

Christianity and World Religions

Chapter 1 – Questions People Ask

- **Opening Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.14
- **Opening Discussion**
 - What do you know about Hinduism? Buddhism? Islam? Judaism?
 - What experiences have you had with persons of each faith? In grade school? College?
 - What courses/studies have you had in these faiths?
- **Videos on World Religions**
 - YouTube – The five major world religions (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6dCxo7t_aE)
 - YouTube – Animated map shows how religion spread around the world (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvFl6UBZLv4>)
- **Scripture**
 - [11] Matthew 2:1-2, 9b-11
- **Questions to Consider While Watching the Video**
 - Why are there so many?
 - How should Christians view other religions?
 - How is God at work in other religions?
- **Video (15:14)**
 - What were Hamilton's responses to the above questions?
 - Other themes from the video
 - We live in a diverse society – everyone's not like us
 - Do you find yourself wishing they were sometimes?
 - Having different religions has resulted in conflict. Anything questioning our faith is a threat. Peace is achieved through mutual understanding.
 - How are we succeeding here?
 - How are we failing?
 - Studying world religions can be uncomfortable since it raises questions about our own faith. However, it can also be seen as an opportunity to strengthen our faith.
 - Where do you stand here?
 - What do you think about the three Christian perspectives Hamilton portrays? Where have you seen each?
 - Pluralist
 - Exclusivist
 - Inclusivist
 - "You hunger for bread because there is a thing called bread." – C.S. Lewis
 - Do you think God is reaching out to others through their own religions, in the same way as he did with the Magi?

- **Discussion**

- What questions would you like to pose to others of different faiths?
- As members of these others faiths grow proportionally in the U.S., how will this affect our culture?
- How would you respond to a Christian friend voicing concerns over the growth of other faiths in the U.S.?
- What are some of the major areas of misunderstanding that affect our relationships with persons of other faiths?
- How does the *manner* in which we state our religious views make a difference?

- **More from the Book**

- [12] “We did not necessarily choose Christianity; it chose us.”
 - Do you agree?
- [15] Multiplicity of religions can suggest either God being a creation of humans, or different expressions of a natural yearning for a God who does exist.
 - How do you react?
- [17] *Theology = “faith seeking understanding”*
- God chooses to allow us to grow in our faith and understanding, without revealing all to us up front, but periodically providing hints along the way (Abraham, Moses, Jesus).
 - How does this sit with you?
- What are your reactions to the statistics on pp. 20-21?
- [30] What is the fate of those who earnestly pursue God through other religions?
 - John 14:6 – “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
 - How do you interpret this?
- [33] If God is willing to accept those who did not know or understand Jesus, why do evangelism?

- **Closing Prayer**

- Leader’s Guide p.21

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Italics imply important points or example answers the leader can convey

Chapter 2 - Hinduism

- **Opening Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.27
- **Opening Discussion**
 - Did you learn anything new about Hinduism in the book this week?
 - Do you have any Hindu friends?
 - How would you characterize them?
- **Video (16:54)**
 - What's your reaction to Hinduism being the "oldest" religion?
 - What is your impression of the Aryans?
 - What do the Hindu writings have in common with our scripture?
 - *Poetry – Psalms*
 - *Central – all homes had them*
 - *Vedas – oldest Hindu scriptures written at the time of King David*
 - *Upanishads – inspired writings/reflections of sages on Vedas with which you may agree/disagree*
 - How do Hindu writings differ from our scripture?
 - *"One True God" – Brahman – manifested in a variety of ways (stories/myths give insight into the nature of God)*
 - *Idols function the same way icons do in Orthodox Christianity*
 - The Human Condition
 - "We have the divine spirit in us"
 - How is this like the Holy Spirit in us? How is it different?
 - Salvation comes through deeds (dharma – duty; karma - deeds)
 - How is this the same/different? (*think of the letters of James vs. Paul*)
 - Are there aspects of karma and dharma that ring true for you?
 - What is your reaction to the concept of reincarnation?
 - How close/different is our understanding of the afterlife from Hinduism (uniting souls with God)?
 - Differences
 - God
 - *In everything vs. distinct from Creation*
 - *Soul (divine soul vs. distinct from God)*
 - *No personal connection (except for spiritual giants) to God vs. personal relationship with God*
 - Human Condition
 - *Soul is perfect – the problem is ignorance vs. sinful nature – the answer is not knowledge; you need a Savior/grace (Jesus is the good karma)*
 - How does the concept of ignorance vs. sin sit with you?
 - After Death
 - *Reincarnation vs. One Chance*
 - How is nirvana similar to heaven? How is it different?
 - Are you "sad for our friends"?
- **Ephesians 2:1-10**

- Why did Hamilton choose this scripture?
- **More from the Book**
 - Any reflections/insights you'd like to point out?
 - [46] Story about 28-year-old son who was killed
 - What's your reaction to Hamilton's observation?
- **Closing Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.34

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Chapter 3 – Buddhism

- **Opening Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.40
- **Opening Discussion**
 - Did you learn anything new about Buddhism in the book this week?
 - Do you have any Buddhist friends? How would you characterize them?
- **Video (18:13)**
 - When do you suffer from angst?
 - Do you see similarities between with Siddhartha and anyone in our Bible? *Moses?*
 - Can you compare Siddhartha to any modern-day figures? *Monks?*
 - How would you describe non-theism?
 - How is it different from agnosticism?
 - Do you think the belief in a deity is a prerequisite for a religion?
 - 4 Noble Truths - Compare each with Christian truths...
 - Life is characterized by suffering
 - Suffering is caused by our attachments to impermanent things
 - To what are you attached that causes suffering?
 - We can overcome attachments
 - [56-57] Eightfold path to overcome suffering
 - Which of these are in common with Christianity?
 - What are your thoughts about "enlightenment"?
 - What are your thoughts about "nirvana"?
 - Differences with Christianity: God; human suffering; life after death
 - To what should you be attached?
 - To what should you be detached?
 - How do you react to Hamilton's example with the candle?
- **Romans 8:18,28; Philippians 4:6-7**
 - Why did Hamilton choose these scripture passages?
- **More from the Book**
 - Buddhism is a broad religion that takes many forms and variations.
 - What forms and variations does Christianity take?
 - Any additional reflections/insights you'd like to point out?
- **Closing Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.46

