



**SELINUS UNIVERSITY**  
OF SCIENCES AND LITERATURE

**RELIGION BUILDS AND STRENGTHENS A PERSON'S  
CHARACTER IN PREPARATION FOR ETERNAL LIFE  
WITH GOD: HE DESIRES FOR US, HIS CHILDREN,  
HAPPINESS NOW, AND FOREVER, IN THE CELESTIAL  
KINGDOM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis intends and wishes to show how religion can build and strengthen a person's character and enhance his or her spiritual progression. And how a religious background profoundly encourages one to look for a more complete, brighter, and glorious future in the next life. At least this is a certain Christian viewpoint discussed and presented by this paper's author.

[Because] among all our joys, there was no one that more filled our hearts, than the blessed continuance of the preaching of God's sacred Word among us; which is that inestimable treasure, which excelleth all the riches of the earth; because the fruit thereof extendeth itself, not only to the time spent in this transitory world, but directeth and disposeth men unto that eternal happiness which is above in heaven (The Translators of The Bible AV).

We can have everything in this life, but without the blessings of God which come by sincere religious observance and commitment, our true potential and never-ending happiness from a loving Heavenly Father (God the Father), will not be completely realized.

Thus, the findings in this paper support what the original Holy Bible translators in the Authorized King James Version (AV) understood, that all the people of the earth (God's children) can discover for themselves their relationships with their maker (God) and look forward to a reality of never-ending happiness with Him, in the life to come. As individuals develop and mature intellectually and spiritually, the community and the nation benefit tremendously. It is the author's argument that the earth's maker and creator (God) has designed and planned this earth to be a wonderful and an excellent creation in all aspects, so that His children can experience mortality, and be happy now and forever. Mortality is part of eternity in God's plan for all His children, whom He loves very much. Religion, has throughout history, contributed tremendously, and encouraged devotedly to the cause of human-kindness among nations, care for the earth, and sustainability of the earth's environment, as well as promoting a dutiful relationship among people, and a reverent partnership with their creator.

The thesis will attempt to follow and explain this main theme, by using the following overall structure. First, is the Introduction. Second, the Literature Review chapter. Third, the Methodology. Fourth, a chapter of the Contents and Results. Fifth, the Discussion and Conclusion. The people of the world really need each other and cannot go without having a

good relationship with God and humankind, to both progress and be happy eternally. Take God away, and we have no religion. Take religion away, and we have no practical, constructive, and spiritual connections with each other and with our maker. God wants and desires for all His children on earth, to have His type and kind of life, both in mortality and more particularly, in the eternity. And the way to achieve that joyous and loftiest goal, is by keeping His commandments. God's Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior, and Redeemer, has taught and summarized those commandments by saying that, loving God and loving our neighbors "hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:40 AV).

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Definition and Philosophers

Religion is worship and service to God or a supernatural power. It requires a follower to be committed and devoted to a particular set of “institutionalised system of religious” beliefs, practices, and attitudes.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, people worship and aspire to do God’s Will because they want to be blessed in various and miraculous ways, which they know, they cannot obtain in any other way. This is why religion is both appealing and attractive to believers, especially if they have had examples of such blessings, whether it be material things or a spiritual manifestation. Still, other people believe that God’s gifts come through the kindness of their neighbours; while others testify that they have felt God’s spirit and comfort to their souls, in times of trials, and as an answer to a sincere prayer. And in terms of eternity, a believer’s faith increases by a certain knowledge that if he or she keeps God’s commandments in this life, the compensatory returns in heaven, are beyond one’s mortal comprehension and imaginations. These followers understand and believe Jesus’ teaching that, “In my Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2 AV). On the other hand, some people may wonder how this can be possible for about eight billion people in the world today, (not to mention, the billions of people who have died). But that is exactly why it is important to point out in here, that unless religion contains something supernatural and superhuman to offer, the rich are the only happy and successful people on the earth. Many people believe and understand that money cannot bring lasting happiness. They see strong family life, trusted friends, and faith in God, as examples of things that will make people feel secured and happy overall. Fortunately, in God’s wisdom, and from His perspective, both the rich and the poor are equal. The rewards of happiness in this life, and especially in the next, are possible for anybody who has faith in His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and who is willing to follow His perfect example and teachings.

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<sup>1</sup>“MERRIAM-WEBSTER: Dictionary,” Google, accessed July 6, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>.

