

THEOLOGY DEFINED

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The Term Theology

Theology has become almost a household term. Or at least a *religious household term* or concept.

The term is a compound word comprised of two Greek words, **Θεός, *theós***, meaning *god, divinity*, or the *divine*, and **λόγος, *lógos***, meaning a *word* or *discussion*.

So, expressed in religious terms theology can refer to a *discussion of god*, or a *discussion of divine matters*. The word is further defined by the context in which it is found.

When used with adjectives like Biblical Theology it usually involves discussions related to what the Bible or Scripture is saying about God. For example, Baptist theology discusses what Baptists believe and teach about God.

An examination of the many different religions of the world will demonstrate that *theology explains how different people perceive of life and ultimate reality, gods, and how these beliefs involve both their physical and spiritual essence*.

In this study we will begin discussing *Apostolic Biblical Theology, Old and New Testament Theology*, then examine how different Christian churches and religions express their theology in faith and practice.

The “Apostolic” Biblical Church

By the Apostolic Church we infer *churches founded by the Apostles and early disciples* who spread out into the world, motivated by Jesus’ great commission of **Matt 28:16-20**, “*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.* ¹⁷ *And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted.* ¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* ¹⁹ ***Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*** ²⁰ *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”*”

Shortly after the giving of this commission in the mountains Luke records Jesus repeating a similar commission, **Acts 1:6-11**, “*So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* ⁷ *He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.* ⁸ *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”* ⁹ *And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.* ¹⁰ *And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,* ¹¹ *and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*”

Luke also records the diaspora movement of the early disciples, **Acts 8:1-8**, “*And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles ...* ⁴ *Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.* ⁵ *Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ.* ⁶ *And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did.* ⁷ *For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.* ⁸ *So there was much joy in that city.”*”

The early Churches established by these early Christians are identified as *apostolic churches* since they were either *established by the Apostles* or *by their converts as disciples of Jesus*. *These early congregations,*

churches, were autonomous congregations established regionally throughout the regions located initially geographically, but soon to be spread by the movement of Christians into the *diaspora*, a term used by Peter, 1 Pet 1:1, 2, referring to Christian groups spreading out into the Gentile world.

Apostolic Theological Teaching

These early churches were encouraged and edified by visits from the Apostles, **Acts 14:19-28**, or by *apostolic epistles* like 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1 Peter, James, Hebrews, Revelation, *et al.* These early apostolic writings were collected into a “category” of *canonical* Christian Scriptures, which along with the Old Testament, became the *Sacred writings*, or *Scriptures* of Christianity. Paul’s letters to *Timothy* and *Titus* give some indication of the normative nature of the Christians lives and churches. The canonical **Gospels, 1 Tim 1:3-11, Titus, and 2 Tim 3:10-17**, establish a pattern of *apostolic epistolary* boundaries to the Christian church and faith. “Now you have observed **my teaching**, my conduct, my aim in life, **my faith**, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹² Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the **sacred writings** which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Throughout the first three centuries of the lives of the churches *no synods or creeds* were binding in the lives of the Christians. Certainly, as in Acts 15 Christians gathered together in meetings or conferences to discuss matters of the faith but these early conferences produced no creeds, oral or written, that were bound on the churches beyond the canonical writings of the apostolic age, the 1st century of Christianity.

Writings like the *Didache*, the purported to be the writings of the Twelve Apostles, surfaced ca 110 CE, but they were not considered creedal or binding on the churches.

It was not until the churches associated with the Roman Catholic churches under the Pope sought control over the burgeoning Roman Church that Christian creeds began to surface. Papal *conferences* in Rome and later Constantinople and Chalcedon produced several Creeds like the Apostles Creed, ca 390 CE, and the Nicene Creed, 325, 381, 451, CE, that became *definitive* and *normative* for the *Roman churches*.¹ These creeds were rejected by the Eastern Orthodox churches who produced their own creeds to define their churches, and later by the Protestant Reformers Luther, Erasmus, Calvin, and Zwingli who set in motion a reformed protestant church movement.

It should be noted that these early creeds were approved in order to address heretical doctrines within the Roman church.

For an expert introduction to the role of early creeds in the life of the 3rd to 4th century church cf. J, N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds and Early Christian Doctrines*, c.a. 1934.

