons. Can anyone be a son, who is not disciplined by his father.”(Hebrews 12.5-6). In the case of our human fathers they punished us and we respected them. How much more, then should we submit to our spiritual father and love (Hebrew 12.9). At times, a pious man suffers on account of others. This was the case with Moses. The Israelites went back to idolatry and God was angry with the people, so Moses had to intercede on their behalf. “Please for-give their sin! and if you won't then remove my name from the book in which you have written the names of your people”.

The Doctrine about God

God is Jesus

Christianity is a theistic religion which believes in the reality of one supreme God. But instead of saying that God according to Christianity is one, creator, sustainer and judge, loving Father and so on, Christians say ‘God is Jesus, God is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. He is eternal. None can conceive his non-existence. He is without beginning and end. He is the creator and sustainer of this

world and has created the world out of nothing. He is both immanent and transcendent through according to Rene Descartes, it is absurd to think that out of nothing comes (Ex-nihilo nihil fit). But there is no plausible scientific explanation of the creation of the world so we have to blindly believe that God is master of creation. This means that Christians support his existence. Christianity is essentially monotheistic believing in only one God, yet God is painted as three persons into one as the idea of Trinity. The three persons in one God the Father, God the son and the Holy Spirit.

According to St. John Jesus declared “whoever has seen one has seen the Father” (St. John 14.9). The Father and I are one (10.30) St. John himself writes in his gospel, ‘No one has ever seen God; the only son who is the bosom of the father has made it known (St. John 1.18) He further says “I am the way, the truth and the life; no one goes to the Father except me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him”. (St. John 14.5-6)

But whatever, Christians may hold about Jesus he never said that he was God. On the others hand Jesus clearly declared that God was greater than He. (St. John 14.28) and God alone knew about the last day of the world and God alone is the judge of men. Hence when the Christians say that God is Jesus then it is only a metaphorical or honorable expression about Jesus in the same way in which we say that Jadu is a tiger or lion. But, perhaps the phrase ‘God is Jesus’ means much has shown what God as love is, by means of his teaching life and death. Certainly Jesus was not God but He was revelatory of the person of God. Jesus was a man, a descendant in the line of King David. By sheer obedience to the will of God, he could reflect the nature of God. By virtue of his life he evinced the power of God in working miracles and by forgiving the sins of men and woman, he showed that God is forgiving and redeeming Love.

Trinity in Religion

There are three things in Christian religion namely, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Theologians of the West have held that these are three persons in one. They distinguish trinity from the triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. But quite obviously three persons, as persons cannot be one, no matter how much closer they may be. Hence the theologians regard Trinity as a great mystery. If Jesus and God are identical then Jesus cannot be man. Hence, the crucifixion of Jesus was fake, for God cannot die, further, if Jesus and God are identical then to whom Jesus was praying all the time in his life. Three, Jesus was called the visible likeness of invisible God (Col 1.15). How can there be any comparison between visible and invisible things? But there is another difficulty. Was Jesus a human being only? In that case the Christians will be dubbed as ‘idolaters’ in as much as a man Jesus a mere creature is worshipped in the place of God who is the creator of all man. Can we say then that He was both God and man a perfect God and a perfect man? This will be self contradictory in as much as it is tantamount to saying that a being is both finite and infinite. When Ram Mohan Roy had to face the doctrine of trinity he denied the Holy Spirit to be

a person and held that God in the form of Brahman is impersonal.

Thus, Jesus is not Brahman, nor is he God, the Absolute Reality, the creator and Destroyer of the world. The utterance of Jesus that ‘I and the Father are one’, or ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father can be better understood as the more perfect revelation of God, Father and Love than was the case in the past or even after his death. He was just a revelatory event in history.

Life after Death

(The Day of Judgement)

As the soul in man is immortal, death is not the total and final end in man. There is an afterlife too, the main ingredients of which are the Day of Judgment, Resurrection of the Dead and the assignment of Heaven and Hell to the people in accordance with their good or bad deeds on earth. Thus, the afterlife account of Christianity is not basically different from that of Judaism or Islam or even Zoroastrianism to a great extent.

