

# Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith

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## Miracles of Christ

Some of the followers of Jesus say that **His greatness** is due to **the miracles** that he performed (giving sight to the blind and raising the dead, etc.).

**“Miracles are proofs** for the **eyewitness only**, and even he may regard them not as a miracle but as an enchantment. Extraordinary feats have also been related of some conjurors...” SAQ

Also, we need to remember that there were **other prophets** who performed miracles and resurrected the dead before Christ. One example is the 9<sup>th</sup> B.C. century Jewish prophet, **Elisha**. Many miracle stories were told about Elisha, such as his **healing of Naaman** (the commander of the army of the king of Syria) who was **afflicted with leprosy**. Elisha told Namaan, who was a leper, to wash in the Jordan river in order to be healed:

"Then went he (Namaan) down, and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child." (II Kings 5:14)

**Elisha also gave sight to the blind:**

"O Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw;". " (II Kings 6:20)

**Elisha also resurrected** the dead.

In this story, **Elisha's bones** bring someone back to life (even a greater miracle!).

"And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet." (2KI 13:21)

**Elisha also raised the son of the Shunammite woman** from the dead (2KI 4:18:34-35)

"And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes."

In addition to Elisha, **Elijah** who lived in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, raised a widow's son from the dead.

“The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.” (1 Kings 17:17-24).

In conclusion, one might say that the greatness of Jesus is not in that he performed miracles, but due to His perfections, wonderful qualities. He set a perfect example for His followers. He was the embodiment of all the virtues. His greatness was also in the glorious Message that He brought to the human race.

To many, His greatest miracle was that Jesus alone, without outward education with only training in a carpenter shop appeared in the world. Without wealth, protector, without armies, rescued those who believed in Him from degradation and lifted them to the highest realm of development and glory (spiritual transformation). Later on, great rulers took pride in being his followers.

### ***Some Answered Questions: Miracles in the Bible***

Also, most of the miracles of the Prophets have an **inner significance**. For instance, in the Gospel of Matthew (27:45-53) it is written that at the martyrdom of Christ:

“there was darkness over all the land...the curtain of the temple was torn into two...the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints...were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many...”

“If these events had happened, they would indeed have been awesome, and would certainly have been recorded in the history of the times. They would have become the cause of much troublings of heart. Either the soldiers would have taken down Christ from the cross, or they would have fled. These events are not related in any history; therefore, it is evident they ought not to be taken literally, but as having an inner significance.” SAQ  
pp. 37-38

### **Jesus as the Son of God**

In regards to Jesus' uniqueness, that is of course from a mainstream Christian perspective. A Muslim would see Islam as the FINAL revelation from God. A Jew sees himself as a member of the Chosen People. A Buddhist sees himself as a member of the only religious group that has achieved True ENLIGHTENMENT, and so on. So, if someone hasn't studied other religions, they probably don't know that these claims to uniqueness are rampant among the followers of ALL religions. The nature of the claim may be different, but they all boil down to **“I have something you don't have.”**

Let me start by saying that there's not a **SINGLE** place in the entire Bible where **JESUS** (not others) voluntarily proclaims Himself as **THE only**

**begotten Son of GOD.** On the contrary, there are over 100 places in the Bible where Jesus calls Himself the **Son of Man.**

<b>Bible Version</b>	<b>Son of God</b>	<b>Son of Man</b>
King James	37	107
American Standard Bible 1901	33	106
World English Bible w/ Hebrew Names	33	107
World English Bible	33	106

Here are just a handful of examples from the four main books (the Gospels) Bible where Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man:

[Matthew 8:20](#)  
[Matthew 9:6](#)  
[Matthew 10:23](#)  
[Matthew 11:19](#)  
[Matthew 12:8](#)  
[Matthew 12:32](#)  
[Matthew 12:40](#)  
[Matthew 16:13](#)  
[Matthew 16:27](#)

[Mark 2:10](#)  
[Mark 2:28](#)  
[Mark 8:31](#)  
[Mark 8:38](#)  
[Mark 9:9](#)  
[Mark 9:12](#)  
[Mark 9:31](#)  
[Mark 10:33](#)  
[Mark 10:45](#)

[Luke 5:24](#)  
[Luke 6:5](#)  
[Luke 6:22](#)  
[Luke 7:34](#)  
[Luke 9:22](#)  
[Luke 9:26](#)  
[Luke 9:44](#)  
[Luke 9:58](#)  
[Luke 11:30](#)

[John 1:51](#)  
[John 3:13](#)  
[John 3:14](#)  
[John 5:27](#)  
[John 6:27](#)

[John 6:53](#)

[John 6:62](#)

[John 8:28](#)

Remember, this is only a small sample. There are over 100 such references in the New Testament. If you want more, go to this site and do a **WORD SEARCH** on **Son of Man**. Pick “**Exact Phrase**” from the drop-down menu underneath.

<http://bible.gospelcom.net/cgi-bin/bible/>

Then, do a search for **Son of God** and see how many hits you get where **Jesus** identifies **Himself** by that title. Yes, Mark, Matthew, Luke, Paul, and other early Christians do call Jesus by that title many times but Jesus does not. There are only **TWO** places in the entire Bible where Jesus admits even to the title **Son of God** (not the ONLY BEGOTTEN). One is **Matthew 26: 63-68**, the other is **John 5:25**. In Matthew, shortly before His crucifixion and in response to pressure from the High Priest who asks Him point-blank if He is Christ, the Son of God, Jesus confirms but, even there, He immediately follows the admission with calling Himself by His favorite title (**Son of Man**):

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

**"Yes, it is as you say,"** Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see **the Son of Man** sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

We need to know the history of the phrase “Son of Man” to understand why Jesus insisted on using that title for Himself. Read chapters **8** and **11 through 47** of Ezekiel. In these chapters, God calls Ezekiel by the title **Son of Man 118 times**. Ask yourself, “Why is Jesus calling Himself by the same title God was calling Ezekiel 118 times?”

Why did Daniel call Jesus by the same title (Son of Man) when prophesying the coming of Jesus:

**Daniel 7:13**

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a **son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

Then, in the following chapter, Daniel himself (another Prophet) is called by the same title:

As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. "**Son of man,**" he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end." (Daniel 8: 17)

By calling Himself the "Son of Man," Jesus was essentially continuing the Hebrew tradition of Prophets being called the Son of Man. Something that Jews knew about and could identify with.