Throughout history, philosophers, including poets and prophets, have pondered, and contemplated God's loving kindness, and the purpose of religion. And they have also written and talked about human vulnerability and frailties. Hence, is the need for true religion, so that we can receive God's mercy and power to overcome and face the difficult challenges and trials of mortal life. And in particular, we need His directions and commandments that will help us to return and live in His presence. The following are examples of certain philosophers' views and ideas that point the human family towards their heavenly home:

Each stage of your life is like petals of a flower...unfolding and opening until it comes to full bloom...You will blossom and then you die...But know that this is not your ending.” — Summerlyn Guthrie.<sup>2</sup>

Reality is what exists whether we believe in it or not.”— J.A.V. Simson.<sup>3</sup>

Believing or not makes no difference to the Absolute of Things That Be. But it does to you. For you shall live and die accordingly. A wise person, or a fool. Choose.”— Fakeer Ishavardas.<sup>4</sup>

If men are so wicked with religion, what would they be if without it?” — Benjamin Franklin, 1706-1790, American politician & writer.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>“Goodreads: Philosophy Religion Quotes,” Google, accessed July 7, 2023, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/philosophy-religion>.

<sup>3</sup>Google, “Goodreads: Philosophy Religion Quotes.”

<sup>4</sup>Google, “Goodreads: Philosophy Religion Quotes.”

<sup>5</sup>“THE BEST QUOTATIONS: Religion,” Google, accessed July 7, 2023, <https://best-quotations.com/catquotes.php?categ=0120>.



There is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it.” — George Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950, Irish writer, Nobel 1925.<sup>6</sup>

When I do good I feel good, when I do bad I feel bad, and that's my religion.” — Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865, American President.<sup>7</sup>

There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion. — Will Durant, 1885-1981, American historian & philosopher.<sup>8</sup>

I am still far from being what I want to be, but with God's help I shall succeed.” Vincent Van Gogh.<sup>9</sup>

Ignorance is the curse of God; knowledge is the wing wherewith we fly to heaven.” William Shakespeare.<sup>10</sup>

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27 AV).

When we look at these philosophers’ perspectives and aspirations, they do point to the need for us to look to God for guidance, and to take religion seriously. They encourage us to live a higher level of behavior and discourage people from obscenity and disrespect towards each other and against God. Philosophers and prophets also support and imply the need for religion (an organization) to progress, propel, and educate us in the ways of Deity (God). He

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<sup>6</sup>Google, “THE BEST QUOTATIONS: Religion.”

<sup>7</sup>Google, “THE BEST QUOTATIONS: Religion.”

<sup>8</sup>Google, “THE BEST QUOTATIONS: Religion.”

<sup>9</sup>“Brainy Quote,” Google, accessed July 7, 2023, <https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/vincent-van-gogh-quotes>.

<sup>10</sup>“AZ Quotes,” Google, accessed July 7, 2023, [https://www.azquotes.com/author/13382-William\\_Shakespeare/tag/god](https://www.azquotes.com/author/13382-William_Shakespeare/tag/god).

motivates and implies a sense of beauty in our humanity and a loving relationship for one another, as well as the appreciation of nature's beauty, related to the natural affection and compassion we, as children of the Almighty God, should have and feel for each other. All these thoughts and undertakings are what our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, want us to do and implement as we journey towards our spiritual destination of never-ending peace with them, in their eternal Celestial kingdom.

God delights in us when we are cheerful and positive about life. He wants us to face life with optimism, awareness, responsibility, and reverence for God. He wants us to focus our minds to our eternal goal, to be with Him and our loved ones forever. There is a better way ahead and we can keep educating ourselves in His ways, in order to reach that brighter life beyond the veil of death. When Jesus Christ comes again, to rule and reign on this earth for a thousand years of peace, and according to God's will and our obedience to His commandments, we will be privileged to witness both indescribable beauty and miraculous blessings, as prophets prophesied, and historians had written, in many parts of the scriptures (e.g., Rev. 20:4-7 AV). Therefore, philosophers and prophets' standpoint is a divine asset and direction for humankind. Because they make people aspire to their full potential, both physically and spiritually. Philosophers and prophets are both implying and suggesting that religion is a vehicle for us to find out who we really are, where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going after this life. A substantial number of prophets, poets, and philosophers (including the ones above), thorough out human history, have wonderfully painted and clarified our path to a happier world through all eternity.

Our Heavenly Father had revealed this vision more than once, for the inhabitants of this planet, which He created, for an extremely wise purpose (for all of His children), as already mentioned. Moreover, He said to Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful," multiply, "and replenish the earth." Furthermore, He saw that all the beautiful nature, food, and the first human couple he had created, were "very good" (Gen. 1-2 AV). God wanted His excellent creations to eventually bring back to Him glory and joy, but most importantly, the eternal happiness and felicity for His children, the family of humanity, the family of God. And because He is an eternal and wise God, He created something that would eventually make Him and His children everlastingly happy and content: a perfect plan by a perfect God, for His spiritual posterity. Another name for this plan is simply, God's everlasting family. And like any wise father, or an excellent architecture, God is firm, resolute, and immovable, in achieving His plan of happiness

for all His children. This plan is explained in greater details and will become more veritable and transparent in the rest of the dissertation.