The Theology and these early Church Creeds was developed more from *doctrinal issues introduced* into the church *ecclesially* from *philosophical* arguments relevant to the churches in the Roman Catholic world. This did not represent a *biblical theology* for the church, but an *ecclesiastical theology* which was not *deductively* produced from *within the Scriptures*.

¹ It is to my intention here to produce a definitive discussion on these early creeds. My intention is only to indicate how the creeds originated, and to mention their relationship to the Christian church and biblical theology in particular. The scholarly library on the origin of the creeds is considerable, and readily available.

Biblical Theology

Biblical theology is the result of an *inductive* examination of the Scriptures. The intention is to demonstrate *what Scripture says* about the **Judeo/Christian God, faith, and practice**.

Biblical theology works through a *careful biblical critical exegesis* of Scripture in an effort to determine *what message*, verbally and theologically, **the original author had for the original reader**.

In the process the *reader/researcher* seeks to identify *inductively what* the **major theological message** is that is **contained within the text**.

In a *deductive* reading of the text the researcher finds, reads, introduces their presupposition into the study. Biblical critical scholars call this method a “*proof text*” procedure in which the reader/researcher searches for texts that support their theology.

Furthermore, *Biblical Theology* eschews *confessions of faith* such as the Catholic *Nicene, Constantinople, and Chalcedonian Creeds*, and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

The intention of Biblical theology *requires Scripture* to be the *normative guide to faith and practice*, not *ecclesiastical, church creeds, or practices* to determine normative standards.

Although both Jewish and Christian Biblical theologies recognize that there are distinct geographic, political, and generational differences in the religious history of the Old and New Testaments, Christians recognize that in these *two canons of Sacred religious theology* there is one God who is driving the theological narrative in each of the Holy Spirit “*inspired*” and “*inerrant*” *normative messages*. Their theological message is the same, although God has spoken his message to his people in different forms through the ages, **he now speaks to them through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit inspired New Testament texts**.

Heb 1:1-4. “*In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs.*”

2 Pet 1:20, 21. “*First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, ²¹ because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*”

Old Testament Theology

Old Testament Theology *seeks to understand what the core message of the Old Testament might be, what the Old Testament says about God*.

This is a broad discussion that can be broken down into smaller more contextual “*canons within the canon*” since the Old Testament narrative covers over 1500 years of Israel’s religious experience with God. We could examine the *core message about God* that we learn from the different *categories within* the five “*categories*” of the *canonical Tanakh Old Testament*, such as the **Torah, Nevi’im** Wisdom literature, or the **Ketuvim** Writings of Israel say. Or we might examine, for instance, the theological message of *Exodus, Deuteronomy, or Ezekiel*.

Each discussion, derived *inductively* from the text, provides a *valuable context* to Israel’s faith that offers boundaries to the discussion of Israel’s theology.

However, as scholars have pointed out, it is the same god, YHWH, working with twelve tribes of Israel over 1200-1400 years in an *eschatological scheme of redemption* that *began in Genesis* and only *ends with Jesus and the eschatological kingdom he inaugurated in his ministry*.

In 1980/2000 Dr. Thomas Olbricht, *professor of Old and New Testament theology* at Abilene Christian University published a book, *He Loves Forever*. The book was the summation of Olbricht’s years of

theological research, teaching, and writing. As a colleague of Olbricht's at ACU in 1980, I audited his course *Theological Teachings of the Old Testament*. **That course and his book reoriented my theological thinking of the Old Testament.** I had been raised in my early years on the concept that the Old Testament was all about *faith and obedience to the Old Testament laws, especially the Law of Moses!*

The theology of the Old Testament was *Law, faith, and obedience. The theology was keep the Law or be doomed!*

Olbricht's thinking gave me a new perspective of not only the Old Testament, but also of God. YHWH is a *God who loves forever!*

Lam 3:19-23, written while Jeremiah [Hebrew tradition attributes Lamentation to Jeremiah] and Israel had just witnessed the destruction of their Temple and Jerusalem. In the shadow of this tragedy Jeremiah wrote:

¹⁹ *The thought of my affliction and my homelessness*

is wormwood and gall!

²⁰ *My soul continually thinks of it*

and is bowed down within me.

²¹ ***But this I call to mind,***

and therefore I have hope:

²² ***The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,***

his mercies never come to an end;

²³ ***they are new every morning;***

great is your faithfulness.

²⁴ ***"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,***

"therefore I will hope in him."

