

World Religion Comparison

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Introduction

The discussion of the various religions is emotive and to some extent on going and ongoing. While some claim that a comparative study of religion is a fruitless and useless endeavor, others claim that it has immense benefits for everyone. In between is an indifferent category. What would one conclude about this matter? Is it worth while a study or not? If it is, what are the tangible benefits? If it is not, why not? Is it not possible that despite our claims, we are all on the right path towards one end, after all, all religions are pathways towards one end? At best, all religions are all wrong or mere aspects of one big truth. One story attempts to tell it all: that religions are like a huge elephant which different people touch (i.e. the different parts) in a dark room. The part they touch is what they describe as the ultimate reality when in fact it is but a small part of the whole. But is this description a reflection of the truth? Is syncretism and ecumenism the way to go in a pluralistic society? These and other pertinent questions lead us to some interesting conclusions as shall be noted in this short dossier.

The comparative study of religions certainly has its pundits quite alright. Those opposing this study claim that this undertaking will not help matters, if anything contributes to fueling of troubles in the world based on ethnic and religious grounds. They claim that if one knows so much about another religion, they will know the weak and strong points of each as well as mastering where to strike in the event of a problem. Ignorance is thus blissful in some sense, so they argue. Interestingly, there is another group (within the bracket that opposes a comparative study) arguing that a study of other religions is first of all wasteful an undertaking, which may lead to serious compromises in the long run. This group further argues that knowing too much would make one to needlessly be too careful to the extent that one can scarcely assert anything for fear of injuring another. Differences cannot be avoided and each group must state what they know and go by it, regardless of the consequences. This collective group claims that a comparative study is both dangerous and unwise, not worth pursuing.

However, there is a second group that asserts the opposite. They state that although neutrality cannot be achieved during this study, it is none the less essential to appreciate what is on the religious menu at any one given time. If one is aware, then they will know what to do and how best to navigate their way through difficult and deadly terrain. To know something about a potential

competitor or foe will enable one to devise the best fitting strategies for engagement in at least two senses. First, this knowledge will act as a bridge for dialogue and amicable resolving of issues between opposing views. The second is that this knowledge will allow the parties identify the points of commonality to the extent that they will know what to do, say or act and when. In a pluralistic society and content, it is essential to have a broad view of things, at least a working knowledge then you can safely and efficiently navigate your way around issues. Ignorance can be deadly and in some instances costly mistakes are committed which may affect a whole community or even nation. For instance, if one kills an animal without due care in a predominantly Muslim context, they may generate a whole tornado of reactions. But if one knew about the *Halaal* teaching, though they do not subscribe to any of its tenets, will be able to do something that is less offensive such as hire some Muslim to slaughter the animal or simply observe the rules and thus have peace as well as longevity in the area, to do more meaningful work. The same holds in a predominantly Hindu context. The knowledge of the *Ahimsa* doctrine informs appropriate conduct.

This paper therefore leans towards the second position because it takes a comparative study of several major religions of the world as an aid to engagement. We pick on a select few among a galaxy of religions. The reason for picking on a select few is in the interest of space and relevance. For our study, we shall focus on Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism and of the Abrahamic-Judeo religions such as Islam, Judaism and Christianity. For ease in grasping, we shall focus on one given religion at a time before concluding with a table summarizing everything. This is not an exhaustive treatment of the subject but merely meant to introduce the subject. We commence therefore with Hinduism.

Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions, having developed over time. Despite its ancient history, it is not as widespread as some later religions like Christianity, partly due to its intrinsic nature and localized context. Hinduism is largely found in the Indian peninsula but it must be appreciated that it is probably the widest scope religion whose tenets have been either absorbed, indigenously internally generated, adopted or derived from by other faiths. By this we mean that some tenets such as *Yoga* and to some extent cosmology have been adopted and even practiced by some parts of other faiths. Additionally, Hinduism has now been introduced into the western world with amazing success, some of its core beliefs being widely accepted and practiced by people from contexts outside the Indian peninsula. But what are the core beliefs of Hinduism, its nature and end of the religion? In what follows, we give a brief over view of what makes up this religion:

