

Do all roads lead to God?

<b>Religion or Cult</b>	<b>FOUNDER (Date/Place)</b>	<b>Key Writings</b>	<b>God</b>	<b>Jesus Christ</b>	<b>Holy Spirit</b>	<b>How to be saved</b>	<b>After death</b>	<b>Other beliefs/ practices</b>
<b>CHRISTIANITY</b>	<i>Jesus Christ. 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, Israel. However, the foundation of Christianity was laid at the creation of the world.</i>	<i>The Bible – Old &amp; New Testaments</i>	<i>God the Father is the All-Supreme Being and our Creator. He is not created but has always existed. He is personal, loving and perfect. God is one in essence, but exists eternally in three distinct persons – Father, Son &amp; Holy Spirit.</i>	<i>Jesus is also eternal and is the second person of the three-in-one God, the 'Trinity'. Born to a virgin, He lived a perfect life and died to take God's punishment for every human being's 'sin' (wrongdoing) on Himself. He now intercedes for us in heaven. He will come again as King, to end world history and begin a new Creation.</i>	<i>The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. The Bible clearly shows him to be both a person and God. He is described as the communicator between the Father and the Son and humanity.</i>	<i>No man or woman can be saved by good works or achievements. The only possible way of salvation is for a person to realise that he/ she like everyone, has fallen short of God's standard (sinned). Then that person must recognise that Jesus Christ died to bring them God's forgiveness, and freedom from sin's power.</i>	<i>Every person's spirit or personality survives death. If we accept the free gift of salvation that Jesus Christ offers we will live with Him forever. If we reject Him, we will spend eternity away from Him in a place the Bible calls 'hell'.</i>	<i>Christians should meet together to help each other grow in the Christian life, and should serve Christ through serving others.</i>
<b>JUDAISM</b>	<i>The God of the Jews, through the Creation, Patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, Kings, Prophets and Rabbis who continue the oral tradition.</i>	<i>The Tanakh (Old Testament), especially the Torah (1<sup>st</sup> 5 books of the OT); Mishnah (200AD); Talmud (5<sup>th</sup> C); writings of Rabbi Rashi (12<sup>th</sup> C) and Maimonides (13<sup>th</sup> C)</i>	<i>Judaism has no official theology, but the Articles of Faith of Maimonides rule out belief in the Trinity. Orthodox Judaism believes God is personal, all-powerful, eternal and compassionate. Reform and Liberal Jews are more humanist and have various definitions of God.</i>	<i>Most Jewish people do not accept Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) sent by God, because they believe Messiah will bring peace on earth, rebuild the Temple, and regather the exiles. Jesus is seen variously as great teacher, false prophet or false Messiah, but increasingly he is studied with interest as one element of the Judaism of his day.</i>	<i>Most Jews acknowledge that the Holy Spirit exists, and see the gift of the Spirit as deserved by only the very pious, but Judaism is not clear on the Spirit's role or nature. In Jewish mysticism the Spirit is the feminine part of God.</i>	<i>When the Temple was destroyed (70 AD) Judaism developed more as a religion of the Synagogue, without the need for sacrifices until the Temple is rebuilt. Until then prayer, repentance, obedience to Jewish religious law and good works are required. Others believe salvation is the improvement of society. Many Jews are not committed to Judaism at all.</i>	<i>The soul is immortal and there will be a resurrection and a judgement. However, Judaism differs on what happens after this. There is no consensus in what heaven is like and whether there is a hell, but most believe that the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come.</i>	<i>The keeping of the Law (Torah) and the celebrating of the various biblical festivals and added traditions. Circumcision and Bar Mitzvah (coming of age).</i>