Baha'is, of course, believe that the station of Jesus was much greater than that of lesser prophets such as Ezekiel and Daniel but we consider Jesus, too, a Prophet; yet one of much greater significance and much higher station.

Now do we believe Jesus was **the Son of God? Of course, we do.** But we believe this sonship was a **SPIRITUAL** not a physical sonship. Remember, the Bible says that, by believing in Jesus, we all can become sons of God. But, physically, we **ALL ARE already** children of God to begin with. If not, **whose children are we physically; children of the devil?** Who created us all? God, of course. So, when the Bible says we too can become children of God, it must mean **spiritually** because, **physically**, we're already there!

Now, was Jesus **the only begotten Son of God? YES.** If by that we mean the same as the Greek concept of LOGOS (Spirit of God that was pre-existent with God but was created by God and became the Agent of Creation). That's why John say:

**John 1: 14**

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

But unlike many Christians who consider **the body of Jesus of Nazareth** as the ONLY BEGOTTEN SON of God, the Baha'is believe that **the ONLY BEGOTTEN SON** was the **Holy Spirit** (Spirit of God) that was **the first and ONLY direct emanation from God.** Everything else in the creation came to being through this Holy Spirit.

But this **ONLY BEGOTTEN Son (the Holy Spirit)**, not only assisted and confirmed **Jesus** of Nazareth to achieve great things but also helped the **Buddha** achieve enlightenment, It helped **Muhammad** create unity among the warring tribes of Arabia, **it assisted Krishna** in creating a spiritual nation in India and beyond, it helped **Moses** free the Hebrews from slavery, and It helped **Baha'u'llah** charter the teachings that are to bring about a new world order, world unity, and brotherhood of mankind.

## Resurrection of Jesus

There has NEVER been a consensus among Christians in regards to the issue of Christ's resurrection. For centuries, Christians have been debating whether the Bible's references to Christ's resurrection were referring to a **physical** or a **spiritual** resurrection. To this day, there's no consensus. According to a recent survey, **more than half** the Methodists don't believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ. Here's a sample of Christians who don't believe in Christ's physical resurrection:

American Lutherans: 13%  
Presbyterians: 30%  
American Baptist: 33%  
Episcopalians: 35%  
Methodists: 51%

(Source: [http://www.religioustolerance.org/resur\\_lt.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/resur_lt.htm))

Remember, Paul believed that "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*" **I Corinthians 15:50.**

If flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, then how could Christ inherit the Kingdom while trapped in his resurrected body made up of flesh and blood?! Have you ever asked yourself, if the Kingdom is the realm of SPIRITS, what is Jesus' BODY doing in the realm of SPIRITS? Where's that body now?!

We shouldn't take everything we read in the Bible as **verbally (literally) true. If we did, then the Bible says Jesus was NOT the only one who defeated death. Elijah did, too:**

### **1 Kings 17:**

The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.

Also, following Christ's resurrection, the Bible reports that many other holy people defeated death and rose from their tombs!!

### **Matthew 27: 52**

The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.

Now try to visualize this. **If this event that Matthew describes had literally happened, can you imagine what kind of commotion it would have created in the ancient world?! Why didn't anyone outside the Christian church report this truly astonishing phenomenon? And how could any society witness such an incredible thing with their naked eyes and not collectively believe (or die of shock on the spot)?!**

In light of the above, don't you think it's more reasonable to believe that Jesus' resurrection was not about the resurrection of flesh and blood which eventually has to decompose and die? Paul clearly believed in the existence of a **spiritual** body. Even though you may be familiar with **1 Corinthians 15**, read that chapter again but this time with the **other perspective** (that Jesus was resurrected in a **SPIRITUAL** body, not a PHYSICAL body) and see if it makes more or less sense:

## 1 Corinthians 15

<sup>35</sup>But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" <sup>36</sup>How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup>When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. <sup>38</sup>But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. <sup>39</sup>All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. <sup>40</sup>There are also **heavenly bodies** and there are **earthly bodies**; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. <sup>41</sup>The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. <sup>42</sup>So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The **body** that is sown is **perishable**, it is **raised imperishable**; <sup>43</sup>it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup>it is sown a **natural body**, it is **raised a spiritual body**.

If there is a natural body, **there is also a spiritual body**. <sup>45</sup>So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"<sup>[5]</sup>; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup>The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. <sup>47</sup>The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. <sup>48</sup>As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup>And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we<sup>[6]</sup> bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

<sup>50</sup>I declare to you, brothers, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable**. <sup>51</sup>Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be **changed**-- <sup>52</sup>in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup>For the perishable must **clothe itself** with the **imperishable**, and the **mortal** with **immortality**. <sup>54</sup>When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."<sup>[7]</sup>

Here, clearly Paul says our natural bodies (made up of flesh and blood) are perishable. And that body CANNOT inherit the Kingdom! What is imperishable or immortal is our **SPIRITUAL** body (meaning, our **soul**). **So, how could**



**Jesus be immortal and imperishable** if He was raised in his old **PHYSICAL** body?!!

If Paul was teaching Christ's resurrection as a physical event, then he was expecting all those believing in Jesus to also achieve the same thing (defeat death on earth!):

**I Thess. 4:14:** *"We believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will also bring with him through Jesus those who have fallen asleep [in death]."*

The Baha'is believe in Paul's teaching. That Jesus did indeed defeat death. That He's still living and will be eternally alive and glorious. But we don't believe He is living in the same **PERISHABLE body** that walked in the streets of Nazareth and eventually ended up on the cross. Rather, He is still living in His **imperishable body (His SOUL)**.

There has **NEVER been a consensus** among Christians in regards to the issue of Christ's resurrection. For centuries, Christians have been **debating** whether the Bible's references to Christ's resurrection were referring to a **physical** or a **spiritual** resurrection. To this day, **there's no consensus**.

