



# WORLDVIEWS: CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS



EVANGELISTIC  
**PRAYER**  
TEAMS



## WORLDVIEWS: CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS **Course Overview**



### **Course Summary**

As we get to know other workers we may discover, with joy, there are people who think very similarly to us - they may even identify as Christian, or say they go to church. But then you notice some differences, the way they behave, their language, and then you learn - they're Catholic, or a Jehovah's Witness, or a Latter Day Saint.

What's the difference? Does it matter? These studies serve as a starting point to begin to explore what your friend believes.



### **Course and Lesson Structure**

#### **Lessons**

**1: Roman Catholicism**

**2: Jehovahs Witnesses**

**3: Mormonism (Latter Day Saints)**

Each of these 3 lessons examines the worldview of the millions of people who believe in one of the Christian religions that are subtly, but importantly, different to orthodox Christianity. You may choose to only do a couple of these studies - feel free to do all 3. However, remember the purpose is to understand their worldviews in order to ask good questions - not to start arguments!



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# WORLDVIEWS: CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

## Lesson 1: Roman Catholicism



### Lesson Introduction

Roman Catholics believe they belong to the original church that Jesus established under St. Peter. Every other pope is a successor of Peter, and so another apostle of Jesus. All other churches have broken off from the one, true Catholic Church.



### Big Picture

*"We believe in one holy, Catholic and apostolic church". Catholics believe they belong to the only true church that Jesus established. God's presence is experienced in the sacraments it administers through Jesus' living representatives on earth - the pope and his priests.*



### Key Truths

- Many beliefs of the Roman Catholic church are also held by Christians. They affirm the Nicene, Athanasian, and Apostles creeds (though what they mean by the words is not always the same).
- Often Catholics mean very different things while using the same words - resulting in a very different religious system.
- Catholics believe in the Trinity (though Mary can often take on attributes we would reserve for God (Father, Son, and Spirit)).
- Catholics believe we are sinners (though not so bad that we cannot contribute something to our salvation)
- Catholics believe in the authority of the Bible (it's God's word - but not his only word)



## **Key Truths (cont)**

- Perhaps the biggest area of difference is how God saves us. While they agree we need Jesus to save us, they disagree about our role in our salvation, and how the Spirit works in our lives.
- Perhaps you have heard about the role of Faith and Works as a historical major difference that led to the Reformation. While true, you may find modern Catholics affirm that we are saved by faith alone, and works must follow faith. (while having a different understanding of what faith and works mean).

There are 3 key aspects to understanding Roman Catholic belief:

1. Catholics are saved by **BELONGING** to the Roman Catholic Church. Being baptised and belonging to the Catholic church is very important to Catholics - almost all are baptised as infants. Knowing God is about belonging to his only true church. Catholics don't just go to church, once baptised they **ARE** Catholic.
2. Catholics experience God **PHYSICALLY** in the sacraments of the Catholic church. The death of Jesus created a well-spring of grace - spiritual power that enables to live Christian lives. Grace is distributed through sacraments, administered by the church's agents - priests. This is a physical experience; the water of baptism washes away our sin; in the Eucharist you eat the real body of Jesus - becoming physically and spiritually one with him. The local priest forgives your sins.
3. The grace of God is administered via a mediator - the **AUTHORITY** structures of the church. Mary represents the church and is our means to Jesus, who is our means to God. The church is represented by the authority on earth - the pope. And the pope's authority is mediated locally by the parish priests (through the chain of cardinals, archbishops, and local bishop). The Bible is also an important authority in the Catholic church.



**Explore Worldview**

Enter	What is their mission?	Catholic means universal, and so their mission is to unite the world under Roman Catholicism with God.
	Who are the bad guys?	Anyone who stands opposed to the mission of the church are "Anti-Catholic". So sometimes Protestants, but often governments or organisations that limit or work against it.
	Who are the good guys?	Catholics, priests - any representative of the Catholic church, especially saints.
	Why attractive?	You belong to the church Jesus initiated. Catholicism is historical, intellectually stimulating, boasts great beauty, art, and wealth. It provides clear ways to experience forgiveness and God physically in the eucharist.
Challenge	What's missing?	A Catholic can never be sure they are in a state of grace - right with God. So they have no assurance of heaven, nor a direct and personal relationship with God based on his word and spirit.
	What's clashing?	There are two major driving forces within the Catholic church that work against one another - the desire for inclusion, and the exclusive claim of the church. The Catholic church is often keen to be involved in ecumenical movements and seeks to re-unite and bring fullness to the church, but it is the only true church of Jesus and salvation is found only in the Catholic church. In the end, unity is about bringing people into the structures of the Catholic church.
Fulfill	How is Jesus the answer?	The Catholic church offers a structure towards Jesus - but Jesus is often obscured by the edifice. A way to Jesus by his word, the Bible - an authority we both share - may be very attractive to a Catholic. So reading a Gospel with Catholics, helping them to see Jesus clearly, could be life-changing.