It is interesting that this theme permeates almost every book of the Old Testament. Its Hebrew root word, *hesed*, is found over 343 times in the Old Testament, over 150 times in the Psalms

A reviewer of Olbricht's book *He Love Forever* wrote, "Do you know - really know - how much God loves you? Is the knowledge of God's love for you just another fact stored in your brain or, is your understanding of God's love so predominant in your life that your every perspective/attitude throughout any given day is influenced by it? *The central focus of the Old Testament is God's love.* Written in an easy to read and well-documented style, Dr. Thomas Olbricht has provided us with an inspiring look at the steadfast, immeasurable love God has for His children. *He Lives Forever* traces the *intense love God has for us* through Creation, Blessings through Abraham's Deliverance in the Exodus Protection in the Wilderness Promise, through the Covenants of Love through the Law Victory in the Conquest, Inheritance of the Land, through the Psalms, Proverbs, and the Prophets.

Dr. Olbricht writes, "the story line of the Old Testament is easier to follow if one is familiar with the basic contours. This book is designed to identify certain foundational affirmations in the Old Testament and to trace the threads, *which bind the whole together. We are concerned with the central message of the Old Testament - that the God of the Old Testament is an incessant lover. "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever (Psalm 136:1)."*

The first instance of this expression is found at Gen 24:12 when Abraham's servant went out to find Isaac a wife. Coming to a spring near the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia the servant prayed these words, ***"O Lord, God of my master Abraham, grant me success today, I pray thee, and show steadfast love to my master Abraham.*** ¹³ *Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water.* ¹⁴ *Let the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Pray let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac. By this I shall know that thou hast shown steadfast love to my master."*

The expression is also found 343 times in the *Tanakh*, Old Testament, over 153 times in 150 Psalms, indicating the importance of this expression to the worship liturgy of Israel.

It is the repeated statements of God's steadfast love for Israel that leads Thom Olbricht to open his theology of the Old Testament with this observation:

“The story line of the Old Testament exudes love, excitement, and hope. It tells how this universe was made, and how humans, these inscrutable beings, occupied such a prominent position. It asserts that the Creator, before the creation of man and the universe, spoke into existence the vast reaches of space. Then he created man in his image. It tells of the Creator's love affair with creation and man. It affirms an undying, relentless, unceasing love, but not so much from the human side. Man not only is inexplicable, but he is also unstable, fickle, vacillating, and often faithless. But God is not man. As the Old Testament tells it, Israel's God loves – intensely – forever ... The God of the Old Testament is an incessant lover.”

*Here in one paragraph Olbricht sums up the story [and Theology] of the Old Testament! **It is a story of a God who loves his creation with a steadfast love, whose mercy never comes to an end, who works steadily in history to redeem his fallen creation.***

New Testament Theology

New Testament theology seeks to unfold how God is explained in the canonical New Testament documents, not in church synods, or church creeds. This theology is expressed in certain *primary biblical practices* such as *corporate and private worship, the Lord's Supper, faith, baptism, salvation, or resurrection, and how these events define the practice of faith.*

This corpus may be refined to identify the theology developed in certain “*canons within the canon*” such as *the canonical four apostolic Gospels, Pauline theology, Petrine theology, Johannine theology, and apocalyptic eschatological theology.* Each of these “canons” unfolds the same theological center, *the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

Without the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus the Gospels are not gospels, good news; they reveal a tragic ending of a failed soteriology!

Without the death and resurrection of Jesus salvation as taught in the Pauline, Petrine, and Johannine Epistles is meaningless, 1 Cor 15.

When *critical inductive biblical exegetical*² approaches are conducted, *inductively*, in these texts *in their individual “canons,”* Gospels, Pauline Epistles, Petrine Epistles, Johannine Epistles, one *dominant theme* emerges; *the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.*

Without the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus New Testament theology, and the church, are powerless and impotent.

When the church's ecclesiastical synodal creeds become the defining factor of Christianity and the church, the theological power of the church has “just departed the Temple,” like the four living creatures of Ezekiel departing the Temple and Jerusalem.

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is a “fulfillment” of Old Testament theology, “*He loves forever with mercy that never fails!*”

Roman Catholic Theology

Roman Catholic theology, a broad concept, can imply that *Roman Catholics have a theological discussion about God in the context of their religious commitment.* In this theology the Pope functioning through ecclesiastical synods, meeting in dialogue with the church's ecclesiastical officers, prominently *Archbishops, Bishops, Priests,* all assembled by vatical decree to meet in a *Roman Vatican City,* wherever that may be in the history of its diocese.