## 1.2 Timeline, Population, and Implications

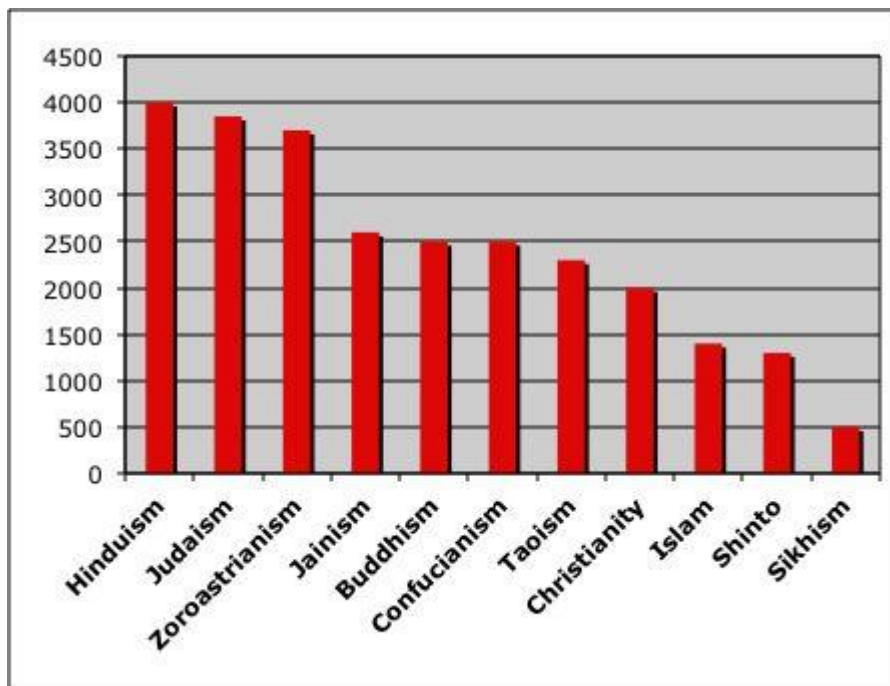


FIGURE 1: The relative years (ages) of major world religions.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 1 bar graph illustrates clearly and colorfully, the history of the major religions on the earth today. Hinduism is the oldest, originating about four thousand years, while Sikhism, started at about five hundred years ago. And even though the two most populous religions on the earth (see Figure 2 below) are Christianity and Islam, they started off at approximately 2000 and 1400 years ago, respectively (Figure 1). In particular, Christianity (31.7%) and Islam (25%) will be the two highest religious congregations as of 2023 (Figure 2). These two religions, as well as Judaism, had the prophet Abraham, as their key and common ancestor and prophet, as recorded in the Holy Bible (AV) and in both Judaic and Islamic texts. In other words, the history of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, have strong biblical connections, because of the prophet Abraham.

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<sup>11</sup>“Beliefnet: Religion 101,” Google, accessed July 11, 2023, <https://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/religion101/2012/10/how-old-are-the-religions.html>.









Projected size of major religious groups for 2023 <sup>[1]</sup>		
Religion		Percent
Christianity		31.7%
Islam		25.0%
Unaffiliated		15.2%
Hinduism		14.9%
Buddhism		6.6%
Folk religions		5.6%
Sikhism		0.3%
Other religions		0.8%

FIGURE 2: Estimated population of religions for 2023.<sup>12</sup>

Abraham was the Lord Jehovah's (Jesus Christ's) prophet (OT, The Bible AV), who had a son named Isaac. He in turn had a son called, Jacob, who was the key ancestor of the Jews (Judaism). Abraham had an older son named Ishmael. All these three religions, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity believe that Ishmael was the Muslims' main ancestor.<sup>13</sup> In short, the Jews (Judaism), and the Muslims (Islam) are both literal descendants of Abraham. But Christians have a spiritual connection to Abraham because Jesus Christ (also a descendant of Abraham), is their Lord and Savior (a Jew).

In short, the above two sources (Figures 1 and 2) seem to indicate and strongly imply both an enlightening path and a sense of optimism for religions overall, in the modern world. Because our Heavenly Father has promised Abraham, that through him and his posterity, "all families of the earth [will] be blessed" (Gen. 12:3 AV). This is a promising and an encouraging state of mind to be in, for believers, who always want a promised future for their children and families. Parents should never give up training and raising their children in the path of education and righteousness, because there is no better way in achieving success in the long-term. Religion is there to assist and guide people to the path which leads back to the presence of God.