### ***Resurrection in the New Testament***

According to the New Testament, **three days after His crucifixion**, Jesus **appeared to the disciples**, as a result of which they acquired **confidence and faith** and they began to **spread the message** of Christ throughout the land. The New Testament writings **contain two separate, opposite and contradictory viewpoints** concerning resurrection. The **earliest accounts** of resurrection state that **resurrection** is in the "**spirit**" and not in the "flesh." **An account** that was **written much later** declares that resurrection is in the "**flesh**" and not in the "spirit".

### ***Physical resurrection: Luke 24 & John 20 & 21***

Chapter 24 of the Gospel of **Luke** contains the **most explicit** statement supporting a **literal, physical, fleshly viewpoint**.

"While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence." Luke 24:36-43

Based on the above passage from Luke and also John chapter 20 & 21 **some** Christians, **especially** the more **conservative ones**, insist that the resurrection of Jesus was a **literal, physical** event. They believe that the actual **physical body** of Jesus literally **arose from the dead** and **ascended** into **heaven- the sky** we see above our heads as we stand on the earth. They say since *Jesus was able to do rise from the dead*, He must be God. Because only God has the **power to overcome death**. Thus the **resurrection of Jesus** is often viewed by Christians as **proof of His Divinity**.

The main **significance of the resurrection to conservative** Christians is its proof that Jesus has the power to **restore life to our bodies** and to give us **eternal life**. They argue that since Jesus rose from the dead literally, when He returns to establish His kingdom on earth **He will have the power to raise from the dead Christians** who have died in **the past**. At that time, they believe, **He will end physical death completely** so that **all will live eternally in His kingdom**. These views are based on the literal interpretation of certain verses in the Bible.

### ***Spiritual resurrection: Paul & Peter***

But the New Testament also **contains other passages** which look at resurrection not as a physical event but rather a **spiritual** one. The **earliest account** of the **appearances** of Jesus **after the resurrection** is that of **St. Paul** who is considered to be the Second Founder of Christianity by many scholars. Paul was a contemporary of Jesus and was probably converted **about two years after Jesus' death**. He was born in the town of Tarsus in Cilicia (Turkey). Paul was a Pharisee who joined furiously in the persecution of the early Church. When Christians fled to Damascus he went to the high priest for letters to bring them back to Jerusalem in chain. But according to the Bible, as he was approaching Damascus, a sudden light flashed around him from heaven, and he fell to the ground. Then he heard a voice saying to him, Saul! Saul! why do you persecute me? Blinded by the bright vision, he was led by the hand into Damascus, where for three days he could not see and neither ate nor drank. He believed that it was the Spirit (resurrected body) of Christ that had appeared to him. The vision of Christ made Paul the persecutor into Paul the apostle. Paul wrote the following passage to the **church he founded in Corinth in the year 52 C.E.**

“Now I would remind you, brethren... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, although some of them have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, **he appeared also to me**. (I Corinthians 15: 1-8)”.

According to **"The History of World's Religions"** by scholars **David Noss and John Noss**, if we analyze this statement, and raise the question, what did Paul **"see"** when Jesus appeared to him, we find it striking indeed that, in the discussion of Jesus' resurrection **he strongly implies that Jesus rose in a spiritual body and not in a physical one.**

This idea seems to be confirmed in Acts 26:13 and Acts 9:3 where it is said that Jesus appeared as **"a light from heaven"**, or a "heavenly vision". So his appearance was not physical.

Paul continues **his commentary** on resurrection by next explaining **how Jesus "rose again from the dead."** Paul wrote:

"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive... Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam [who was Jesus] **became a life-giving spirit ... flesh and blood cannot... inherit the kingdom of God.**" (1 Corinthians 15)

According to Paul, when Jesus died, he "became a life-giving **spirit.**" Also, if flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, then how could Christ inherit the Kingdom while trapped in his resurrected body made up of flesh and blood?!

**The opponents** of the belief in a **"physical resurrection"** in the New Testament say that in the **1 Corinthians 15** the Apostle Paul gives Christians the **first written explanation of resurrection** in all of the Christian writing. This **letter** not only is the **first written commentary on resurrection** in all of **Paul's writings** but, since **Paul's entire body of writings** were written years before the **Gospels** were composed, it's also **the first written explanation of resurrection in all of the New Testament writings.** Also, since it **comes from Paul himself, it's one of the most authoritative** statements on resurrection in the entire Bible. In 1 Corinthians 15, in answer to the question: **"How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"** Paul **begins his commentary** on resurrection by explaining that there are **different kinds of bodies.** He says:

"All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also **heavenly bodies** and there are **earthly bodies.**"( **1 Corinthians 15:39-40**)

**Paul continues** by using the **analogy of a seed** to explain that we are **transformed at death** from one **bodily form (physical) to another (spiritual).** He says:

"What is **sown is perishable**, what is **raised is imperishable... It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.** If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Lo! I tell you a mystery... **we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.**" (1 Corinthians 15)

Here Paul is trying to explain that **when a seed is planted**, what grows out of that seed is not the same seed that was planted. It is **"changed"** into something **different and better**. The seed grows into a plant or a tree. According to Paul, the **same thing happens when we die**. We are **"changed"** into something different and better. Paul explains: "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15)

The **Apostle Peter** also only **explains the resurrection of Jesus one time** in all of his writings. Peter wrote that Christ was:

**"put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit."** (1 Peter 3:18)

The opponents of the belief in the "physical resurrection" of Jesus say that nowhere in any of their writings do Peter or Paul state that the resurrection of Christ was physical. Nowhere in their writings will you find any **empty tomb stories**. Why not? They say it is because **Peter and Paul never taught such things**. Peter taught that when Jesus' fleshly body died... he was raised **"in the Spirit"...** while Paul taught that after Jesus was killed he **"became a life-giving spirit."** The accounts of **resurrection in Luke and John** that **contradict Peter and Paul** were **written years after Peter and Paul had both been put to death**.