When Catholic doctrines or issues are discussed, like the order of *selecting a new Pope,* such discussions define *Roman Catholic Theology;* discussions about Roman Catholic Religion, fellowship, and

² By the expression *critical inductive biblical exegetical* we mean a careful examination of the text in its original contexts; *historical, grammatical, linguistic, syntactical,* and religious, contexts, and not by a deductive proof-text approach.

practice all defined in terms of several creeds, the *Apostolic Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, the *Chalcedonian Creed*, etc. The decisions expressed in these creeds become the defining theology of the Roman Catholic church. The Scriptures are acknowledged, but the Creeds become the expression of Roman Catholic theology to the dissatisfaction of the Eastern wing of the church.

This was set in practice when the *Eastern Orthodox Church*, the *Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople*, rejected the Roman Catholic Creeds and established their own diocese in Byzantium, Constantinople, ca. 451 CE.

It was apparent that the Roman Catholic Creeds had become the ecclesiastical epistemology of the church, not the pivotal death and resurrection explained in the Scriptures. The Creeds were introduced *deductively* from outside of Scripture!

Westminster Confession of Faith

The Westminster Confession of Faith, or simply the Westminster Confession, is a *Reformed confession of faith*, drawn up by the 1646 by the *Westminster Assembly* as part of the *Westminster Standards* to be a confession of the *Church of England*. It became and remains the "*subordinate standard*" of doctrine in the *Church of Scotland*, and has been influential within *Presbyterian* churches worldwide.

In 1643, the *English Parliament* called upon "learned, godly and judicious *Divines*" to meet at *Westminster Abbey* in order to *provide advice on issues of worship, doctrine, government and discipline of the Church of England*. Their meetings, over a period of five years, produced the confession of faith, as well as a *Larger Catechism* and a *Shorter Catechism*. For more than three hundred years, various churches around the world have adopted the confession and the catechisms as their standards of doctrine, subordinate to the *Bible*. For the *Church of Scotland* and the various denominations which spring from it directly, though, only the *Confession* and *not the Catechisms* is the subordinate standard, the Catechisms not being re-legislated in 1690.

The Westminster Confession was modified and adopted by *Congregationalists* in England in the form of the *Savoy Declaration* (1658). English Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and some Anglicans, would together come to be known as *Nonconformists*, because they did not conform to the *Act of Uniformity (1662)* establishing the Church of England as *the only legally approved church, though they were in many ways united by their common confessions, built on the Westminster Confession*.³

Presbyterian Articles of Religion

The beliefs and practices set forth by the Presbyterian Church have their roots in the teachings of *John Calvin*, a 16th-century French reformer. Calvin's theology was similar to *Martin Luther's*. He agreed with the father of the Protestant Reformation on the doctrines of original sin, *justification* by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers, and the sole *authority of the Scriptures*. Where Calvin distinguishes himself theologically is with his doctrines of predestination and eternal security.

The official *creeds*, confessions, and beliefs of the Presbyterian Church, including the *Nicene Creed*, the *Apostles' Creed*, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Westminster Confession of faith, are all contained within a document called *The Book of Confessions*. The end of this constitution is an article of faith, which outlines the major beliefs of this particular denomination, which is part of the *Reformed* tradition.⁴

³ Wikipedia.

⁴ Wikipedia

Baptist Theology

Baptist theology, although somewhat uniform, may be examined through the Southern Baptist Convention's views, or the Scandinavian Baptist and Missionary Baptist persuasions, each of which differs somewhat on the concept of hereditary sin, total depravity, and baptism.

Methodist Theology

Methodist theology is defined as a *Protestant movement* primarily by the *Wesleyan Articles of Religion*, in *distinction from the Lutheran Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England*. The Methodist church is *not defined by the Westminster Confession of Faith*, the primary confession of the Church of England and Church of Scotland.

The Methodist Church was originally founded by **John and Charles Wesley** in the 18th century as a *reformation movement within the Church of England*. The Church emphasizes **personal holiness, social justice, and grace through faith in Jesus**. They believe in **free will** and **prevenient grace**—the idea that *God's grace enables humans to choose salvation by their own intellect* and not through the predetermined decision of God as in Luther and Calvin.