## Application

Remember, this is not an exercise in finding points to argue over, but to provide context to begin exploring with Catholics what they believe.

So, what questions could you ask a Catholic to explore their worldview?



## Prayer

Pray for a deeper understanding of Roman Catholicism so we can go deeper with our Catholic friends and colleagues.

Pray for an opportunity to read through a Gospel with a Catholic friend.

## Remember

**COFFEE**



**DINNER**



**GOSPEL**



## Further Reading

*Nothing in my Hand I Bring* by Ray Galea

*The Road Once Travelled* by Mark Gilbert

*Stepping Out in Faith* edited by Mark Gilbert



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## WORLDVIEWS: CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

### Lesson 2: Jehovah's Witnesses



### Lesson Introduction

Jehovah's Witnesses began with Charles Taze Russell in 1874. They predicted the return of Christ in 1874 and 1914. Jehovah's witnesses seek to read the Bible without any attention to what believers have understood in the history of the church - but with the added input from the Watchtower magazine.



### Big Picture

*Jehovah's Witnesses arose out of a doomsday cult based on peculiar readings of the Bible. In their eyes they represent a return to the beliefs of the early church before it was obscured by human traditions and philosophy.*



### Key Truths

- Jehovah's Witnesses seek to go back to a plain understanding of the Bible, without attention to what others have believed in the history of the church, because the church's teaching has been obscured by human traditions and philosophy.
- They believe:
  - There is one God and his personal name is Jehovah. He wants us to call him by his name.
  - The Bible is God's inspired message to humans.
  - Jesus is not God. The Trinity is not mentioned in the Bible. Jesus was a spirit creature of heaven before he was born.



## Key Truths (cont)

- The kingdom of God is a real government in heaven that will replace all human governments following armageddon. Jesus is the king of God's kingdom and he returned spiritually in 1914 to establish his rule on earth. (So we must not align with any earthly political movement)
- Jesus' "ransom sacrifice" delivers us from sin and death if we exercise faith in Jesus, repent, change our life, and get baptised. Works prove our faith is alive, salvation isn't earned. (Also, Jesus died on a stake, not a cross)
- Heaven is a spiritual realm where God, Jesus, and faithful angels reside. 144,000 people will be (spiritually) resurrected to life in heaven to rule with Jesus. Earth is the rest of humanity's eternal home, God blesses obedient people with perfect, everlasting life in a perfect, paradise on Earth.
- Thus, there are two resurrections - a spiritual one for those going to heaven (including Jesus), and a physical one for those staying on Earth. But, Jesus can take on a physical form to visit Earth, such as when he took a body with wound marks to bolster Thomas' faith.
- Evil is the result of angelic rebellion, where Satan persuaded humans to join in his rebellion.
- There is no hell. After resurrection, those who refuse to learn God's ways are destroyed forever.



## Explore Worldview

Enter

What is their mission?	A Jehovah's Witness is a member of God's kingdom and seek to grow that kingdom through witnessing.
Who are the bad guys?	Satan and his angels, Christians and those who teach false religion, those who oppose God.
Who are the good guys?	Jehovah's Witnesses, the 144,000, Jesus and the angels.
Why attractive?	It is a conservative, well-organised, defined system of belief that seems to appeal particularly to the previously churchied.

 **Explore Worldview (cont)**

Challenge	What's missing?	Jesus is a spiritual being - like an angel - made human. He is God's instrument of creation and redemption, but he isn't divine. He is worth a bit more than an ordinary human, but certainly not of infinite worth. If Jesus is a third party between humans and God, his death on our behalf is an unjust, unfair convenience.
	What's clashing?	Jehovah's Witnesses short circuit 2000 years of church history and try to connect directly to a certain reading of the Bible. However, there is now over 100 years of Watchtower teaching, is this similarly a product of human philosophy? The idea of a physical and spiritual resurrection doesn't square with the Bible's expectation of physical resurrection. (ie. Thomas seems to have been fooled by Jesus to boost his faith - much like Jesus' return in 1914 was spiritual/secret)
Fulfill	How is Jesus the answer?	If a Jehovah's Witness trusts only in the authority of the Bible, as they claim, they may agree to read the Bible with us. While they may be more used to reading topically with notes, reading through a Gospel (from start to finish), letting the word speak for itself may be a good strategy.

 **Application**

Remember, this is not an exercise in finding points to argue over, but to provide context to begin exploring with Jehovah's Witnesses what they believe.

So, what questions could you ask a Jehovah's Witness to explore their worldview?