In short, **Paul** and Peter's teachings on the resurrection of Christ indicate that when **Jesus was crucified**, his fleshly **"physical body" died**, he was **"changed"** and he **"became a life-giving spirit."** And to be certain that **Christians don't "misinterpret"** what he is saying, Paul explicitly told them that **"flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." **Fleshly bodies can't go to heaven.****

Peter and Paul's explanation of resurrection to them, is consistent with the Hebrew Bible. In the Jewish Book of Ecclesiastes we read:

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it." Ecclesiastes 12:7

### ***Spiritual resurrection: Luke, Matthew, John***

According to the opponents of the "physical resurrection" of Jesus in the New Testament, the **"spiritual" resurrection** is also illustrated in the **Gospel accounts of Jesus' death**. As Jesus was dying on the cross he exclaimed:

"Father, into thy hands I commit **my spirit"**. Luke 23:46

In Matthew it says:

"when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, **he gave up his spirit"**.  
Mat. 27:50

In the Gospel of John, Jesus said:

"'It is finished.'" with that, he bowed his head and **gave up his spirit."** John 19:30

To them, these passages seem to indicate that when Jesus died, his body returned to the earth while his **spirit "returned unto the Lord who gave it."**

### ***The other resurrection stories in the New Testament***

In the Gospel of Matthew we are told that, at the time of Jesus resurrection, **"many bodies of the saints... came out of the graves... went into the holy city, and appeared unto many."** -Matthew 27:52

Why is there no mention of this incredible event in Jewish history? How many resurrected Jewish saints were there walking around Jerusalem at this time? Hundreds? Thousands? What did the resurrected "saints" do in the "holy city" and where did they go when they left? Or did they leave? Did they die? Or could they still be there... living somewhere today in modern Jerusalem? Was this a literal resurrection? Or was this a "heavenly vision" too? No one knows for certain, the Bible doesn't say.

In the story of **Jesus' transfiguration**, it says that **Elijah and Moses** appeared with him on the mountainside. **Moses** obviously **must have been resurrected** from the dead too, because, although he had died twelve centuries before... there he was, alive and talking with Jesus. When the disciples saw these two other men of God, they asked Jesus whether they should prepare "three booths (or shelters) here, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah"? This, of course, would not have been necessary, since Moses and Elijah were never physically there. Jesus later told them to **"Tell no one the vision"**. Matthew 17:9

Apparently the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus on the mountainside was so realistic that even eyewitnesses couldn't see that it was a "vision". Jesus had to explain it to them before they could understand.

**Looking at Resurrection from a spiritual point, one can say that when Jesus died helplessly on the Cross, the apostles were on the verge of losing all faith in Him (ex. Peter and the rooster). Because they couldn't believe that the Christ who had manifested so much power, spoke with such authority in front of the Pharisees, spoke of His kingdom, gave spiritual life to people, couldn't prevent His own humiliation, passion, and death at the hands of the Jews and the Romans.**

**On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, with God's help (assistance of the Holy Spirit), their faith was restored. How did that happened? Maybe they had a dialogue among themselves, maybe they had a vision or dream, or some kind of an spiritual experience. Therefore, gradually they became convinced that He was *truly* from God and His Message was from God.**

### ***Church of the Holy Sepulcher***

Christians believe that where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is, is where Jesus was resurrected and that it was where Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac took place.

### ***Descent into Hell***

Later theologians to develop doctrines of Christ's descent in corresponding ways. The affirmation "He descended into Hell" first appears in the Aquileian Creed of Rufinus (ca. 400 CE); from there it gradually spread throughout the West and found a place in the Apostles' Creed.

Today, Many Christians believe that he was executed by the Roman occupying army, visited the underworld, was resurrected, spent 40 days with his disciples, and then ascended to heaven.

### ***Spiritual resurrection***

The opponents of the belief in physical resurrection in the Bible say that what both Paul and Peter are saying in these passages is that when the "physical body" dies, the "spiritual body" survives. The spirit leaves the body and goes to be with God in heaven.

### ***Spiritual resurrection of Jesus in John, Luke and Mark***

For example, Sunday morning when the women followers of Jesus went to the tomb the New Testament account says that they saw angels. These angels are clearly identified in this passage as **"a vision"** . -Luke 24:23

Later, when Christ appeared to two of his disciples on the road **"they didn't recognize him"**. Then, when they finally realized who he was, **"he vanished out of their sight"**. -Luke 24:31

Even later, the **"Disciples were meeting behind locked doors... when suddenly Jesus was standing there."** -John 20:19

Can a physical body suddenly appear in a locked room? No? Can a "heavenly vision"? Yes. Another statement from the gospel of Mark offers one explanation of these sightings. Here it says that after his death **Jesus "appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country."** -Mark 16:12

In what form could Jesus suddenly appear and then, just as suddenly "vanish"? What kind of body can "suddenly" appear in a locked room? Physical bodies can't... but then again, that's not what Paul saw was it? When Paul saw the resurrected Christ, it was not in the flesh, it was in "another form," it was a "heavenly vision".

- **The Arian Controversy**

In the **4<sup>th</sup> century**, during the rule of **Constantine (the Great or Constantine I)** a **dispute** began over the subject of the **relationship of**

**Christ to God.** The phrase "**Son of God**" was not **quite clear to the bishops**; it was **blasphemous to the Jews** and **incomprehensible** to the **Greek philosophers**, an imperfect coming out **of a Perfect**. It was **at Alexandria, in Egypt** where a **priest** by the name of **Arius** disagreed with **his bishop, Athanasius**, on the question of whether **Christ** was a **finite or an eternal being**. According to Arius:

1. **Christ** was **created (had a beginning)**.
2. Christ was a **glorified being, better than us**, but still a **creature and not a literal Son of God**.
3. **Christ was not eternal**.
4. **Christ** was **not** made of the **same substance as God**.

The opposing party, **led by Athanasius**- then only a deacon and **secretary to the bishop of Alexandria**- maintained that Christ:

1. Christ was **uncreated**.
2. He was the **Son of God**.
3. He was **eternal**.
4. He was made of the **same substance as God**.

The dispute could not be settled by an appeal to Scripture because both parties could find support in it. The **Athanasians** could adduce **the opening** of the chapter of the **Gospel of John**, where Christ was declared to have been in the beginning with God and to be he through whom all things were made. The **Arians** could cite the statement from the **Epistle to the Colossians** that Christ was "**the first-born of all creation**." (Colossians 1:15 ) Did that not imply that he was himself created?

