Comparative Religions: Reflection Essay

By

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Looking at the religion of Christianity it is easy to see all eight of the different aspects of religion: a belief system, community, central myths, rituals, an ethical system, emotional experiences, material expressions of religion and sacredness, because Christianity is a very clear about what is believed.

The Christian belief system is that God created the earth and the universe and that he created man in his own image. After creating man, he placed man in the Garden of Eden, for man to live in paradise and have a relationship with God. Due to sin, man was removed from the Garden of Eden and was punished with a hard life on the earth that culminates in death. However, God still wished to maintain a relationship with man, so God sent his son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins and raised him from the dead three days later. While this sacrifice did not remove man’s penance of having a hard life on the earth, it did remove the penalty of eternal death if one believes that Christ died for their sins and rose from the grave three days later.

For Christians, while community or being part of the church is not mandatory for salvation, community is still extremely important, because it allows Christians to be around people that have similar beliefs and draw strength from those common beliefs. Through that strength and the strength that God gives us, we can survive and cope with anything that may come our way.

Some central myths of Christianity are the well-known stories from the Bible, such as how the earth was created, Noah’s Ark, Daniel and the Lion’s Den, and the various miracles of Jesus Christ.

Different rituals of the Christian religion would be that of after accepting Christ as your savior showing that belief openly with believer’s baptism, and communion, and not just because you are a member of the church. While both of these are rituals in nature, they also both require conscious thought and belief in what is being symbolized.

An ethical system is also clearly defined within Christianity through that of the Ten Commandments that God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai. While these are a basic set of commandments from God, they also fall into a set of rules and laws that create an ethical system.

Emotional experiences in Christianity can range widely, from joy through the saving power of Jesus Christ, in the direct transformation that people may feel after accepting Christ as their savior. To that of comfort and solace during times of personal loss or troubles, that God is always with us, and will give us the strength to deal with anything that we may be dealing with; and if the loss is the loss of a loved one, the emotional comfort and knowledge that if that person was a born again Christian that we will see them again someday.

Material expressions of Christianity exist all over the world, through many different paintings such as the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel, to that of personal symbols such as the cross, or the fish.

As for sacredness, I would say that this really all depends upon what you believe, and if you are a member of a church what your church believes. About 6 or 7 years ago, the church that I attend started construction on a property. At the breaking ground ceremony, the church buried a Bible in the general vicinity of where the Pastors pulpit would actually be, so that whenever he would preach he would literally be standing on sacred or holy ground. I think sacredness could also be seen in the act of communion because it is a very solemn time where Christians remember what Christ has done for us, and is not to be taken by unbelievers.

Given these points about Christianity, it would be interesting to take a quick look into Scientology, because it is diametrically opposed to Christianity as it requires no faith, which allows its followers to pretty much believe only what they choose to believe because they and only they have observed it to be true.

This lack of required faith, almost completely eliminates what other religions would consider as central myths because there is no set of centralized stories to be passed on from generation to generation because if it isn’t observed then it isn’t required to believe that it is true, or even might be true. A couple of aspects of Scientology that I can find that could remotely be considered a central myth would be that they do believe in the existence of a “Supreme Being” or God, and that man is essentially good. With that said, most of the other aspects of a religion system can be found in Scientology.

Scientology definitely has a belief system, of seeing is believing, and if you did not see it you do not have to believe it. The founder of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard when he says things such as the following, teaches this:

“Personal integrity is *knowing what you know.* What you know is what you know and to have the courage to know and say what you have observed.” (www.scientology.org, 2012)

“But I think they would all be covered very well if what we really observed was what we observed, that we took care to observe what we were observing, that we always *observed* to *observe.* And not necessarily maintaining a skeptical attitude, a critical attitude or an open mind—not necessarily maintaining these things at all—but *certainly* maintaining *sufficient* personal integrity and *sufficient* personal belief and confidence in self and courage that we can observe what we observe and say what we have observed.

Nothing in [**Scientology**](http://www.scientology.org/what-is-scientology/inside-a-church-scientology.html) is true for you unless you have observed it and it is true according to your observation.” (www.scientology.org, 2012)

There is a community focus as there are local churches where fellow believers can gather to commune with people that believe similarly to themselves. There are also rituals such as “Auditing”, which if my understanding is correct uses the system of Dianetics to allow members to examine their own lives on a conscious and subconscious level, so that they may gain more understanding into themselves and the universe.

The requirement of an ethical system is also in place, at least indirectly, in the belief that man is inherently good. Thus, they would strive to treat each other and their community with respect, kindness and other qualities that would indicate some form of ethical system. In addition, as the focus of the religion is about self-examination there would also be an emotional experience attached to this, because as one gains a better understanding of themselves they would gain better emotional control and experience more positive emotions.

With these few examples of the aspects of religion from Christianity and Scientology, it is extremely clear that religions can vary greatly not just from different sides of the world as in east vs. west, but just in general from one religion to another, even if they are considered eastern or western religions.

# References

www.scientology.org. (2012, September 11). *Scientology*. Retrieved from Scientology.org: http://www.scientology.org