The Method Church uses the *Articles of Religion* and *Wesley's sermons* as *doctrinal standards*, not the Westminster Confession.

The *Articles of Religion* may be *revised* from time to time, and *by regional conferences*. Local conferences vote on the amendments which are then passed on to regional and national conferences for approval or rejection by vote.

Thus, although Methodists claim Scripture as the foundation of their religion, the religion is primarily defined by the current 25 Articles of Religion of the Methodist church.

Like other religions there are related but different denominations within the Methodist Church,

Mormon, Latter Day Saints Religion

Mormonism, or the Church of Latter-day Saints, was founded ca. 1820 - 1830 by Joseph Smith in the regions of New York, Pennsylvania, Kentucky etc. Due to local opposition Smith was forced to move his church center to several States, ending up in the Utah Territory in 1848. It is not possible to fix any one state or city for the founding of the Latter-day movement for Smith was constantly on the move, for one "nefarious" reason, or another. Biographies of Smith's life and career reveal that Smith had an aggressive demeanor and behavior that repeatedly initiated local neighborhood opposition, often legal opposition.

Fawn M. Brodie, former professor of History at UCLA, and a descendant of a prominent Mormon family, who after considerable graduate research at the University of Chicago left the Mormon faith, publishing one of the best biographies of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History*.

The Mormon Church settled in Salt Lake City, UTAH, where they built an impressive church Temple center, and global membership. A strict family and religious code for life, and faithfulness to Joseph Smith and his doctrines, are the center of Mormon faith.

Major sacred literature for the Mormon church are the *Book of Mormon* containing Joseph's translation of a secret set of gold plates, and the *Pearl of Great Price*. These books Mormon Sacred literature are the heart of Mormon doctrine, constantly updated by the Twelve Apostles of the church in Salt Lake City Temple. In recent years the Mormon church has adopted the Christian New Testament as secondary literature, but not on the same level as their prime sacred literature.

Mormon theology is shaped and driven by the constant interpretation and enforcement of the *Book of Mormon* and the *Pearl of Great Price*.

Islamic Theology

Islamic theology is predicated by the teachings of **Allah** as revealed to **Mohamad**, the great prophet, and encoded in their sacred literature, the **Quran**.

Islamic life is directed by several *acts of worship*, prayer, submission, *annual pilgrimages*, to Mecca, and reverence of Muhammad and the Quran.

Islam was founded in the 7th century CE by an Arabian Prophet, Muhammad in Mecca, Arabia, c.a. 570 – 632 CE.

Followers of Islam are called *Muslims*,

Mecca,^[a] officially **Makkah al-Mukarramah**, is the holiest city in Islam. It is located in the western Saudi Arabia and is the capital of Mecca Province.^[4] Mecca is considered the birthplace of Islam, and is the birthplace of the Islamic prophet **Muhammad**.

It is 70 km (43 mi) inland from Jeddah on the Red Sea, in a narrow valley 277 m (909 ft) above sea level. Its metropolitan population in 2022 was 2.4 million, making it the third-most populated city in Saudi Arabia after Riyadh and Jeddah. The Hira cave atop the *Jabal al-Nour*, just outside the city, is where Muslims believe the Quran was first revealed to Muhammad. Visiting Mecca for the *Hajj* is an obligation upon all able Muslims. The Great Mosque of Mecca, known as the *Masjid al-Haram*, is home to the Ka'bah, believed by Muslims to have been built by Abraham and Ishmael. It is Islam's holiest site and the direction of prayer for all Muslims worldwide.

Muhammad, as great Prophet is considered by Muslims to be the final messenger in a long line of Allah's prophets that includes Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

Islam, meaning *submission*, began ca 610 CE in Arabia as a religion opposed to Judaism and Christianity that would bind the fragmented Arab tribes together in one religion, eventually to become a "covenant Empire" eventually growing into a political religious movement under the "reign" of Muhammad.

The movement, eventually named *Islam implied submission to the will of their God, Allah*.

Mohammad's Allah originally incorporated many of the characteristics of YHWH in Judaism. The influence of Abraham, Moses, Isaac, David, and even Jesus, *the great teacher*, is openly claimed in Islam.

"Evangelism" or "mission outreach" in Islam originally was through battles against opposing groups with Mohammad and Islam conquering the tribes and national groups surrounding Arabia in the Middle-East.