It then became necessary **to appeal** to the **consensus of the Church**. Constantine therefore summoned a council, which met **at Nicaea** in Asia Minor (Turkey). It is called the **First Ecumenical**, or universal, Council because it included bishops from the East and from the West. To celebrate the **20th anniversary of his reign**, Constantine invited the assembled bishops to dine with him. As for Arius, **Constantine exiled the excommunicated Arius** to Illyria.

- **The Nicene Creed**

Thus in **325, three hundred** delegate **bishops** met **at Nicaea** , close to Constantinople, and produced the famous **formula of the Nicene Creed**. The Nicene Creed was devised to **explain the nature of Christ** and the **relationship between Jesus and the Father**. It **rejected any subordination of the Son to the Father**. The Greek word used to express their full equality was *homoousios* , meaning “of the same substance or being”. The English equivalent is “**consubstantial**”. The **Father and the Son** were described as two persons sharing in **one being or substance**. With the **Holy Spirit** they constitute the **Trinity**.

The **Nicene Creed** became the **basis** of the **doctrine of Trinity**. It was adopted **under pressure by the emperor** who wanted peace in his land, however it **did not bring peace**. It was bitterly denounced by many. But was ultimately accepted, and later **became INFALLIBLE**. Today, the **Nicene Creed** is accepted by the Roman **Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican** (church of England), and **most Protestant** churches.

#### *The Writing the Nicene creed*

The Nicene Creed was not written at the Council. It was written later on. At the Council it was decided that God the creator = Jesus the redeemer.

#### *Writer of Trinity*

It seems that the doctrine of trinity was later developed by three bishops.

- **Doctrine of Trinity**

The **term Trinity** (“tri” + “unity”) from **the Latin “trinitas”** is **NOT** found in the **Bible**. While the **New Testament writers** said a great deal about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, **none of them explained clearly** what the **relationship among the three was** (neither the term nor the concept is in the N.T.). It is in **Tertullian's (220 C.E.)**, one of the **early Church Fathers** (see great information), writings that we **first** find the **word Trinity** which he actually used in its Latin form, “**trinitas**”. He used this word to describe the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whom he taught were “**one God in three persons.**”

The doctrine of Trinity teaches the belief that **God eternally exists**, or **fully reveals Himself**, in **three co-equal persons** - the Father (the Creator) , the Son (the Redeemer) and the Holy Spirit (the Sanctifier). It seems that certain passages that refer to the divinity of Christ in the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel have been helpful in the development of this doctrine.

#### **Tertullian**



Tertullian is the author of many apologetic and theological works and is one of the most quotable of the Early Church Fathers. Tertullian eventually joined a *heretical sect* called the Monanists and left the Catholic Church. Thereafter he condemned the church as unspiritual and so as compromised by worldliness.

### *More on Trinity*

According to this doctrine, a finite human being, genuinely a part of our human race, was also the infinite, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient creator of everything other than himself.

- **Objections made to the doctrine of Trinity**

It is believed that the **misunderstanding** of the **meaning of the Trinity** led to more bloodshed **among fellow Christians** than all the **persecutions** by the **non-Christians**. One victim was **Michael Servetus (1511-1553)**, a Spanish physician and theologian who lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (time of Reformation). Servetus **rejected the doctrine of the Trinity** in his writings such as a book called **“On the errors of Trinity”**. In that book he said those who believed in the Trinity were really **Tritheists** (believers in three gods) **or atheists**. Servetus believed that **Christ the Word** was **eternal**, but the **Son was not**. Contrary to the Protestant reformers, he also taught that both **faith and works** were **necessary for salvation**.

In 1553 Servetus was convicted of heresy, due to his **Arian views** (by the Roman Catholic authorities) and imprisoned in Vienne. He fled from prison and went to Geneva where John Calvin (a Protestant Reformer) lived. There he was arrested for his heresy and was tried by the town **council of Geneva**. At his trial, **the council condemned him to death on two counts**, for **spreading and preaching anti-Trinitarian and anti paedobaptism (infant baptism)**. In his **death sentence**, the **judges** condemned Servetus to death “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” **by burning at stake** [these words were a part of their sentence]. As the flames grew around him, Servetus was heard to cry “O Jesus, **son of the eternal God**, have pity on me!” On hearing this, **William Farel** (a French evangelist), a leading Protestant reformer, said that if his appeal had only been to “Jesus, the **eternal son of God**,” he might have been spared (so both catholic church and protestants like Calvin were against him).

Today, the doctrine of Trinity is a **major belief** of a **majority of Christian** churches. However, there is a **small minority** like the **Universalist Unitarian** church who reject this doctrine in its present form and consider it to be a **man-made concept**. The opponents of the doctrine of Trinity maintain that **the descent of God** who is a **Perfect Being** into the **body of a human that** is not perfect (body of Jesus), will **make God imperfect** and that can not be. In other words, if God becomes human, he has to get sick or

die. They ask questions such as if Jesus was literally God, what happened to humanity when Jesus slept at night? Was humanity left without God? Also, if Jesus was literally God, when he died on the cross, did God die with him too? To support their ideas, they use biblical passages such as:

**“no man hath seen God at any time.”** (John 1.18)

**John Hick**, a well-known theologian of our time, and the author of **God Has Many Faces, The Myth of God Incarnate, The Myth of Christian Uniqueness**, seems to agree with these opponents. In his writings, Hick says that **the historical Jesus NEVER claimed to be God**. He says that the idea of **“Divine Incarnation”** [found in the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel] is **ONLY a metaphor** and should **not be taken literally**. It only means that **Jesus manifested the Divine qualities (in other words, it is not a “descent” but a “manifestation”)**. But he was **not God on earth**. This idea is supported by Michael Molloy, in his book, **“Experiencing the World’s Religions”** where he says that **“Paul saw Jesus not only as teacher, prophet, and Messiah but also as a manifestation of divinity- to Paul, Jesus was an “image of God”**. Molloy’s view **seem to have been based on** such New Testament passages as:

1. “who is the **image of God**”(2 Corinthians 4.4)
2. “the **image of the invisible God**” (Colossians 1.15)

In “God Has Many Faces” John Hick says we are clearly living in a period of theological reflection in which these doctrines which were once accepted largely without question have now become matters of open debate (pp. 123-124). To cite just one major evidence of this, Hick says that in the 1976 Report of the Church of England’s Doctrine Commission, the chairman, in his own essay concerning the doctrine of Trinity wrote: “I can not with integrity say that I believe God to be one in three persons”. Then Hick says that the Commission’s then chairman, is also Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford. But it should be added that some of his colleagues agreed with him on this view but but others strongly disagreed.