 **Prayer**

Pray for an opportunity to go deeper with a Jehovah's Witness friend or colleague.

Pray for an opportunity to read through a Gospel with a Jehovah's Witness friend.

**Remember**

**COFFEE**



**DINNER**



**GOSPEL**





## WORLDVIEWS: CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

### Lesson 3: Mormonism



### Lesson Introduction

Joseph Smith was unsure which church to join, so he asked God to reveal to him the true church, God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him and told him all churches were apostate. Then the angel Moroni directed him to gold plates and other relics - the translation of which became the Book of Mormon. He re-established Jesus' church and the priesthood.



### Big Picture

*The gospel of Jesus Christ was lost and the church fell into apostacy until God called his prophet, Joseph Smith and delivered him new Scriptures via and angel - Moroni. Smith re-established the lost gospel and the church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints.*



### Key Truths

- The church fell into apostacy following the death of the apostles. The calling of Joseph Smith as prophet and priest re-established Jesus' church and his gospel.
- God reveals his truth directly to individuals as they diligently ask him to reveal it, but also through revelations of modern day leaders and prophets. Key to becoming a LDS believer is reading the Book of Mormon and *earnestly* asking God to reveal that it is true. The truth of the Book of Mormon is not determined by reason, but by whatever experience or sign God may give the earnest seeker.
- Latter-Day Saints (or LDS, what Mormons prefer to call themselves) believe not because of solid, rational proof - much of its story is unverifiable, and without historical basis - HOWEVER, these are matters of (blind) faith - a chance to exercise one's faith. The experience of God's confirmation of truth is the basis of faith moving forward.



## Key Truths (cont)

- LDS beliefs share many Christian concepts and words - but what they mean can be very different:
  - Trinity is not about one God in three persons - Father, Son, and Spirit. LDS doctrine prefers to speak of the Godhead - who are three, separate, physical beings - one in love, purpose, and will.
  - God the Father was once like us, he has a human-like body, but is now glorified - and we can become like him in glorified reality.
  - The atonement of Christ saves all of God's children (except the sons of perdition), the atonement is applied to us in as far as we repent and keep God's commandments.
  - We have a pre-mortal life where we lived as children of God, the atonement allows us to return to the Father's presence. Mortal life (and sin) is essential for us to learn and grow, but we need atonement to re-unite us to God the Father.
  - Our eternal life is determined by our obedience to four covenants and ordinances of the church: Baptism and confirmation; receiving the priesthood of Melchizedek (for men); endowment in the temple (including wearing temple garments); and sealing (or temple marriage). Families are sealed together eternally in this way and so if they remain faithful are worthy of the highest of three heavenly kingdoms. (these ordinances can be performed on behalf of others, or even for the dead).



## Explore Worldview

Enter

What is their mission?	The church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints seek to see all come to the full realisation of God's plan of salvation through his restored church.
Who are the bad guys?	Those who by their craftiness delude others away from the truth.
Who are the good guys?	Those who obey the teaching of the church and of Jesus, and his prophets. Joseph Smith, and the presidents of the LDS church.
Why attractive?	LDS teaching provides a tight system of belief, and a strong family-oriented community. It is a highly experiential religion.

 **Explore Worldview (cont)**

<b>Challenge</b>	What's missing?	LDS teaching is a legalistic religion that robs grace of its power. God is just a glorified human, Jesus' atonement provides no effective change. LDS doctrine is intellectually anemic, instead it is based on an experience of 'revelation' that must be sought earnestly - which creates a confirmation bias.
	What's clashing?	LDS teaching is based on the fanciful imagination of a 19th Century charlatan who created a cult complete with polygamy and violence (he was killed in a gun fight with a mob while in prison on remand, charged with treason). There is no material evidence of the Book of Mormon's origins, nor of the lives of ancient Israelite lives in North America - it is a matter of blind faith.
<b>Fulfill</b>	How is Jesus the answer?	Jesus' death on the cross in our place does not just open a door through which we may find salvation - we have assurance of salvation. Most LDS apologetics and beliefs are designed to convince Christians to also adopt their beliefs as a fuller understanding. There is little to be gained by arguing the points - it isn't a rational belief system! However, as they believe the Bible is authoritative, it may be helpful to invite a LDS believer to read through a Gospel with you.

 **Application**

Remember, this is not an exercise in finding points to argue over, but to provide context to begin exploring with Mormon friends and colleagues what they believe.

So, what questions could you ask an LDS believer to explore their worldview?

 **Prayer**

Pray for an opportunity to go deeper with a Mormon friend or colleague.

Pray for an opportunity to read through a Gospel with an LDS friend.

**Remember**

**COFFEE**



**DINNER**



**GOSPEL**