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<sup>12</sup>"List of religious populations," Wikipedia, accessed July 11, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_religious\\_populations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations).

<sup>13</sup>"Ishmael," Britannica ACADEMIC, accessed July 11, 2023, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Ishmael/630224>.

## 1.3 Monotheistic Religions: Basic Attitudes, and Characteristics

### 1.3.1 Judaism: basic attitudes, and characteristics

- Worship the one true God of heaven
- Become a holy people
- Keep God's laws and covenants
- Help the poor and the needy
- Still waiting for their true Messiah
- Literal descendants of prophet Abraham
- Pray often

The Jewish people (also known as the Israelites) have historically and resolutely claimed, as recorded in the Bible (AV), that they had personal contact with the true God of heaven, Jehovah. For example, the prophet Moses delivered the Jews from bondage, under the Pharaoh of Egypt. In that miraculous event, Jehovah saved the Israelites, by allowing the people to walk on dry ground, while Pharaoh's army who pursued them from behind, were drowned in the depths of the red sea. Thus, because of these types of miracles and a lasting relationship between the Jews and God, this is why this inner belief in a personal God, is central and has become such a "differentiating factor in Jewish thought." In short, this quote and the dotted points above, illustrate and give a very brief summary of the main nature and characteristics of Judaism:<sup>14</sup>

The Jewish God had promised the people that if they looked after each other's welfare and keep His commandments, including the ten commandments (Exo. 20 AV), He would bless them to be a great nation and also, a blessing for the rest of the inhabitants of the earth. In particular, He would send His only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to be their Messiah. The Jews did not follow or believe in Him and are still waiting for their Messiah to come. A difference and a contrast between this Jews' thinking on this topic, and the Christians' own version and

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<sup>14</sup>"Judaism," Britannica ACADEMIC, accessed July 12, 2023, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Judaism/105859>.

interpretation of the Messiah, is discussed and examined later in this chapter and the rest of the paper.

### **1.3.2 Islam: basic attitudes, and characteristics**

- Worship one true God
- Five daily prayers
- Pay annual tax
- Fasting in the month of Ramadan
- Sacred worship and sacred places, like Mecca
- Help the sick
- Literal descendants of prophet Abraham

The Muslims' (Islamic) basic attitudes and characteristics on religion are summarized in here.<sup>15</sup> Like the Jews and Christians, Muslims believe in helping the sick and praying often. And like the Jews, Muslims are also descendants of the prophet Abraham. Both nations worship the true God of heaven and earth and emphasize the need for divine help in their daily lives.

### **1.3.3 Christianity: basic attitudes, and characteristics**

- Worship the one true God of heaven
- Jesus Christ the Savior and exemplar
- Jesu Christ was the first to be resurrected
- Every person will be resurrected
- Look after the poor and the needy
- Plan of salvation and eternal life for all
- Pray always in the heart

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<sup>15</sup>Islam," Britannica ACADEMIC, accessed July 13, 2023, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Islam/105852>.

Like Judaism and Islam, Christianity has certain attitudes and characteristics that clearly define and explain Christians' religious manner of worship.<sup>16</sup> Christians, however, follow and worship God, our Heavenly Father, and His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, while both Muslims and Jews do not believe Jesus Christ as the son of God. Christians believe Jesus Christ was risen in Jerusalem about two hundred years ago, and He was also the prophesized Messiah, who was born of Mary, and espoused to a carpenter named Joseph of Nazareth (see The Bible AV). Muslims do not believe in that doctrinal understanding, while the Jews are still waiting for their own Messiah, who will come and save them physically and personally, from all their enemies and trials. Christians believe that Jesus Christ can forgive people's personal sins, and that He will come in the millennium, to personally rule on this earth for a period of thousand years of peace, as foretold by the prophets. Furthermore, Jesus Himself, had taught this doctrine, while He was preaching and living in Jerusalem (see The Bible AV). More will be written and expressed about this subject, later on in the thesis.