Medina in Saudi Arabia became an early center or capital of the new "empire" or religion of Islam under Mohammad. The many independent nomadic tribes, the Bedouins, were brought under the control of Mohammad and the sacred writings of Islam, the Quran.

Medina is generally considered to be the "cradle of Islamic culture and civilization".

Medina is considered to be the *second-holiest of three key cities in Islamic tradition*, with Makkah (Mecca) and Jerusalem serving as the holiest and third-holiest cities respectively. Observant Muslims usually visit Muhammad's tomb in Mecca at least once in their lifetime during a pilgrimage known as *Ziyarat*, although this is not obligatory.

The *Quran*, also spelled as *Qur'an* or *Koran*, became the central religious text of Islam. It is claimed to be the written form of the oral revelations from Allah to Muhammad. The exact origins of the written form of the Quran is debated. It is organized in 114 chapters (*surah*, pl. *suwer*) which consist of individual verses (*ayah*). Besides its religious significance, it is widely regarded as the finest work in Arabic literature, and has significantly influenced the Arabic language. It is the object of a modern field of academic research known as Quranic studies.

Sacred Texts

Quran: The central religious text, revealed to Muhammad.

Hadith: Collections of sayings and actions of Muhammad, used to interpret the Quran and guide for daily life.

Core Beliefs of Islam

Oneness of God (Tawhid): There is no god but Allah.

Prophethood: Muhammad is the last prophet.

Revealed Books: Muslims believe in the *Quran*, as well as earlier scriptures like the Torah

Angels: Spiritual beings who carry out God's commands.

Day of Judgment: Everyone will be held accountable for their actions.

Divine Decree (Qadar): Everything happens according to God's will

Afterlife: Belief in resurrection, judgment, heaven (*Jannah*), and hell (*Jahannam*).

The Five Pillars of Islam

These are the foundational acts of worship:

Shahada: Declaration of faith.

Salat: Praying five times a day.

Zakat: Giving to charity.

Sawm: Fasting during Ramadan.

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once, if able.

After Muhammad's death, the religious and political rule of Islam was divided leading to *two major and opposing sects*, **Sunn Islam**, and **Shia Islam**, with several other minor religious sects developing.

Islam is one of the world's *major monotheistic religions*, followed by over 2 billion people globally. It is rooted in the monotheistic belief of **one God (Allah)**. Although Allah is the core of Islamic belief, Mohamad's person and the Quran add a dual, almost divine, dynamic to the monotheism of Islam. Denigration of Muhammad and the Quran is considered blasphemy of Allah.

The punishment of such blasphemy is death by the decree of the governing powers of the religious community.

Hindu Theology

Hinduism⁵, c.a. 8,000 BCE, is one of the oldest forms of religion among all the known religions, even dating before Abraham and Moses, ca. 2000-1700BCE.

Hinduism was originally, and still is in many respects, *a form of nature and life reverence* that found meaning in *the power and beauty of life in nature*.

Of all religions Hinduism manifest a high reverence for all forms of life.

Because of its age, over 7,000 years, and its respect for philosophical reflection, Hinduism may be difficult to assimilate for those who hold to a theistic, God oriented, view of religion

In Hinduism, the conception of god varies in its diverse religio-philosophical traditions. Hinduism comprises a *wide range of beliefs about god and divinity*, such as *henotheism*, *monotheism*, *polytheism*, *panentheism*, *pantheism*, *pandeism*, *monism*, *agnosticism*, *atheism*, and *nontheism*.

Forms of theism are found in the *Bhagavad Gita*, *sacred Hindu sacred*. Hinduism rotates around an emotional or loving devotion (*bhakti*) to a particular god such as one of the *avatars* [a manifest of deity in some form statue, idol, icon, etc.] such as Vishnu, Krishna, Shiva, and Devi known as the Bhakti movement.

Contemporary Hinduism can be categorized into four major theistic Hindu traditions:

⁵ The *Encyclopedia Britannica* has extensive information on the "theology" of Hinduism, explaining how Hinduism explains man's relationships with the universe.

Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, and Smartism. Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism worship the Hindu deities Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi as the Supreme god respectively, or consider all Hindu deities as aspects of the same, Supreme Reality, or the eternal and formless metaphysical absolute, called *Brahman* in Hinduism, this can be translated from Sanskrit terminology, as *Svayam-Bhāgavan* ("God Itself"). Other minor sects such as Ganapatya and Saura focus on the deities *Ganesha* or *Surya* as *the Supreme*.