From the outset, it is important to state that Hinduism is not a unitary or monolithic religion but is an henotheistic syncretic religion with many deities deriving their being from what is known as an impersonal principle or force called *Brahman*. Thus, a good portion of Hinduism is pantheistic (though theistic Hindus exist too) as well as polytheistic in nature with the respective gods having different attributes, functions, potency or abilities. The ultimate reality (i.e. *Brahman*) has different traditions as to its origin including that of an egg (or primordial water etc.) which eventually exploded akin to the big bang theory. This being is impersonal in nature and thus does without emotions or feelings what so ever. Out of this *Brahman*, has emanated the respective deities which have evolved over time. Second, Hinduism is pantheistic in nature because the ultimate reality or god is in everything and everything is in this same god. Thus, in Hinduism, gods and people can mutate and become the same as the ultimate reality because they are extensions of it through *nirvana*. Third, Hinduism teaches that creation and life is in a continuous cycle. In one breathe, it may be manifested and so become visible (leading to what is viewed as created) but at another time, it may become unmanifested and thus invisible. Fourth, Hinduism teaches that for one to be saved, they need a certain kind of knowledge that is inherent in them but needs to be triggered. As the person becomes self conscious (i.e. in the *atman*) of this through meditation and *Yoga* practice, they can then transform themselves into a god eventually becoming one with the ultimate reality. In short, a person is saved by knowledge and transformation into a being same with god. Nothing of a personal savior is needed but a certain type of inner light, knowledge and practice of rites. In a sense, Hinduism is gnostic. Though different schools of thoughts exist in Hinduism, all of them are either theistic, pantheistic or dualistic, holding that the spiritual world has a direct effect on the here and now existence of the person. That is animism right there. In effect, ones' past life has a telling effect on what they eventually become in the ensuing life or what they are now is a consequence of a past life. Further, the *Karma* defines and dictates what one eventually becomes in life as well as the caste system one is born in. Thus, a well schooled Hindu should not question their fate, suffering or caste system they are born in but accept it as their portion in life. A Hindu born in humble circumstances for instances may be paying for their past bad life and needs to work hard to correct this so that when they reincarnate, then they will be in a better caste system with attendant privileges. One thing more, Hinduism has a set of sacred writings as enshrined in the *Vedas* or some such writings. The *Vedas* are basically hymns of praise to given deities or indeed describe who these beings may be including their functions. In these hymns are revealed multiple deities, *Varuna* being the oldest. *Varuna* is said to be omnipotent and omniscient as well as the possessor or owner of the earth. This deity (i.e. *Varuna*) does many other functions such as punishing offenders, "sinners" or transgressors with a view to correct. Another deity of a later generation is *Indra* followed by others. Interestingly, all these Hindu deities have their origin in the *Brahman*, the ultimate source of all things which is impersonal in nature. From *Brahman* emanates various philosophies of the *Upanishads* and *Vendata*. Each of these has a view of the world, one denying reality claiming that

all of life is a mere illusion, *maya*. That said, it would be important to state that the gods of Hinduism have been in a state of flux over the centuries. The more recent ones would include *Vishnu* with his avatars. Theistic Hinduism has its own special gods that include *Krishna* as revealed in the *Bhagavad Gita*. *Krishna* claims to be eternal, Lord of all the planets and demigods. Although *Krishna* has creative power, it is contingent on people's previous lives, their *Karma* as argued by later Hindu theologians. This aspect of Hinduism (i.e. theistic) clearly rejects the impersonal deities as taught by other pockets within the religion.

From the foregoing, we can safely conclude that Hinduism differs from other religions such as Christianity because it does not acknowledge a savior outside the person. Although the person is assumed to need forgiveness, and therefore a sinner of some sort, salvation is resident within them according to Hindu doctrine. This ties in very well with the New Age Movement (*NAM*) doctrine that has invaded the Christian Church. The secret beliefs and knowledge that someone needs to be saved is a kind of Gnostic teaching, as taught in ancient times. Hinduism believes in the caste system, gurus, karma, rituals (such as ceremonial washings in sacred rivers among others). Hindus know and practice these things to increase the probability of reaching *nirvana*. There are at least three paths to salvation in Hinduism namely through: meditation, knowledge or deeds. A person has a choice which route to pursue. Hinduism is vastly varied complex religion claiming the title of being the most tolerant. Finally, we may state that Hinduism is mystical, animistic in nature and pantheistic with an impersonal ultimate reality unlike the personal God of Christianity. A working knowledge of Hinduism will help matters in case one ventures into a predominantly Hindu context.

Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion that teaches peace with all people and creation as the ultimate goal where all suffering ceases. A Buddhist will ordinarily be a peace loving individual whose mission and aim is to find lasting peace with himself and those round about them.

Although Buddhism has its roots in the teaching of the first Buddha or teacher (i.e. *Siddharta Gautama*, lived in the 6 century BC), it has over the years evolved into two different facets but within the same fraternity. So what are the core tenets of Buddhism? Simply stated, Buddhism teaches that the world is an interconnected whole emanating from different causal happenings. In other words, things are interdependent and interconnected in such a way as to result in what we see and experience today. Buddhism denies the existence of an ultimate reality such as primordial *Brahman* (in Hinduism) or a personal God as found in Christianity, claiming that what exists just evolved from impersonal causal occurrences. Although Buddhism does not outrightly reject the existence of deities, it states that all of them have evolved out of causal actions. In other

words, a person can evolve into a divine being as well as fizzle out into “nothingness” meaning that Buddhism is pantheistic in nature. Interestingly, Buddhism rejects the idea of the self (*atman*) in preference for ‘*anatta*’. By this a human being is said to consist of five interdependent attributes (or aggregates) affecting or influencing each other. In effect, life is said to be an illusion rather than a reality. Furthermore, life is said to be suffering itself, which suffering cannot be avoided by anyone, in the quest for *nirvana*, although the question is: who suffers, because the self is said not to exist? Suffering is said to be essential to achieve liberty. That said, the individual must seek after inward peace, which peace is not found in outward things but by acquiring a particular knowledge and inner sense of peace after mastering the teachings of the respective *Buddhas*. Once achieved, a person is said to have attained the *nirvana* and thus considered as an *arhat* or the ‘*living enlightened one*’. The original *Buddha* is believed to have hailed from a wealthy family where he was sealed off from the real world until he ventured out of his quarters. He was shocked to learn that there was much suffering and turmoil in the world. Thus, he resolved to leave, abandoning all his creature comforts and live in poverty in the quest to find true peace and happiness. After many travels within his context, he eventually discovered that when one developed a particular inward disposition subscribing to a certain set of truths, then they could rise out of turmoil to reach a peaceful stage and thus become a *Buddha* themselves. The *Buddha* then transmits wisdom and peace to the outside world.

As earlier hinted at, early Buddhism was initially a single religion but with the passage of time, several successive brands of Buddhism (such as *Mahayana* Buddhism) have come with their own unique teachings, some of them even contradicting the earlier tenets set forth by *Gautama* the first Buddha. By several Buddhist brands we mean that there are several sects within the one main religion although the two major schools are the *Theravada* (more traditional and conservative) and the *Mahayana* (which is a later version of Buddhism developed in the second century by *Nagarjuna*). In addition, we also have Buddhist monks devoting themselves to meditation and prayer, forsaking all other activities, except in the case of *Mahayana* Buddhism, helping all other humans achieve *Nirvana*. In such settings, if one becomes a Buddhist monk, they separate themselves from the world to focus on their major calling. It is worth noting that there are different brands of Buddhists (i.e. *Nahayana* and *Mahayana* etc.), many of which are peace loving in the main.

What does a Buddhist aspire after? The correct thinking Buddhist aspires to reach a state of enlightenment and peace (i.e. illumination is said to be salvation in Buddhism), *nirvana* where all self is expunged and thus suffering is obliterated as the state of eternal peace is achieved, which is salvation (or liberation) in itself. The self is said to hinder the accessing of eternal bliss because the five aggregates are subject to suffering. For the Buddhist, the idea of an ultimate reality, personal God or even savior from sins does not arise, if not absurd. Thus, Buddhists focus on the ultimate relief from suffering which the five aggregates go

through when this illusionary life is concluded, akin to a candle flame. In this religion, suffering is part of the process of being and will not be avoided but viewed as a means to an end. So how exactly can a person be “saved” in Buddhism? What needs to be observed? A number of steps must be followed and observed. First, the person must accept certain ultimate truths, internalize them and practice which leads to enlightenment (among them believing that salvation resides within their power through meditation for instance) and then salvation. No savior is needed as is the case in Christianity or some other such religion.