In summary and so far, this author has been trying to highlight and emphasize the importance of the common and fundamental attitudes and characteristics that are necessary and pertinent to a person's journey to be with God, forever. That road, no matter how difficult the oppositions are (including Satan's evil temptations and enticing), can only be possible through the help of the true God in heaven, and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. He suffered for our sins, and personally, overcame the crucifixion and death, so that everyone on this earth (and whoever lived and will yet live), will be given a free gift of a resurrected body, a body that is immortal. In addition, and in accordance with God's conditions and will, we can live again with our Heavenly Father, and our Savior Jesus Christ, and our loved ones, in the eternities. Religion can only promote and motivate such a majestic ideal. Another writer has both acknowledged and supported this rationale by saying that "Religions help people understand the world around

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<sup>16</sup>"Christianity," Britannica ACADEMIC, accessed July 13, 2023, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Christianity/105945>.



them, transcend the stresses and sufferings of this world, and deepen their relationship with others and God.”<sup>17</sup>

Hence, with the help of the God of heaven and earth, with a sincere faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, and with the aid of a solid and persuasive religion and organization, our Savior can make up the difference. He has said that the things that are not possible with people, “are possible with God” (Luke 18:27 AV). He had tried with all His soul, during His mortal ministry in Jerusalem, to create a perfect religion. This was done so that those who believed in Him, and continue to do so, would have the necessary ordinances like Baptism, as well as the right attitudes, characteristics, and other requirements, which would in turn, enable and qualify them to be with God eternally. But wicked men killed and crucified Jesus. Nevertheless, and as God had designed, the Savior was risen on the third day, and is continuing to live in heaven, and preparing a place for all His siblings who have lived, are still living, and are yet to live upon the earth (see The Bible AV). “[W]e are the offspring of God” (Acts 17:29 AV); and “all of [us] are children of the most High” (Psalm 82:6 AV). Furthermore, Jesus had taught that, Heavenly Father had loved us miraculously, by sending “his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should... have everlasting life” (John 3:16 AV). The Savior’s teachings (e.g., worshipping God, helping the needy, and praying always) continue to encourage and invite us to turn to him, so that we can reach our heavenly destination. He has promised us all, He will go and prepare residences and places for us in His heavenly “Father’s ...mansions” (John 14:2 AV).

#### **1.4 Monotheism and Prophets**

As mentioned before, and as clearly illustrated in Figure 3 below, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, all have taught and believed Abraham, as an important prophet and figure in their worship of the only true God of heaven and earth. Abraham was their common and outstanding

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<sup>17</sup>Christina Puchalski and Edward O’Donnell, “Religious and spiritual beliefs in end of life Care: how major religions view death and dying,” ScienceDirect, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1084208X05000443>.

prophet, whose life and experiences are found and recorded in their written texts or artworks. Therefore, due to Abraham's devoted service and obedience to God, the former was promised by the latter, blessings of happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. These three religions therefore, distinctively, and unmistakably, are widely known as the main monotheistic religions both of the ancient and modern eras. To these followers, prophets are the mouthpieces of God, to both speak and explain God's commandments to the people of the earth. In short and for reemphasis, Figure 3 specifically describes and demonstrates the three monotheistic religions in this world, which are, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

From both Judaism and Christianity's perspectives, Moses was another prophet through whom God revealed His will for the people of Israel. For example, God told Moses to warn and persuade Pharaoh, that if he would not let the Israelites leave Egypt, and be free from bondage, Pharaoh's, and the Egyptians' "firstborn in the land" would die (Exo. 12:12 AV).