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Chapter 4 – Islam

- **Opening Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.51
- **Opening Discussion**
 - What do you think of when I say Islam?
 - What do you know about the religion of Islam?
 - Do you have any Muslim friends? How would you characterize them?
 - What do you think it's like to be a Muslim living in modern-day America?
- **Genesis 21:9-20**
 - *Muslims believe Abraham was told to sacrifice Ishmael, rather than Isaac, and that scribes corrupted the account in the OT*
- **Video (17:42)**
 - Islam is the most recent of the religions we're studying.
 - Is this significant to you?
 - We're in a "clash of cultures."
 - How would you characterize this clash?
 - Have you ever attended an Islamic worship service? What was it like?
 - Story of Muhammed
 - Does Mohammed's story remind you of any other historical figure? *Buddha? Moses (God spoke directly to him)?*
 - Do you view Allah as the same as the God we worship?
 - How does the concept of a theocracy (Islamic State) sit with you?
 - What is your reaction to Mohammed's taking up arms against Mecca and others?
 - How do you reconcile this with your reaction to Joshua and David's military campaigns?
 - *Islam = "submission or surrender to Allah"*
 - Quran
 - What is your reaction to the Quran being the dictated words of God?
 - How would a Muslim compare the Quran to the Bible? [e.g., "the Word became flesh and lived among us"]
 - Five Pillars (How do each compare to Christian practices? What can we learn from them?)
 - One God and his prophets; judgment
 - Prayer (5x/day)
 - Fasting
 - Charity
 - Pilgrimage to Mecca
 - How does God speak to humans?
 - How important is the key distinction Hamilton points out (Jesus as the Son of God vs. Jesus as a prophet)?
 - What is at the heart of the conflict/mistrust between Muslims and Christians?
 - How can we combat this?
 - How are we reaching out with love to our Muslim neighbors?
 - How are we reaching out with something else?

- **More from the Book**
 - What new insights did you gain from the book?
- **Closing Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.59

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Chapter 5 – Judaism

- **Opening Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.65
- **Opening Discussion**
 - When I say "God's people," who do you think of?
 - When I say "God's chosen people," who do you think of?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how familiar are you with... Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism?
 - What Jewish stereotypes exist?
 - In what ways have Hebrews been persecuted throughout history?
 - Egypt, Romans, Inquisition, Holocaust, Today?
- **Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5-6**
- **Video (17:34)**
 - Have Abraham's descendants become as numerous as the stars?
 - Do you see Christians as a covenant making and breaking society in the same way as Jews in the Torah?
 - *3 Branches of Judaism*
 - *Orthodox – God's religion; Torah/Talmud given by God*
 - *Conservative (positive/historical Judaism) – Torah is divinely given, but not Talmud*
 - *Reformed – no personal messiah; no resurrection; immortal soul*
 - In what ways is living a life by deeds appealing? In what ways is it not?
 - If the essence of Judaism is the Shema ("Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."), what is the essence of Christianity?
 - Interesting perspective – "The Way" was a sect of Judaism rather than a different religion
 - Do you feel that Christians and Jews have more in common than any other two of the major religions?
 - In what ways do you think the NT *replaces* the OT, and in what ways does it *augment* the OT?
 - Do you think of the Jews as being responsible for Jesus' crucifixion?
 - How can we better interact with our Jewish brothers and sisters?
- **More from the Book**
 - Why was it important that Jesus be born into a Jewish family? What would have been different if he wasn't?
 - What new insights did you gain from the book?
- **Closing Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.73

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Chapter 6 – Christianity

- **Opening Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.77
 - **Opening Discussion**
 - As a result of this study, how has your perspective changed on any/all of the other major world religions?
 - What Bible verses do you feel contain the essence of Christianity?
 - **John 3:16; Matthew 25:31-36; Luke 10:25-28; Romans 8:38-39; John 1:12; Philippians 2:5-11; John 14:6**
 - Which of these best reflects the essence of Christianity?
 - **Video (17:33)**
 - What is your response to the three "problems of religions"?...
 - If there is only one God, why are there so many religions?
 - How can someone who has never heard about God be condemned to hell?
 - How can I choose among religions without studying them all thoroughly?
 - Are there any other "problems of religions" that you see?
 - Who are the Christians that you've known (or read about) that would keep you from being a Christian?
 - If you had not been born into a Christian family, would you be a Christian or would you have chosen another faith?
 - *Essential Gospel*
 - *God – creator; God's essential nature is love*
 - *Humanity – creation; in God's image; good but sinful*
 - *Salvation – God's plan; Son in flesh; gift without price to turn their hearts;*
Buddhism/Hinduism/Islam/Judaism: try hard
 - Why Hamilton is a Christian...
 - Eyewitnesses
 - Christian Ethic
 - Picture of God
 - Redemption of the cross
 - Hope of life after death
 - Personal experience of Christ
 - Why are you a Christian? Each of the above reasons? Others?
 - Have you experienced a hesitancy to accept God's gift, either by yourself or by others?
 - **More from the Book**
 - In your opinion, what ultimately will happen to those who reject God's gift through Christ?
 - What commonality have you seen among the religions we've studied?
 - **Closing Prayer**
 - Leader's Guide p.85
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