Finally, Buddhism rejects central tenets in Hinduism or Christianity classifying their modes as inferior. Interestingly, even within Buddhism itself, some schools of thought (*Mahayana*) claim to be superior to others such as *Hinayana* because in the former brand, the person who becomes an *arhat* is said to proceed beyond just mere aiming for *Nirvana* but to become a *Bodhisattva*, able to help others achieve the same blissful status (*parinirvana* or final extinction/annihilation of personhood). As such, in *Mahayana* Buddhism, we find some of the prominent brands of Buddhists (e.g. *Dalai lama* leader of the Tibet Buddhists) at times endowed with some strange supernatural powers claiming to have the ability to save or help anyone regardless of who they may be, whether demons in Hell or not! In Buddhism, the dead are not helpless because they can still be saved by the *Mahayana* Buddhist hence the belief that all human beings shall ultimately be saved or achieve a state of *Nirvana* where *Karma* has no place let alone reincarnation which Buddhism rejects.

We may thus conclude that Buddhism has some tenets similar to Hinduism (and actually arose from Hinduism) but also significantly departs from it. We also learn that two major opposing, if not rival groups exist within this religion. The researcher needs to bear this in mind as they interact with the apparent peace seeking Buddhists. If they depart from this peaceful disposition, that is the exception not the rule in general.

Confucianism and Taoism

Confucius was a respected official in Chinese history who held high offices with royalty and public service but later became a thinker whose ethical teachings have been imbibed by many societies in south East Asia, countries like China and Japan. He is believed to have lived about the sixth century BC and has bequeathed the world with some classic ethical principles or system today held in reverence to a sacred level though it is doubtful that he himself claimed that the said principles were inspired or authoritative in and of themselves.

Although Confucius never claimed to have started a religion (as he respected the extant religion in his time, though gave them a mere ethical interpretation), his teachings have been accepted to near religious proportions because his sayings

are very relevant even today, affecting everyday public life. In summary, Confucianism is basically not a religion but a set of ethical principles that apply to life, living, interpersonal relations as relates to moral principles. This ideology (because Confucianism is difficult to classify as a religion somewhat) teaches that there exists an impersonal eternal moral principle which is eternal, omniscient, hidden by which all human beings ought to be guided. For one to attain perfection, they need to be sufficiently educated and obey/observe the moral laws derived from the universal principle. For Confucius, salvation from defect such as sin was foreign but one needed to perfect their moral character and all would be well, hence the leaning of his philosophy towards improving society. That said, Confucius thought religion teaching had value in so far as it helped people towards observing or attaining moral perfection. From the foregoing, we can conclude that Confucianism, at least in its original form did not concern itself with the afterlife but the present physical realities.

On the other hand, Taoism is a religion started by *Lao Tse* about the same time as Confucianism was started, although this took a religious tone. Basically, Taoism teaches that there is a self-existent universal being that existed before the world was and all things emanate from this immutable eternal principle. Unlike the Christian God, this principle is impersonal and yet the creator, eternal truth of the Universe. Another point worth noting is that this religion is syncretic somewhat because its development is a mixture of ancient Chinese deities and others that developed over time. Found largely in China and Japan, this religion holds sway on many lives.

Taoism focuses on the alignment of an individual to the pulse of nature rather than being a good moral citizen as found in Confucianism. It holds that human nature reflects nature and as much as possible must conform to it to be a good Taoist. Furthermore, Taoism teaches reincarnation for those who do not reach the mark until they finally do and then attain total liberation. Unlike Confucianism that does not subscribe to any form of salvation, Taoism teaches that an individual must be careful to obey and follow the dictates of nature. They must control their inner universe until it is in sync with nature, then they can be saved. One way is to perform prescribed physical and spiritual exercises while the other is a particular diet as well as some form of meditation and breathe control. In that way, the person syncs well with the rhythm of nature and so can be saved. That said, Taoism is not clear or explicit about life after death (whether it is immortal or not) as to what happens when a soul meets all the required standards, although it seems to suggest a total annihilation of the being into non-being back to the primordial state. We may thus conclude that Taoism is mystical because of the path to salvation such as meditation, breathing practices etc. One more point is about evil in Taoism. This religion does not really regard anything as essentially evil because two opposite sides are involved in everything that happens. This brings about equilibrium in nature. Besides, evil belongs to the nature of the world.