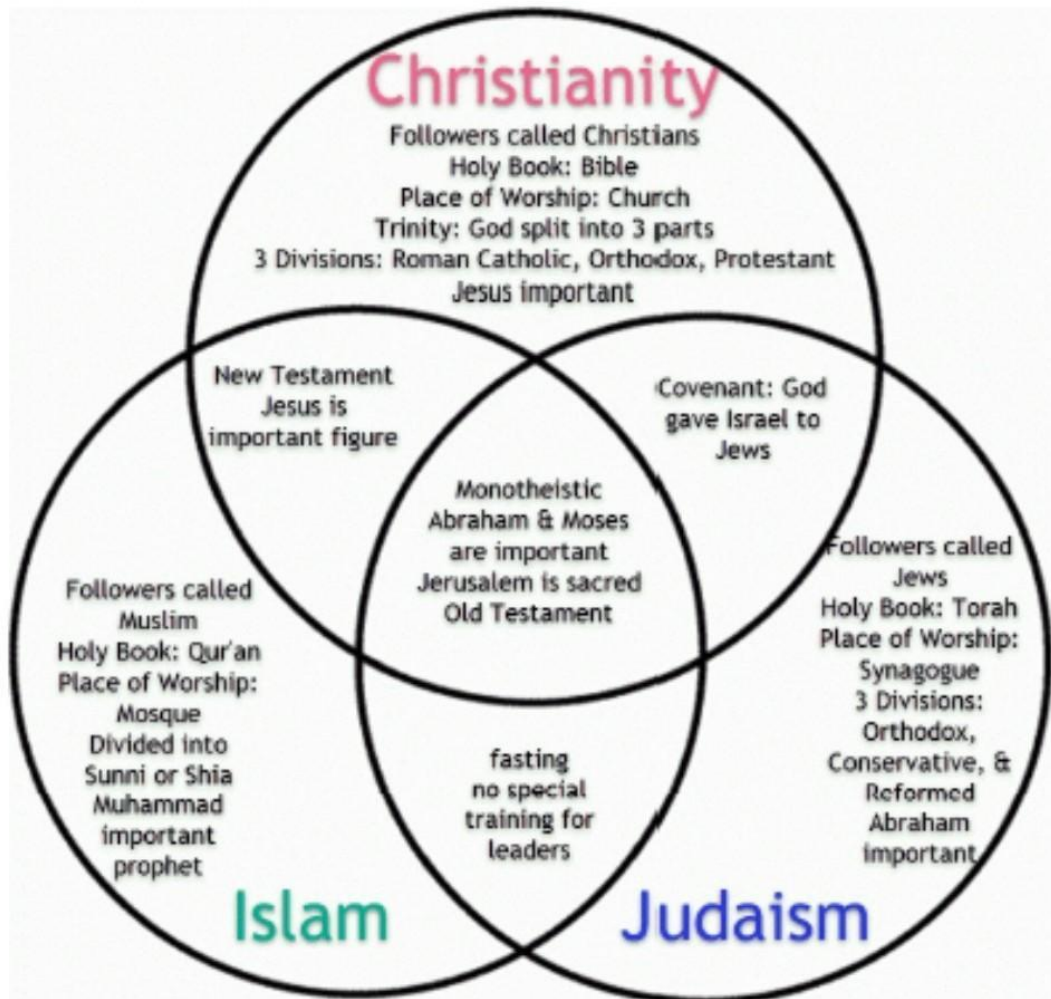


FIGURE 3: Monotheistic religions.<sup>18</sup>

This and other miracles performed by God through Moses, were all fulfilled, as recorded in the Old Testament (The Bible AV). Of course, the disappointed, distressed, and extremely angry Pharaoh eventually, let go of the Israelites.

As for Christianity, the believers also see Jesus as a prophet, someone representing God upon the earth, as an intermediary or mediator, and someone speaking the mind and will of the

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<sup>18</sup>“Which two monotheistic religions practice fasting?” Brainly, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://brainly.com/question/15556253>.

Creator. In fact, Moses had said, taught, and implied that, anyone who would not listen to Jesus Christ, a prophet “like [Moses],” would not receive peace in this life or in the world to come (Deut. 18:15 AV). Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel and thereafter, had also testified and taught the same doctrine, specifically, that God’s son, Jesus Christ (Jehovah or the Messiah), was sent, to bless the people of the world, in “turning [them] away... from [their] iniquities” (Acts 3:22-26 AV). Our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son’s purpose, of promising and giving us peace on earth and preparation for eternal life, would not be possible, without an organization or religion, of ordinances and commandments.

### **1.5 Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ’s central role**

God is intelligent, wise, perfect, and orderly in his design and purpose, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life for His children on earth. The highest characteristic and nature of our Heavenly Father, is His love for all of us, His children. God has taught this consistently and purposefully throughout the Scriptures (e.g., The Bible AV). His Beloved and Only Begotten Son, our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, has also taught this persistently and steadily, during His earthly ministry and in His primitive church (NT, The Bible AV). This religion is further emphasized and highlighted in His apostles’ teaching, after His death, that: His saints and church “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20 AV). Unlike the Jews’ belief, the Christians always see Jesus as the Messiah, a perfect being, with a perfect love, including His atoning sacrifice in Gethsemane and on Calvary’s cross. He initiated a religion during His mortal ministry, which was divine, meaningful, and unmistakably eternal in its scope, focus, and identity. This was done so that all of God’s children know of His pure love for them, and His deep desire for them to become heirs of His power, mansions, and blessings in heaven (see The Bible AV). Jesus has reminded us of these miraculous and indescribable eternal blessings for the righteous, in his intercessory prayer, found in the New Testament (John 17 AV).

The Savior had miraculously paid the price for humankind’s sins in His first coming. He was crucified, died, and was resurrected in Jerusalem, on the third day. Christians are now waiting for the Millenium Second Coming of their Lord and King, to rule on this earth for a thousand years of peace (Rev. 20:4-7 AV). Here, it is implied that religion is a way of life which teaches important beliefs and doctrines that a person, families, and communities need to follow and abide, if they are to return and live with God for ever. God is eternal and He wants

His children to live with Him in a never-ending state of joy and happiness. Thus, He wants true religion to bring His people and followers together, to serve each other, to worship God, and to look to Him for guidance and protection both physically and spiritually.

