

Comparing and Contrasting Religion in the Modern World with Christianity

New Religious Movements and Christianity

Christianity was itself a “new religious movement” that began within the Jewish community of faith. Today, however, in the United States, new religious movements in general share a number of distinctive features that are different from those of Christianity:

- They are relatively newer in the United States than is Christianity.
- They remain small movements, for the most part.
- They are usually somewhat exclusive, often with rigorous expectations of members, who in turn often regard themselves as set apart from the rest of the world.
- The group itself tends to be quite close-knit.
- They revere different scriptures, or include other writings, along with the Bible in some cases, as authentic revelation.
- The additional writings referenced give rise to beliefs and rituals that often differ noticeably from those of Christianity.

At the same time, they share with Christianity the attempt to provide answers to their adherents’ most basic life questions, to give moral and ethical guidance, and to provide rituals in which people can experience the sacred and affirm their commitment to the group.

Christianity and the New Age

The following list provides some basic comparisons and contrasts of the New Age Movement with Christianity:

- Mysticism has been an undercurrent within most forms of Christianity; it is central in the New Age Movement.
- Christians hold that individuals need the grace of God; most New Age followers believe that people have all they need within themselves.
- In Christianity, human actions are judged by God; the New Age Movement embraces the belief in karma, an impersonal moral law of cause and effect.
- Christians affirm resurrection of the body. New Agers usually believe in reincarnation.
- God, for most Christians, is a distinctive divine being who chooses to relate to creation, including human beings; most New Age followers experience the divine more as universal energy present in all things.
- Christians emphasize the action of God’s grace *upon* people, strengthening, guiding, and encouraging them; New Agers emphasize tools and practices for *self*-transformation.



Neo-Paganism / Wicca and Christianity

The differences and similarities between Neo-Paganism / Wicca and Christianity include the following:

- Reverence for nature, the natural world, and its cycles and manifestations holds a parallel place for Neo-Pagans and Wiccans that reverence for God does for Christians.
- Neo-Paganism / Wicca is polytheistic, whereas Christianity is monotheistic.
- Many Wiccans honor the Triple Goddess, the sacred feminine in her manifestations as Maiden, Mother, and Crone; most Christians experience and express God as a Trinity of three Persons in One God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Neo-Pagans and Wiccans base their religious life more on ritual, with less emphasis on correct doctrine; Christians hold that doctrine and shared beliefs are key elements to their communities of faith.