When the world comes to its final end, there is resurrection of the dead. In this resurrection, souls of all men are united with their bodies and men again come in the fullness of their nature. When exactly the end of the world and the consequential resurrection will take place is known to God and God alone. The end of world will mark the arrival of the final day of Judgement. On this day of judgement all souls united with their bodies will be brought before God for the final assessment of the value of their deeds done by them during their earthly lives. Those whose deeds have been in accordance with the teachings of Jesus are sent to heaven and those who have been unrighteous and sinful are sent to hell. Hell is a place of eternal punishment from God, where as heaven is a place of eternal happiness through communion with God. It is a state of perfect and unceasing joy. Describing the joy of heaven, it has been said, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither had entered in the heart of men, what things God has prepared for them that love Him”.

What happens to the individual soul in the intermediary period, i.e. during the period between the death of an individual and the final day of judgement. Where does the soul lie during this period between the death of an individual and final day of judgement? Where does the soul lie during this period? To answer this question, Christianity seems to believe in two kinds of judgement. The universal judgement is the final judgement made at the end of the world which is applicable to all. There is little doubt, according to the gospels, that Jesus believed in the day of judgement.

Heaven and Hell

There is the idea that if a person dies in the love of God and his fellow beings he is taken as unstained and is “straightway received into heaven”. And again the soul of a man who has lived a sinful life quite in disobedience of God’s will straight way goes down to hell. Those souls which although have been stained by sins, but have shown

sincere repentance and have undergone penance etc are first sent to the purgatory for purification and thence to Heaven.

In many places in the gospels, Jesus is said to have expressed his belief in Heaven and terrible painful life in hell. This is clearly exemplified in the story of a rich man and the beggar Lazarus who used to sit at the doorstep of the rich man. The poor man died and carried away by the Angels to sit beside Abraham at the feast in heaven. The rich man died and was in Hades, where he was in great pain; he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus at his side. So he called out, "Father Abraham! Take pity on me, and send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water and cool my tongue, because I am in great pain in fire". (Luke 16:22-24)

Jesus believed in the hell-fire where the sinner will cry and will be gnashing his teeth, (Mathew + Luke). The following lines from the gospel of Mark would make things clear- "And if your hands causes you to sin, cut it off, it is better for you to enter life maimed than with hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off, it is better for you enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown in hell. And if your eyes cause you to sin, pluck it out, it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes not die, and the fire is not quenched. For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltness, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another". (Mark 9-43-50) Similar idea is also given in the gospel of Mathew (18-8-9) the message clearly explains that temptation leads to sin, so avoid temptation.

Jesus promises paradise to the repentant thief who was hung by his side on the cross. "I promise you that today you will be with me in Paradise.

According to the Bible man was made in the image of God i.e. with the knowledge of good and bad and a free will to choose either. In due course the final destiny for man is that he should surrender his will to God. But it is difficult thing for man participates in dual nature. He is a man of flesh and of nature, and also his spiritual nature. And the carnal man and the spiritual nature in man very often come in conflict. "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain, immorality, impurity, dicentionsness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strofe, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like. I warn you as I warned you before that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with his passions and desires." (Galations 5 - 17-24).

This goes to prove that man cannot do what he wants to do. He does what he does not want to do. One has to have faith that the death of Jesus has paid the price of Sin for us. It is thus through faith that all of you are God's sons in union

with Christ Jesus. Hence, the message of the cross is a free gift of the whole mankind. For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is the result of your own efforts, but God's gift and no one can boast of it.

This is exactly the position of Ramanuja who lays emphasis on Bhakti for the deliverance of man. Of course, Christian Bhakti is in the redemptive death of Jesus. Secondly, both Ramanuja and Christians teach that the service of God is our greatest freedom. "Our wills are ours so that we make them thine." Hence the ultimate destiny of man is that he should overcome his physical passions and desires and makes his will the will of God. (Galations 5.24). We must have the fruits of Spirit and not of carnal man. But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control. (Galations 5.23).