His children on earth can prepare now, for Christ's second coming. And they also can look forward to a reunion with their Heavenly parents. This parenthood and divine doctrine is purposely implied in Heavenly Father's teachings and commandments that, His sons, and daughters on earth, were created in His image, both "male and female" Moreover, He commanded Adam and Eve, to "multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:27-28 AV). Parents (father and mother) and the traditional family unit, is a prototype and image of the family units in heaven, consisting of a mother, father, and children. Altogether, all our families, according to God's will and final judgment, will combine into the overall family of God, and receive exaltation and all that Heavenly Father has. Heavenly Father so loved us that He sent us His Son, to die and be resurrected, so that we may have eternal life (John 3:16 AV). Therefore, God has given us just a tiny, yet miraculous and incomprehensible glimpse, of what is installed in heaven for His children, His heirs. These are those who faithfully and cheerfully observe, and keep all His ordinances, covenants, and commandments (Rev. 21 AV).

Furthermore, this combination of faith and religious observance reminds this writer of a past, personal religious experience. In this dissertation, he refers to himself as Andy, and not as a Methodist, as he was brought up by his grandfather, who was also his minister. Andy's religion is a certain Christian faith. It is faith and "the belief in God, the eternal Father, in his Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit."<sup>19</sup> This author also clearly wants transparency and to continue his main theme, the title of his thesis. In brief, God wants all His children to be happy- now, and in the next life- and to really feel His true love for them, in a daily basis. This great and indescribable love is similar in a small way, how devoted parents, especially when they

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<sup>19</sup>"Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Doctrine," Britannica ACADEMIC, accessed August 8, 2023, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Church-of-Jesus-Christ-of-Latter-day-Saints/53770>.

get old, sincerely, and intently wish to give and pass along all their love and possessions to their children, so that they can be happy and secured in the long-term.

## **1.6 A Specific Cultural background**

Andy was brought up, since as an eighteen months' old baby, in a Samoan village and culture, during the nineteen fifties and sixties. His house was planted, like a tasty and fresh sandwich, in the middle, between the blue ocean and the green forest of the Pacific island. As far as he could remember, his childhood life was both beautiful and spiritual. From a spiritual standpoint, he and his family were happy, living a simple and primitive life. Every day, about 6 AM, His family always sang a hymn and said a prayer before anything else. Then in the evening before meals, it was always another hymn, another prayer, followed by a short reading of certain verses of the holy scriptures (The Bible AV). This set the tone for Andy's life every day, until he left the island at age 18 years old, to further his education and to seek employment in New Zealand (the closest European civilization). Looking back to that exceptional and divine experience, he could not explain as a youth, what it was. But he knows now, it was a beautiful and indescribable feeling in his heart, mind, and soul. It was a deep feeling of love for God and His love for him. It made Andy confident in facing life each day, it made him feel safe and secured, and it made him believe that God was daily, and constantly protecting and watching over him, with pure kindness and sincere care. Often, he would cry when the spirit of God overcame him with love and joy. It was a very personal and real interaction with the divine.

It is true, that every person on this earth, ever borne or will yet borne, no matter his or her background, is loved and remembered by God, through his loving spirit. Therefore, He gives each child who ever comes into this world, the same gift and blessing, in order for them to recognize God's love, and the path that leads back to our heavenly home. He gives us our conscience, which is also known, as the light of Jesus Christ. It is "the true Light, which lighteth every [person who] cometh into the world" (John 1:9 AV). God loves us equally, no matter our culture, or race, because He "is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34 AV). And God loves all of His children on earth, by sending His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to die and be resurrected for us, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16 AV). God's spirit comforts and reassures each person, that He is interested personally in every detail of our lives. Overall, village life for Andy was both happy and beautiful. He loved those

days of swimming with other village children in the sea, and playing cricket with them on the road, because there were no cars or other distractions all day long. It was a simple life but also a satisfying and memorable life.