Brahman represents the power that underlies all reality and gives reality meaning.

Atman represents the power that *underlies all life* which provides life to all entities, *vegetable, animal, and human*.

Atman is one of the *most basic concepts in Hinduism*, the universal self, identical with the eternal core of the personality that after death either transmigrates to a new life or attains release, *moksha*, from the bonds of existence. While in the early Vedas [sacred literature] it occurred mostly as a reflexive pronoun meaning "oneself," in the later Upanishads, which are speculative commentaries on the Vedas, *Atman* comes more and more to the fore as a *philosophical topic*. *Atman* is that which makes the other organs and faculties function and for which indeed they function; it also underlies all the activities of a person, as *Brahman* (the Absolute) *underlies the workings of the universe*. *Atman* is part of the *universal brahman*, with which it can commune or even fuse. So fundamental was the *Atman* deemed to be that certain circles identified it with *brahman*.

Of the various systems, *darshans*, of Hindu thought, *Vedanta*⁶ is one of six systems of Hinduism that is particularly concerned with the *Atman*.

Buddhist Theology

The Encyclopedia Britannica observes regarding Buddhism that it is a religion and philosophy that developed from the teachings of a Hindu philosopher, *Siddhartha Gautama*, who adopted the name of the Buddha, Sanskrit meaning "*the Awakened One*." *Siddhartha* was a philosopher and teacher who lived in northern India between c.a. 563 BCE.

Siddhartha according to legend, was a Hindu prince who renounced his position and wealth to seek enlightenment as a spiritual ascetic, apparently he attained his goal and in preaching his path to others, founded Buddhism in India in the 6th-5th centuries BCE. Contrary to some views he is considered an actual historical figure.

The events of his life are largely legendary. As the son of a wealthy king he had lived in a protected lifestyle of wealth and comfort. He is attributed to having seen four sights which changed his thinking and lifestyle. At some point he saw, *an old man, a sick man, a corpse*, that indicated life is passing and meaningless. His fourth sight, *a holy man*, led *Siddhartha* to his turning his back on wealth and position. Sitting in an ascetic mood under a Bodhi tree *Siddhartha* sought *enlightenment* or *awakening*. Eventually with disciples he established a way to *enlightenment* through *contemplation* of life. Buddhism in various forms spread from India to Central and Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan, Buddhism has played a central role in the spiritual, cultural, and social life of Asia, and, beginning in the 20th century, it spread to the West.

Ancient Buddhist scripture and doctrine developed in several closely related literary languages of ancient India, especially in Pali and Sanskrit. In this article Pali and Sanskrit words that have gained currency in English are treated as English words and are rendered in the form in which they appear in English-language dictionaries. Exceptions occur in special circumstances—as, for example, in the case of

⁶ *Vedanta* is one of the six orthodox traditions of Hindu philosophy and textual exegesis. The word *Vedanta* means 'conclusion of the Vedas,' and encompasses the ideas that emerged from, or aligned and reinterpreted, the speculations and enumerations contained in the Upanishads, focusing, with varying emphasis, on devotion, knowledge, and liberation. Vedanta developed into many traditions, all of which give their specific interpretations of a common group of texts translated as 'the three sources': the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. *Wikipedia*.

the Sanskrit term *dharma* (Pali: *dhamma*), which has meanings that are not usually associated with the term *dharma* as it is often used in English. Pali forms are given in the sections on the core teachings of early Buddhism that are reconstructed primarily from Pali texts and in sections that deal with Buddhist traditions in which the primary sacred language is Pali. Sanskrit forms are given in the sections that deal with Buddhist traditions whose primary sacred language is Sanskrit and in other sections that deal with traditions whose primary sacred texts were translated from Sanskrit into a Central or East Asian language such as Tibetan or Chinese.

There is no single textual collection of sacred literature for all of Buddhism. Instead, there developed three main Buddhist Canons: the *Pāli Canon* of the *Theravāda* tradition, the *Chinese Buddhist Canon* used in *East Asian Buddhist tradition*, and the *Tibetan Buddhist Canon* used in *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*.

Buddhism view of god is more philosophical than religious since most Buddhist do not believe in a *divine being* or *god*. Buddhism practices a *non-theistic religion* meaning it does not center its religion around the *worship of a supreme deity*. Buddhism recognizes the inherent divinity within all beings rather than attributing divinity to a singular god.