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<b>ISLAM</b>	40 year old Mohammed, with prophetic visions of the angel Gabriel around 610AD on Mount Hira just outside Mecca.	<i>Qur'an (Koran)</i>	<i>There is only one God and that is Allah. This makes Muslims 'monotheists' – believing in one God (like Christians and Jews) but not a Trinity. Allah is the supreme God but not necessarily a loving and merciful God</i>	<i>Muslims hold Jesus in high regard but he is not God, only a prophet. Most regard Mohammed as a greater prophet than Jesus even though the Qur'an mentions that Jesus is the only prophet not to have sinned. The Qur'an also gives Jesus the title of Messiah – the Anointed One.</i>	<i>The Qur'an talks of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, just like the Bible. However, to Muslims he would not be the third person of the Trinity but a divine instrument used by Allah to fulfil his purposes.</i>	<i>The Koran teaches that salvation can only be achieved by striving and man's own effort. The four main ways to achieve salvation are recorded as: predestination by Allah, martyrdom, pilgrimage to Mecca, animal sacrifice, and by good works.</i>	<i>If they're good enough, Muslims believe that they go to heaven, which to them means a physical resurrection and the heavenly delights will also be physical (Garden of Delights). If not good enough, they will be in hell which brings literal physical punishment with flames, literal physical torment, swooning, death, revival and then more punishment.</i>	<i>Islam's 'Five Pillars' – daily recitation of the shahadah; prayers five times daily; 'alms' giving; fasting during Ramadan; pilgrimage to Mecca.</i>
<b>BUDDHISM</b>	Gautama, who was born in Lumbini, a village on north-east India; lived from 563-483 BC	<i>In Theravada Buddhism there are three writings known as Tripitaka – the gathering of oral traditions of more than three centuries. Mahayana Buddhism contains over 5000 holy writings.</i>	<i>Buddhism does not have a belief in a personal Almighty God who is to be served, worshipped and obeyed. They do not believe in God at all, whether in one or a Trinity.</i>	<i>Buddhism does not have a belief in a divine messenger and sees no need for a personal saviour. At best Buddhism may accept Jesus as a literal man who did good.</i>	<i>Little if anything is said about the Holy Spirit and certainly there is no belief in him as the third person of the Trinity. In Buddhism there are no divine revelations.</i>	<i>Salvation is viewed as an escape from the continual cycle of rebirth (reincarnation). To get to this point, there has to be the accomplishment of so many good works that the karma (the law that adds up the good and bad things we do in this life) allows them to be released from this life.</i>	<i>The dead are reborn according to their karma. They are reborn in one of the several realms of existence which they must progress through. Only when they reach Nirvana is this cycle ended.</i>	<i>The need to keep moral laws and ceremonial observances.</i>

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<b>HINDUISM</b>	No one person founded Hinduism but there are three main religious influences: Indo-European, Iranian and Indian, dating back to around 1500 BC.	The Mahabharata that contains the Bhagavad-Gita, Rigvada, Upanishads, Puranas and many other texts.	Hindus believe both in one God and many gods expressing this one Deity. The Trimurti (three gods in one image) consists of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer. The life force resides in everything that exists.	Jesus would only be recognised as a 'holy man' along with many others who brought similar or corresponding messages. Jesus is not unique and not the expression of the Supreme living God in human form.	Little if anything is said about the Holy Spirit and certainly there is no belief in him as God.	The Hindu, like the Buddhist, is seeking release from the continual cycle of rebirth. This is achieved by following a sacred code of conduct and ritual prayers. Three main paths of devotion, action and knowledge.	At death only the body dies but the spirit (or soul) lives on and comes again in many different bodies until the final liberation from the rebirth cycle is achieved.	Yoga and meditation are central aspects of belief and practice for many Hindus.
<b>SIKHISM</b>	Originated in the area of Pakistan and north-west India. A number of disciples gathered around Guru Nanak (1469-1539) to seek God's presence.	The sacred scriptures are said to be a guru, the Guru Granth Sahib.	God is one, the ultimate and eternal Guru (Satguru) who provides enlightenment and understanding for his disciples.	Jesus is acknowledged as a Sikh 'holy man' and prophet. Jesus is not God, because God has not appeared to man or been born on the earth. Nanak is the focus for Sikh devotes, not Jesus.	There is no concept of the Holy Spirit in the Sikh religion. Meditation and worship are used to dwell on the name of God.	Salvation is a love-union with God, that results from a devotional relationship of worship between the disciple and God. Until that union (sahaj) takes place, individuals must live many times.	Basically a form of reincarnation until sahaj takes place. The process of transmigration only ends when a person finds the true Guru.	Sikh men are distinguished by the 5 ks: 1. kesh, or uncut hair; 2. kangha, or comb used to keep hair clean; 3. kara, or metal bangle; 4. kaccha, or special knee-length underwear & 5. kirpan, or dagger. Guru Nanak had 9 successors who shared the same truth and a distinctive insight into God, and even held a basic common identity.