We may thus conclude that both Confucianism and Taoism have their distinctiveness having a special place among the people who imbibe them.

Dualistic Religions

But what are the dualistic religions? We do not cover them in this paper but they too have their own tenets such as having more than one eternal existing in conflict, some how with humans caught in between these scuffling deities. Examples of such religions would be *Zoroastrianism*, *Gnosticism*, *Manicheism*, *Bogomilism* and *Catharism*. All these are off shoots of some major religion but have gone at a tangent to suggest extra deities in conflict with the first known gods in other faiths.

Christianity

Having surveyed some religions above, we proceed consider the Abraham if faiths as we come to a conclusion of this brief comparative survey of religion. We focus on Christianity, with some reference to Islam and Judaism.

In Christianity, a person is said to be born sinful from birth and carries this nature on to their grave. The only difference occurs when a person is regenerated by the Holy Spirit so that they can begin to please God. Although the sinful nature is not entirely eradicated at regeneration, the person has an infusion of spiritual life which affects the way they live and do things. Prior to regeneration, they are said to be depraved and sinful to the core (i.e. total and not absolute depravity), but when they are transformed, they become alive to spiritual realities. Christianity teaches that for a person so dead in sin, there is need for a redeemer or savior in the person of Jesus Christ who pays for their sin in a vicarious atonement, in effect effecting a divine substitutionary exchange on the cross. The sinner receives an imputed righteousness while Christ takes on their sins and suffers for them. The Christian God is personal, both immanent and transcendent. While the Christian God may be similar in some senses to the Islamic deity, he is distinct in that He is personal and interacts with his creation, calling those regenerated as His children. In short, salvation in Christianity has to do with a deliverance from sin through a savior Jesus Christ because the sinner cannot save themselves. Unlike other religions like Philosophical Confucianism or Hinduism, the difference between the divine and human is clear, nor can a person ever become god, although the regenerate are said to be partakers of the divine nature. They are partakers in the sense that they become like God, not God!

It is equally important to state that the Christian God is one and yet subsisting in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Christian is therefore Trinitarian in doctrine and will view this one God from an ontological as well as economic perspective. This God has an eternal plan and reacts to sin in holiness. He is not

the author of sin or evil but allows these to take place in his created order after the fall. Though God does not entertain sin per se, he has in grace saved his people whom he foreknew 'ere time begun in Christ. This God is personal in the sense that he dwells with and interacts with His people and yet is transcendent in the sense that he dwells alone, self sufficient, eternal and infinite in nature.

In Judaism and Islam on the other hand, one has to work hard to be saved. Good works and ritual practice are said to open the door to salvation. In Islam for instance, one has to observe the five pillars to be a good Muslim or one who submits. In Judaism, there are several rituals and practices such as circumcision one has to subscribe to in order to qualify to be a Jew or one acceptable to God. Not so the Christian faith, for it is by grace through faith that one is accepted by God for salvation. Our best works cannot please God at all, for they are as filthy rags in his sight! On a positive note, all the three religions-Christianity, Islam and Judaism are monotheistic, holding on to only one God unlike what Hinduism or some other pantheistic religion purports.

What Others have Said or Commented on various Religions

Many have written on the various religions, and to different degrees. They have highlighted some salient points worth noting, and at times arriving at contradictory conclusions, depending on who is writing and from what perspective. Ernest Valea has written a very interesting document on comparative religion from a Christian perspective. In that book, he makes several land mark statements worth noting such as the elusiveness of neutrality in comparative religions study, the importance of appreciating what others hold in order to engage them better as well as the continuous rising and evolution of world religions. Another, Robert Morey has written a book, *A battle of the gods*, relating to the deities around the world and yet sets out to explain the Christian God. He explores the attributes of God in relation to other gods with a view to demonstrate that the Christian God is unique and the only true God. His book explains God from the Old and new Testament proving that the same God in the Old is the one in the New Testament. This is important a study because many heretical views have been and are being mooted in our day. As one reads further, they will come across all sorts of teachings and claims different from the standard truths that we have in Christian Scripture or any sacred writings of any major religion for that matter. For one to survive in a polytheistic pluralistic context, they need to first of all be very clear what they have believed or hold on to. Remaining a theological lightweight is exceptionally deadly in these degenerate days.