### • **The Original Sin**

Augustine had **incalculable influence** on **Western Christianity**. He was **the authority** in **Christian theology until the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century** and was an **influence on Reformation thinkers** such as Martin **Luther** and John **Calvin** as well.

Augustine believed that **Adam and Eve** had **willfully** chosen to **sin against God** and had **passed on their Sinful nature to all future generations**. For this reason, to him, **all humankind** was **sinful** and **fallen**. It was **only the grace of God** that could save them. (Those He chooses (like Augustine), He saves by grace; to others his grace doesn't come and are doomed to damnation). According to many scholars, **Augustine’s view of “salvation by grace”** was **based on his own moral weakness in youth** and **God’s sudden grace**.

Augustine's **idea** of an "**inherited sinfulness**", brought Augustine in fierce **controversy** with a **British monk** called **Pelagius**, who said in the Book of Ezekiel it say: "the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father" and with others. These men said that **there is no such thing** as **original sin**. They believed that **humankind was free to act** as it would. Therefore, **salvation** was something **initiated** and mainly carried through by **human will**. Only a **little help** from **God** was **needed**. They believed that the **Adam and Eve** may have left to **their descendants a bad example**, but **no "inherited moral weakness"**.

## **History of the Original Sin doctrine**

One of the best sources on the **development** of the doctrine of the original sin is a book called, "**Original Sin**" by a **theologian** by the name of **Tatha Wiley**. In this book she says that this doctrine grew during **the first 4 centuries of the church's tradition**. Some of the **early church fathers** that contributed to the development of this doctrine were: **Origen (3<sup>rd</sup> century)** [see #1], **Cyprian (3<sup>rd</sup> century)** [see #2], **Ambrose of Milan (4<sup>th</sup> century)** [see #3]

But it was in the **5<sup>th</sup> century** that **Augustine fixed the meaning of the original sin**. Augustine **did not invent this doctrine**. However, **his influence** on this **concept was substantial**. In developing *his theory of the original sin*, he was mainly **influenced by such early church fathers** as **Cyprian and Ambrose**. In his writings Augustine acknowledges particular debt to these two writers. He might have also been influenced by the following statement from Paul.

"I can will what is right, but I can not do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, **but sin that dwells within me.**" (Romans 7:20)

Augustine, **living a sinful life in his youth**, could **relate to** the above statement. What he **didn't realize** was that **Paul** might have been **talking** about "**inclination to evil**" or **temptation** which **stems from his "lower nature"**.

Influenced by Augustine, the council of Carthage (411-418 C.E.) and **Orange (529 C.E)** brought theological speculation about original sin into official dictionary (wordbook) of the church. In other words, the **councils of Carthage and Orange confirmed Augustine's theology** of the original sin as a **core belief of Christianity**.

In the **medieval period**, the **work of Thomas Aquinas** and some other writers are **very significant**. The **Council of Trent (1545-1563)** brought medieval development to closure by its **definition of original sin as a dogma** of the **church**. The Council of Trent's explanation remains that of Roman Catholic doctrine today.

According to Wiley, the idea of the **original sin** was **developed** by these **Church Fathers** as a **response** to a broad **range of questions**:

- The **relationship of God to evil**: why **human beings, not God**, are **responsible for evil**.
- The **suffering, and death** that humans experience were considered to be the **consequence of sin**, not the action of a capricious creator.
- The **human nature**: Why **human beings** do not seek and love God and the **source of their inhumanity** to one another.
- This doctrine explained the **universality of sin**. All are sinful because all **share Adam's sin**.
- The **purpose of the incarnation** and the **reason for Christ's redemption**.
- The **practice of infant baptism**
- The **role of the church in God's plan of salvation**: the **indispensability of the church**, the **SOLE mediator** of **Christ's grace of forgiveness**.

**Appeals to a first sin** (Adam's sin), to an **original corruption**, to an inclination to sin, or to a fall were ways of **answering these questions**.

**Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century** there has been a **breakdown** of the **doctrine of the original sin**. In the modern world, scientific and evolutionary understandings of history and human origins displaced the pre-modern view of history in which the idea of original sin was shaped. **Literary studies** established the **SYMBOLIC nature** of the **Genesis creation and expulsion (from the Garden of Eden)** stories, leaving only fundamentalists to argue for their historicity. **One MAJOR criticism** of the **original sin doctrine** was that it located **salvation EXCLUSIVELY** in **Christ and the church**, fostering a **dismissal of the possibility of salvation in other religious traditions**.

**Theologian Matthew Fox** calls the doctrine of original sin a "**false theology of sin and redemption**". The **foundational truth of Christianity**, in his view, is **NOT original sin** but **original blessing**, the **affirmation of the goodness of creation and humankind**.

#### • **Baptism in Protestantism vs. Catholicism**

Unlike Catholics, a majority of Protestants don't have any sacraments to purify them from the "original sin". With them, it is **ONLY the belief in Christ** that purifies them from that sin. So they believe that when you believe in Christ, all your sins, including the "original sin" are forgiven. So, baptism or Eucharist, to many Protestants, are not done to purify them from the original sin.

#### **Paul and the original sin**

Paul in Rom. 5:12 said:

“Sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin.”  
This verse later became foundational in the doctrine of original sin.”

As **Pauline scholar Joseph Fitzmyer** who is a biblical scholar, has insisted, the **idea of the original sin DOES NOT belong to Paul himself** but to **theological and doctrinal developments over many centuries** from **Patristic** (100-451 C.E.) church to the **council of Trent**. Professor Fitzmyer notes that Paul’s own concern lay with the **origin of death**, not with the origin of sin. Paul took sin for granted. Its origin was not a question for him. **His real interest** was with **LIFE** that was now offered in Christ (spiritual life).