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<b>HARE KRISHNA</b>	A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami founded the movement in New York in 1966, but it can trace its beginnings back to ancient Hinduism.	The 18 chapters of the Bhagavad-Gita from the Mahabharata and the Vedic scriptures – the spiritual literature of the ancient Indian culture.	Krishna is worshipped as the Supreme God among many gods of Hinduism. He is not however viewed as a personal, loving God.	Jesus Christ would only be recognised as a directly empowered representative of Krishna who brought the message of the good way of life to the people of his generation.	As with Hinduism from which it comes, little if anything is said about the Holy Spirit and certainly there is no belief in him as God.	Salvation is seen as being released from the reincarnation cycle which is achieved by coming to Krishna consciousness. In order to come to Krishna consciousness, the follower must seriously cultivate knowledge by carefully reading Srila Prabhupada's books asking questions of devotees who can give enlightening answers.	Unless one fully Krishna conscious, he or she has to accept a body in the next life according to his or her particular state of consciousness. After achieving full Krishna consciousness, the next time that person gives up their body in death they do not accept another material body but return home, back to Krishna.	It is vital to be a vegetarian and repeat a mantra many times a day.
<b>NEW AGE BELIEFS</b>	No single founder. The beliefs are not new but go back to the old ways of paganism and eastern mysticism.	As New Age is an 'umbrella' term there are many different writings and Scriptures used, mostly with Eastern influence.	The God of the New Age is an impersonal force believed to be found in everything that exists. There is no distinction made between the Creator and his creation.	Jesus would be recognised as one of the religious leaders who manifested the 'Christ spirit' at different times in history. He would not be seen as God and he would not be regarded as unique. One New Ager said that Jesus was the most advanced human that ever walked the earth.	The Holy Spirit would be relegated to some sort of power extension from the 'God' that they believe in. Viewed as an energy and not as a person.	Salvation is seen as release from earthly life into some form of eternal reward. New Agers have different beliefs about how this happens. The basic principle is the law of karma (good deeds weighed against bad deeds) that determines reincarnation in the next physical life – only when the karma balances can there be release from the cycle of reincarnation.	Death simply brings another lifetime until the previously mentioned release is achieved and then the individual will be released from further reincarnation and move on to their reward.	Looking for the dawning of the Age of Aquarius and the new earth.

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<b>WICCA/ PAGANISM</b>	No one founder, but many traditions over the years contributed, including ancient Saxon, Greek, Roman, Celtic and Norse.	As there are many different traditions that come under this heading there are also many different writings that are accepted.	It is accepted that 'God' or 'the Divinity' could be either female or male, with many in these traditions favouring the female. There may be many different expressions of goddesses or gods including Nature and the Earth, and all life is a manifestation of Divinity.	Some would dismiss any belief in Jesus Christ whereas others would accept him as some kind of magician, or maybe as a man with some very interesting ideas. As they do not accept the loving personal God of the Bible, Jesus is obviously not the Son of God who gave his life for humankind.	There is no place for the Holy Spirit in any of this wide belief system. Some in this group however would believe in different spirits that could communicate with them and help them.	There is no salvation in the way that Christians would understand the word. Indeed there are many different beliefs about life after death within this grouping, but wherever the individual believes they are going they will get there by doing good works or progressing through forms of karma and reincarnation.	There is no such place as hell or punishment of any kind after death. Most of this group would believe that the Devil and his realm are the invention of Christians. Beliefs would vary over a wide range from annihilation to entering back into the Divinity again.	Wiccans honour nature and celebrate eight festivals, or Sabbats, that mark the year as it turns through its seasons.
<b>SPIRITUALISM</b>	Thought to have been revived by the Fox Sisters in 1848 but its roots can be traced back much further.	There are many different occultic writings, for instance those by White Eagle. Some 'Christian' spiritualists would even use the Bible.	God is an impersonal divine power and everything is within this power. This means that the same power can be either destructive or constructive, light or dark, etc. The same force can thus be used for good or for evil.	Jesus Christ is just one of the many prophets and certainly not the unique expression of the living God. He was a good man and said good things that we can learn from but we need to put his words alongside all the other prophets.	The Holy Spirit is part of God's energy and force and not recognised as a person or God. Indeed some spiritualists would even say that it is the spirit of some holy person.	Salvation in spiritualism is based on the beliefs of karma and reincarnation. A person has many lives until at last they balance their karma (good deeds cancelling out bad deeds) and thus reach enlightenment and be released from this earth and body.	There is a hell in the thinking of some spiritualists, but you can progress out of there and up through the levels of reward. For most the understanding is that the afterlife is simply a fourth dimension, although some believe in a sort of heavenly existence.	Much of the time is taken up with healing and the developing of gifts of mediumship.

