

# Comparing and Contrasting Jainism with Christianity

## The Impure Status of the Material World

Jains believe that the problem with humankind comes about because clean and pure souls are trapped in unclean, impure matter. The sense that the soul is pure and clean while everything material is evil and impure runs throughout Jain belief and practice. Christians, meanwhile, believe that the material world is created by God and is good although compromised by sin. Embodiment is not evil nor polluting in itself.

## The *Tirthankaras*

Christians believe that God became human only once, in the person of Jesus. Jains revere twenty-four *tirthankaras* (spiritual heroes who have shown the way to salvation), and they believe there have been others in previous cycles of creation. Though the spiritual accomplishments of the *tirthankaras* are unique, they themselves are not.

## Asceticism and Austerity

Jains advocate and practice asceticism or austerity as the means to rid the soul of the matter that clings stubbornly to it. Though the practice is vastly more rigorous for monks and nuns than for laypeople, it strongly affects the life of Jain laity as well. Most Christians, on the other hand, feel that God creates the material world for human use, within the bounds of good stewardship and morality. Thus, most believe that it is permissible to consume animals for food and acceptable to kill bothersome insects or rodents. In increasing numbers, however, Christians are seeing that good stewardship of creation means that we need to pay attention to how the animals we raise for food are treated. Nearly all Jains are vegetarians (and, in fact, vegans, who use no animal products whatsoever).

