

Comparing and Contrasting Hinduism with Christianity

Creation

Christianity offers its followers an explicit account of the creation of the world and of human beings. “In the beginning,” God created everything. The creation story also indicates a definite ending to this created order. Time runs along its track into some unknown future, at which time God’s purposes in the creation will be fulfilled and time as we now experience it will end. Conversely, for Hindus, the world is depicted as going through endless cycles of creation and destruction, unimaginable in scope, with no definite beginning or end. For both religions, beginning and end have a strong element of mystery, but for Christians, this mystery is contained within the creative activity and will of God.

The Course of Human Life and Death

Christians believe that we have only one lifetime to live on this earth, followed by the death of this earthly body. Judgment by God ensues, and the faithful aspire to an eternal life of bliss in Heaven. Hindus believe that each soul will be reborn again and again, going through many lifetimes until released from the cycle of death and rebirth through liberation, or *moksha*. That final release is determined not by the judgment of a personal God but by the individual’s having eventually “gotten it right” and let go of the notion of individual selfhood so that merger into the divine can occur.

The Moral Law

Christians and Hindus view the sources and application of moral law differently. For Hindus, *dharma* is the natural law built into the universe. Hinduism doesn’t speculate on why it is the way it is, aside from saying it is one aspect of the divine order of reality. The moral law is part of reality. Christians also posit a divine origin for moral law, understanding that law as having been given directly by God, most notably in the Ten Commandments given first to the Hebrew people and carried over into Christianity through the Old Testament. Jesus then augments and interprets this Law in the New Testament. The moral law is of supernatural origin. Most Christians, however, also embrace the idea of natural law, or moral law, that has been a part of the creation since its beginning.



Sources of Moral Guidance

There are interesting parallels between the sources to which Hindus turn for guidance about *dharma* and those that are familiar to Christians as they seek moral guidance. Hindu reliance on divine revelation as it is found in their scriptures is analogous to Christians' reliance on Revelation in Scripture and through the person and work of Jesus. Catholic Christians have the Tradition of the Church, passed from generation to generation through the official teachings and practices of the Church, much as Hindu tradition is passed from generation to generation. Hindus also look to persons considered wisest in their society, while Christians, especially Catholic Christians, look to the examples of the lives of the saints. Finally, both rely on the urgings of conscience.

Creator and Creation

One of the most pronounced differences between Hinduism and Christianity is Hinduism's monistic view contrasted with Christianity's monotheistic/dualistic view. From the predominant Hindu point of view, everything, as diverse as it appears to us, is ultimately one. People, houses, trees in the park, insects—all things are in their essence Brahman. Brahman is the infinite, eternal, unborn, and undying, nonpersonal reality of which everything else is a manifestation. Christians, on the other hand, make a clear-cut distinction between God as Creator of everything that is and God's creation. (It is crucial to note that this is not, from a Christian perspective, a distinction between good and evil. The created order, created by God, is good and is blessed.) For Christians, there is one God; for Hindus, there is simply the One, the All. These two major religions share slight similarity in that Hindus experience the many gods and goddesses of their tradition as manifestations of the One. In Christianity, the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) expresses belief in three Persons in one God.