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<b>JEHOVAH'S WITNESS</b>	Charles Taze Russell in Pittsburgh USA in the early 1870s.	The New World Translation of the Bible and anything published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.	God the Father alone is God. 'Jehovah' is a poor anglicised version of God's name YHWH (for Hebrew consonants pronounced 'Yahweh'), recorded many times in the Old Testament. Witnesses believe all true Christians should call God by this name.	Jesus is the first created being of Jehovah, also called Michael the Archangel in the Bible. Jehovah created Jesus then used Jesus to create all other things. Jesus is not God but a lesser god. Although Jesus is called 'mighty God' in Scripture, he is never called Almighty God and so he must be lesser than Jehovah.	The Holy Spirit is only an active force, likened to electricity. He is therefore not even a person and certainly cannot be God.	A two-tier salvation. Only 144, 000 will rule with Jesus in heaven. The 'great crowd...before God's throne and the Lamb' that the Bible mentions will not go to heaven, but will live in paradise on earth after the Battle of Armageddon. Becoming a member of the Watchtower Society (the 'Organisation') is the key to salvation, not a personal relationship with Jesus.	At death a person goes out of existence and only remains a memory in the mind of God. After Armageddon, all that are worthy will be resurrected back to the earth – the way the Society describes it actually sounds more like recreation. These people will be given a second chance of salvation during Christ's 1000-year reign.	Jesus returned invisibly in 1914. God bans blood transfusions. Celebrating Christmas, Easter and birthdays is pagan.
<b>MORMONS</b>	Joseph Smith received the first vision in 1820 in the north of New York State, USA.	Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants; Pearl of Great Price and King James Version Bible.	God himself was once a man just as we are but is now exalted and sits enthroned in the heavens. The actual belief is that he lives near a planet called Kolob with all his goddess wives.	Jesus' title Son of God may be accepted but he is seen as just a man who was born like any other man. Other teachings in Mormon history are that he was married, had children and that his death was not sufficient to bring forgiveness for all sins.	The Holy Spirit is called the Personage of Spirit, a Spirit Person, a Spirit Man, a Spirit Entity. He can be in only one place at one time and cannot transform himself into any other form or image.	There are different levels of salvation, but 'full salvation is for those in the highest of the three heavens that have fulfilled every law and ordinance of Mormonism, including not drinking tea, coffee or caffeine drinks. Salvation is said to be by God's grace, but this only takes effect when you have done everything you need to do (good works).	There are three heavens or kingdoms in Mormonism. For men that reach the highest level there is the opportunity to go on to be gods and live on their own planet with their goddess wives. The second level is lesser general salvation for all 'good people'. The third level is for the wicked and degraded.	Sacred temple ceremonies with special handshakes and secret passwords. Importance of the family is often their opening message.