**Adam’s disobedience** is the **source of death**. Christ’s obedience (when one obeys Christ) is the **source of new life**. Paul’s teaching in Roman 5:12 is **directed toward the advent of redemption, not the origin of sin**. Paul proclaims access to divine redemption, not only for Jews but now also for Gentiles, **through faith in Christ**. A Jewish thinker, Paul does not think of human sinfulness in relation to biological inheritance. It is simply a fact of life.

### ***Original sin in the Old Testament***

“None is pure from sin before you, not even an infant of one day upon the earth.” (Job 14:4-5)

Also

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” (Psalms 51:5)

This may well be **humanity’s inclination** to sin and error. We are created with the inclination to do both good and evil.

This information comes from “Original sin” by Tatha Wiley pp. 1-62; 130-131; 205-208.

### ***Some Answered Questions: Original Sin***

“As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,” means, according to this terminology, that **Adam is the father of man**--that is to say, He is the cause of the physical life of mankind; His was the **physical fatherhood**. He is a living soul, but **He is not the giver of spiritual life**, whereas **Christ is the cause of the spiritual life of man**, and with regard to the spirit, His was the spiritual fatherhood. Adam is a living soul; Christ is a quickening spirit. The body of man is a captive of nature.... It is, therefore, certain that sins such as anger, jealousy, dispute, covetousness, avarice, ignorance, prejudice, hatred, pride and tyranny exist in the physical world. All these brutal qualities exist in the nature of man.... It is "a quickening spirit,"

meaning that all the imperfections which come from the requirements of the physical life of man are transformed into human perfections by the teachings and education of that spirit. Therefore, Christ was a quickening spirit, and the cause of life in all mankind.

**Adam was the cause of physical life, and as the physical world of man is the world of imperfections, and imperfections are the equivalent of death,** Paul compared the **physical imperfections to death.** But the mass of the Christians believe that, as Adam ate of the forbidden tree, He sinned in that He disobeyed, and that the disastrous consequences of this disobedience have been transmitted as a heritage and have remained among His descendants. Hence Adam became the cause of the death of humanity. This explanation is unreasonable and evidently wrong, for it means that all men, even the Prophets and the Messengers of God, without committing any sin or fault, but simply because they are the posterity of Adam, have become without reason guilty sinners, and until the day of the sacrifice of Christ were held captive in hell in painful torment. This is far from the justice of God. If Adam was a sinner, what is the sin of Abraham? What is the fault of Isaac, or of Joseph? Of what is Moses guilty?"

- **Baptism**

The **word baptism** means "**to immerse**". Baptism was practiced by the Essenes and pagans before John the Baptist and Christians. In **Judaism**, baptism as an **initiation into a new faith** was practiced by the Pharisees when they **took converts** into Judaism. In Christianity, **Jesus' disciples** baptized converts even during his ministry, and Paul baptized converts wherever he went. It is **not clear** why Jesus' disciples baptized, nor the New Testament tell the reader clearly why the early church continued the practice.

In the New Testament, **John** the Baptist **immersed** his converts in the Jordan River. But as Christians grew in number, the inconvenience of finding a body of water large enough to immerse the candidate perhaps argued for a more moderate baptism. **Pouring or sprinkling water** on the head became accepted as the proper mode of baptism.

The **majority** of people who were **baptized** in the **New Testament** were **adults** who were entering the community. The **exception** *might* have been **children included in some of the households** who were baptized (Acts 11.14; 16.15,33).

According to some **theologians** like Tatha **Wiley**, in the **early history of Christianity** (**1<sup>st</sup> century**) baptism was **primarily** adult baptism. Those to be baptized were to **fast for one or two days** before ritual.

The **baptism of infants** became a **more routine practice** within the church as the **doctrine of original sin** became **more widely accepted**. Today, **Infant baptism** (also called **paedobaptism** and **pedobaptism**), is practiced in the Roman Catholic church, the Orthodox churches, Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists, to name a few. Baptists practice

adult baptism and children between the ages of 8-12 depending on the sect. In Catholicism it is believed that the unbaptized infant will eternally stay in **limbo**. As to what happens overall to unbaptized people, different churches have different views.

**Baptism** *appears originally* to have been an **outward sign** of the **change in status** from the **non-Christian** life to the **Christian life**. In later years, it took on deeper meanings. Eventually, baptism **was believed to remove all past sins** but it made no provisions for future sins. Danger was felt so much that people began postponing their baptism till deathbed.

But this had 2 major flaws:

1. one could die before baptism
2. the church quietly allowed people to sin

At length one sin was permitted and later the church allowed more. Finally it became possible to sin after baptism and still be saved through confession, communion , etc.

### ***Baptism from a symbolic viewpoint: Based on "Some Answered Questions"***

There are many people ( Christians and non-Christian) who believe that what John the Baptist was doing by immersing people in the Jordan had **spiritual significance** and *should not be taken literally*. To them what he meant in reality was:

" O God! as my body has become purified and cleansed from physical impurities, in the same way purify my soul from the impurities of the world of nature- **evil qualities : anger, hatred, pride, hypocrisy**, fraud, etc."

What he was doing was making people spiritually ready for the advent of Christ, so they start a new life under the banner of his guidance. Water here does not mean material water as in Luke it is said:

"...he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost [help of the Holy Spirit] and with fire [love of God]...". (Luke 3:16)

Fire, in this verse ,is believed by some, to be the **fire of the love of God** which **burns away the impurities** and helps people to believe in God.

"These natural impurities are evil qualities: anger, lust, worldliness, pride, lying, hypocrisy, fraud, self-love, etc. **Man cannot free himself** from the rage of the carnal passions except by the **help of the Holy Spirit**. That is why He says baptism with the spirit."

SAQ

*Cleaning with water in the Old Testament*

In the Hebrew Bible, cleansing with water is an important part of purification rites, especially after sexual activity or contact with a corpse (Lev. 15.18, Num. 19.13).

### ***Adult baptism in the New Testament***

He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved (Acts 11:14)

When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us (Acts 16:15)

At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized (Acts 16:33)

### ***Adult baptism in early Christianity***

Two examples of the early Christian writers (Fathers of the Church) that didn't believe in the baptism of infants are: Hermas who live in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Another Father of the Church who also lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century who was the author of the "Epistle of Barnabs" argued that the souls of children are entirely innocent and born without sin. But in his writings, Augustine considered the custom of infant baptism both ancient and valid. He took as authoritative the brief references of earlier writers linking baptism with an inherited sin.