Lessons Gleaned From a consideration of World Religions

Many lessons can be synthesized from these major religions but in this section, we pick out the significantly salient points which can easily give us a summary as well as some take home lessons. Comparative religious studies are complex, never neutral and yet offer a rich experience to the researcher.

1. Diverges and similarities in religious comparative analysis will always exist and people should not relent.
2. Comparative analysis of religions should encourage tolerance and understanding rather than foster hatred. This does not mean compromise or ecumenism.
3. Depending on the perspectives and one's convictions, they can arrive at opposite conclusions.
4. There is no neutrality in any study, even in comparative religion study. One's hind back ground colours their conclusions.
5. Debate is ongoing on religious matters and likely to continue into the foreseeable future.
6. Some strongly hold or suggest that various religions together point to one supreme being dubbed as God, hence such people are syncretic. It must be noted however that religious syncretism is not credible because religions cannot be reconciled though may tolerate each other. It is important to understand others but never compromise your stand.
7. Some religions such as Hinduism (although Hindus claim to believe in one supreme, hence mono theistic, with millions of expressions of representations.) have countless deities as well as based on different philosophies. In effect, they are a cluster or a syndrome of many religions.
8. Other religions are strictly monotheistic abhorring any mention of any other deity besides the one true deity. Islam, Judaism and Christianity fall into that category.
9. Still other religions deny any theistic being subscribing to an impersonal or pantheistic existence.
10. Some religions however have a combination of at least three natures which mystically coexist. Hinduism for instance is Henotheistic (i.e. where many gods exist but only one is the most important), pantheistic and dualistic, all in one. Although the various schools within do not entire agree with each other's perspective, they none the less all claim to belong to authentic Hinduism.

11. Some religions or indeed philosophies have developed over time, with key figures standing out. For instance, Confucianism is centred around the philosophies of Confucius, while Hinduism has various grand teachers (*gurus*) and generations of developments. Christianity is an outgrowth of Judaism and has a fixed scripture which was developed over a prolonged period of time.
12. Each religion has a set of sacred scriptures or some philosophical sayings of some grand master. Christianity has the *Holy Biblia*, Islam has the *Quran* while Hinduism has the *Vedas* or some such related writings. All these sacred writings are authoritative and at times interpreted variously within respective religions.
13. Human nature and sin definitions differ considerably among religions, even among monotheistic religions.
14. Salvation is described variously and means different things. Although the idea of being delivered from some calamity or suffering may be universal, the means of and the end may differ. For instance, in Buddhism, salvation is from suffering reaching *Nirvana*, while in Christianity, salvation is deliverance from sin in Jesus Christ.
15. Suffering and evil is viewed variously amongst the religions. In Buddhism for instance, suffering is deemed part of the process of being. It must be interfaced because of the aggregates as one attempts to escape the illusionary suffering state through getting rid of person hood. Christianity on the other hand views evil differently which has a source other than a good loving God, although He may permit it for a purpose. He is never the author of sin or evil. That said, Christianity states that evil first started in the angelic world and later transferred to the world. It is said to be real and had terrible effects on creation until Jesus comes along to restore everything in redemption.
16. Although many religions may be syncretic and seriously “inclusive”, Christianity and Islam claim to be the only way to God, despite their awareness of the existence of other religions. They are exclusive religions in that sense. There is need to have a broad spectrum of today’s religions and then make an objective decision.
17. Buddhism rejects the idea of a personal God or ultimate reality as in Hinduism preferring the idea that the world is empty, a web of interdependent baseless phenomenon. Life itself is an illusion affected by the interaction of the five aggregates but this illusion is annihilated when personhood is removed. Further, Buddhism rejects the idea of reincarnation or re-absorption into the ultimate reality to achieve total bliss or *Nirvana*.

18. Not only are there monotheistic or polytheistic religions, dualistic religions exist as well. Human beings are somehow caught up in between two co-existing and yet conflicting deities. Gnosticism or *Bogomilism* are examples of such dualistic faiths.

As can be seen, there are many valuable lessons to be learnt from the menu of religions on offer today. Many more keep coming up and need to be meticulously studied, documented to ascertain how best to interact with them.

Conclusion

We have made our case that a knowledge about other faiths is both beneficial and essential in a pluralistic society. Only then could meaningful engagement occur.

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