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<b>SCIENTOLOGY (&amp; Dianetics)</b>	<i>L Ron Hubbard in 1951. The first Church of Scientology was founded in Los Angeles 1954.</i>	<i>'Dianetics, The Modern Science of Mental Health', along with all other works by Hubbard.</i>	<i>Scientology has no dogma concerning God and allows each member to come to his or her own conclusion as to the nature of God or a Supreme Being.</i>	<i>Jesus Christ would be respected by most as a special man with good teachings but he would still need Scientology. According to Hubbard, Jesus did not reach the highest level of Scientology.</i>	<i>Little if anything is taught about God's Holy Spirit. However, Scientology does teach that humans each have an alien spirit called a 'thetan' which makes us an immortal spirit being.</i>	<i>When in this life or a previous life an individual has an emotional experience an 'engram' is received and they are said to be in a 'preclear' state. Through purchasing counselling courses from Scientologists and undertaking their auditing, these engrams can be removed and a clear state is reached. This state brings release from the cycle of rebirth.</i>	<i>Heaven and hell do not exist in the Christian sense. There are many rebirths until Scientology has brought the person to the ultimate state of 'clear' and they are thus freed from rebirth and can move to a state of 'heaven' when they next die.</i>	<i>'Narcono' – drug rehabilitation scheme; 'Criminon'- criminal rehabilitation. Free personality tests offered by 'Hubbard Dianetics Centres' to attract interest.</i>
<b>CHRISTIAN SCIENCE</b>	<i>Mary Baker Eddy after a claimed miraculous healing in 1866. First Church was in Boston Massachusetts in 1879.</i>	<i>'Science and Health – with Key to the Scriptures' and all other writings by Eddy.</i>	<i>The God of Christian Science is a pantheistic God – an all-embracing force or principle that lives in everything.</i>	<i>Jesus was a man who more than all men presented the Christ idea to the world. This is the same as the New Age principle of the cosmic Christ. Eddy declared clearly that Jesus was not God but the Son of God. She also taught that Jesus did not actually die.</i>	<i>Jesus proved that Christ is the 'Divine Idea' of God. This 'Divine Idea' is the Holy Spirit will lead into all truth. The Holy Spirit is only a power or an inanimate principle and not God.</i>	<i>When a person is set free from the illusion of believing in this unreal world of matter and sinfulness he or she is saved. This 'mind over matter' state is reached by studying and then accepting and believing what Eddy wrote.</i>	<i>Neither heaven nor hell are taught as actual places. Hell is a state of mind and once released from the mind it no longer exists. Heaven is the place of reality in another dimension where the acceptance of the Divine Principle of Christian Science leads.</i>	<i>The central theme is that of healing. Sin, sickness and death are seen as unrealities.</i>

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<b>CHRISTADELPHIANS</b>	<i>Dr John Thomas first published his teachings in England in 1848, but had begun them in the USA magazine in 1844.</i>	<i>King James Bible; 'Elpis Israel'; Christendom Astray' and other writings by Robert Roberts and John Thomas.</i>	<i>Most Christadelphians today believe that there is one true God the Father who is Creator of all things. He dwells in unapproachable light in the heavens but his spirit fills all space.</i>	<i>The Jesus of the Christadelphians had no pre-existence; he was simply the 'Word' which in their understanding means that he did not exist until he became a man. He is certainly not God and he did not even have the title of 'Christ' until his baptism.</i>	<i>Christadelphians teach that the Holy Spirit is neither a person nor God. The Spirit is believed to be an unseen power that extends from God, despite the Bible using personal pronouns 'he' and 'his' in reference to the Holy Spirit.</i>	<i>Traditional Christadelphians do not believe that Christ's death is sufficient to save us from the penalty for sins and so works are needed in addition. Today many would say that we are saved by grace, but when the belief is investigated we find that it means we can only keep salvation by fulfilling the Biblical Law.</i>	<i>Christadelphians do not believe that we will go to heaven we die but that we will live for all eternity on earth. There is no such place as hell and so those that do not make it to salvation on earth will simply be annihilated.</i>	<i>Great emphasis is placed upon Israel in their teaching and Bible Exhibitions are regularly held.</i>