### ***Pagan baptism***

Pagans had baptism maybe as an act of purification.

### ***Limbo in Catholic Church***

In Roman **Catholic** theology, **limbo** describes the **temporary status** of the souls of **good persons** who died before the **resurrection of Jesus**, and the **permanent status** of the **unbaptised** who **die in infancy** (without having committed any personal sins, but without having been freed from original sin).

### ***Baptism in New Testament***

In the **Gospel according to St John**, Christ has said: **'Except a man be born of water [life] and the Spirit [bounty of God], he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'** The **priests** have **interpreted** this into meaning that **baptism is necessary for salvation.**

Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris

Talks, p.81



- **The Sacrament of Eucharist (“give thanks”)**

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." ( Matthew 26:26 - 28 )

The above passage became the **basis of** the sacrament of **Eucharist**. Eucharist is the **commemoration of Jesus' last supper** with his apostles before his crucifixion. In the early years of the church, it became customary for Christians to gather together and eat a meal recalling the death of Jesus. Perhaps it was simply a meal of bread and wine, or it may have included other foods. Eventually, the Eucharist among some Christians, particularly **Roman Catholics** (and to a lesser extent, the Eastern Orthodox churches) became a sacred meal in which **the bread and wine** actually became the **flesh and blood** of Jesus. This is called the **doctrine of transubstantiation**. This doctrine teaches that during the **mass**, when the priest at the altar pronounces the word ' **this is my body**' the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the **substance of the body and blood** of Christ. So **without changing in shape or taste** they are the very body and blood of Christ. In sharing the **communion “meal”** together, the **people** are **united with each** other as well as **with Christ**.

### ***The history of Transubstantiation***

Some church fathers believed in the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist; others considered the elements as signs of the body and blood of Christ, and that His presence is spiritual. In the **9<sup>th</sup> century**, a **French monk** by the name of **Paschasius Radbertus**, wrote a **treatise** called "**On the Body and Blood of the Lord**" which was the **beginning and the foundation of the belief of transubstantiation**. Though, at this time, it was only at best **a theory** and **NOT widely accepted or taught**. He was opposed by Ratranmus, a contemporary monk at the monastery of Corbie. Ratranmus wrote: "The bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ **in a figurative sense**" (De corpore et sanguine Christi). This controversy between two Catholic monks shows that both views were present in the Catholic church at least up to the eleventh century.

**Transubstantiation as a term**, was apparently first **used by the archbishop of Tours, Hildebert of Lavardin ( 1056 - 1133 AD )**. The **doctrine was authoritatively declared** to be the **faith of the church** at a **council held in Rome under Pope Gregory VII in 1079**, and **again in the Fourth Lateran Council**. In **1215 C.E.**, at the Fourth Lateran Council **under Pope Innocent III**, the doctrine of **transubstantiation** was **reaffirmed** as an article of faith, or creed to **be believed in without question**.

### ***Oppositions to Transubstantiation***

In the **16th** century, **Erasmus**, the leader of the **Dutch reform** movement who was a theologian, interpreted **the presence of Christ in the sacrament as spiritual**. This same idea was expressed by **Ulrich Zwingli** who was the leader of another Protestant movement called **Zwinglianism** in the **16<sup>th</sup> century**. He also interpreted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as purely **commemorative and spiritual**. Today, **most** Protestants including **most Baptists** believe that the **bread and wine** are **symbolic of Christ** and are a **reminder of his sacrifice**, but that they are not **literally** transformed into his body and blood.

## Some Answered Questions: Eucharist

The **presence of Christ is ONLY symbolic.**

" I am the LIVING BREAD which came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and NOT DIE." (John 6: 50, 51)

"It is clear that the **body of Christ** did **not descend from heaven**, but it came from the **womb of Mary**; and **that which descended** from the heaven of God was the **spirit of Christ**. As the **Jews** thought that Christ spoke of His body, they made **objections**, for it is said in the 42nd verse of the same chapter: "And they said, Is **not this Jesus, the son of Joseph**, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?"

Reflect how clear it is that what Christ meant by the **heavenly bread** was **His spirit, His bounties, His perfections and His teachings**; for it is said in the 63rd verse: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." Therefore, it is evident that the spirit of Christ is a heavenly grace which descends from heaven; **whosoever receives light** from that spirit in abundance--that is to say, the **heavenly teachings--finds everlasting life.**"

Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp.97-98

In the same way, reflect that when Christ blessed the bread and gave it to His disciples, saying, "**This is My body**," and gave grace to them, He **was with them in person, in presence**, and form. He **was not transformed into bread and wine**; if He had been turned into bread and wine, He could **not have remained with the disciples in body, in person and in presence**. Then it is clear that the **bread and wine were symbols** which signified: I have given you My bounties and perfections, and when you have received this bounty, you have gained eternal life and have partaken of your share and your portion of the heavenly nourishment.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p.99

## Conclusion

### Is God hearing the prayers of non-Christians?

If not, why not? Are they not sincere? Or are they all incapable of being sincere?

Are they not His children? If not, whose children are they?

If God does ignore the prayers of non-Christians, why would we want to believe in a God who ignores the prayers of 5 out of 6 of His children?!? Would a kind Father do that?

Do I want to believe in a God who condemns 5 out of 6 of His children to eternal damnation?! Remember, that would require that His Hell (if you believe in a **physical** hell) to be 5 times the size of His heaven (if you believe in a **physical** heaven).

In the end, I recommend that you read the following books that are classics in the field of Christian theology. These are by Christian university professors (including Missionaries) who will explain how the meaning of the message of Christ was gradually changed over time by priests, ministers and others. So, over the centuries, for various reasons, different Biblical concepts were misinterpreted and got us to where we are today:

Eck, Diana L. **Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras.** Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

Hick, John and Paul F. Knitter. **The Myth of Christian Uniqueness.** Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994.

Hick, John (Editor). **The Myth of God Incarnate.** London: SCM Press Ltd., 1977.

Hick, John. **The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age.** Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press. 1993.

Knitter, Paul F. **No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions.** Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985.