Andy had a strict upbringing by a devout and religious grandfather and leader, of the entire village. However, as far as Andy could remember, his grandfather never lost his temper or hit/chastise him, on Sundays. Thus, even today, Sunday is always a special and joyful day of Andy's entire life. In the Samoan village, every Sunday, the whole family dressed in their whites (effectively, from top to toe), just like all the other villagers. Then they all attended the white chapel, to worship God. It was such an angelic and unforgettable sight to see, as the villagers were walking to and from the chapel, each Sunday, communicating reverently and joyfully, as shown by their beautiful and happy faces. The shape of the village was like a semi-circle at the edge of the ocean. Hence, while the islanders were happily and cheerfully conversing as they were walking to and from church, their white clothes were seen and reflected back by the ocean's surface and gentle waves, nearby. After church, families had their beautiful and tasty meals (including coconuts, fish, pawpaw, pineapple, bananas, taro, etc). Afterwards, they would socialize reverently in their own homes and houses (made of coconut leaves and columns), read the scriptures, and rested the entire day. They did this so as to keep the sabbath day holy, as God had commanded in the scriptures (The Bible AV). Children were not allowed to play outside, or swim in the sea with their friends, and nobody was allowed to work. For the islanders (like other Christians), Sunday was revered and honored as the Lord's holy day of rest, and for God's children to honor it, make it holy, and rest from all their labours (Exod. 20:8 AV).

Undoubtedly, religion had played a big and major part in Andy's life. It made him spiritual and humble. It taught him to look to God for comfort in both good times and during challenging times. In this thesis, it certainly makes sense to talk about the need of developing a good relationship between people and with their God. We need religion to bring followers of Jesus Christ together in unity, to strengthen their characters, and to learn the correct way of worshipping Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Without an organized religion, there is no connection between us, and no connection with our maker; and there will be no hope for an eternal future. Heavenly Father is a God of love, purpose, intelligence, and glory. He wants His eternal family (hopefully, all of humankind if they follow Him) to have order. Heavenly Father's main instructions for His organization, were founded by His Beloved Son, in His

religious and primitive church, which He first established in Jerusalem (The Bible AV), approximately two thousand years ago.

Apart from the actual religious experience by Andy, he equally found solace and spirituality in the beauty of the natural environment. This gave him unique happiness, related to his religious experience in his home, and in the house of worship on Sundays. The environment and nature was like a paradise. He was captivated and mesmerized by the deep blue ocean and sky, the pure green forest, the never-ending supply of bright sunlight, the colourful and beautiful flowers, and the birds welcoming Andy each day, with their sweetest melodies in a most heavenly, indescribable, and harmonious manner. This natural and environmental beauty and glimpse gave Andy unique, joyful, and fantastic memories of his youth. Both the frequent religious observances and nature's beauty complemented each other beautifully. Such beauty clearly cemented in Andy's mind, heart and soul, how wonderful and miraculous God's love, purpose, and creations, precisely are. Such happiness and joyful memories would continue to comfort and reassure Andy throughout his life today, especially during the demanding situations and circumstances of mortality. There were no cars or shops in the village. But every day was a special and beautiful day for him. The villagers ate fresh foods. The former lived on the fishes from the sea, coconuts, bananas, paw paws, pineapples, and other delicious foods that nature could freely provide in the nearby forest. If he did not have to leave Samoa at age 18 years old, to pursue education and employment in New Zealand, Andy's life would still (in his mind now), be perfect, complete, beautiful, and spiritual.

Here, the author is presenting a certain Christian view, based on the basic attitudes and characteristics of Christianity, as taught in the scriptures (The Bible AV). Andy is promoting and accentuating one of the teachings of Jesus Christ and His original apostles. That is, His followers should not be ashamed to proclaim His gospel. Because it invites people to come unto Him and His church and religion. Because it gives them the power "unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16 AV). Andy's learning and understanding of peace from God and His omniscience, clearly explains and identifies His love for all His children on earth, and what He prepares for them in the next life.. And His Spirit reassures us of that love and that promise, no matter where we live, and however we are raised in various parts and cultures of the world. We can worship Him anywhere, and in our hearts. Because we are blessed with the Light of Christ, our conscience, given to us as a free gift from God when we are born into mortality. This is our guide to receiving more knowledge and more light from Him, in this world, and as we prepare



for the next life. Our challenge is to trust in His plan for eternal happiness, central to the life and teachings of His Son, Jesus Christ.

This introduction is pointing us to Jesus Christ's purpose, which is eternal happiness for us, and for the glory of our Heavenly Father and our Savior. All things good come from them. We need religion to help us love and serve one another as siblings (spirit brothers and sisters), as well as to draw us closer to our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son. They love us equally and mercifully and will never forsake us (Deut. 4:31 AV) if we keep their commandments. They want us to be happy now and forever. Mortality is part of our journey to their presence. Each day is an experience to become like God, by following the example of Jesus Christ. We can overcome our trials in this life by consistently and vigorously looking up to His character and attributes of excellence and spirituality. Doing these things will help us achieve our eternal goal, to be with God and become His contended and joyful heirs. He has promised those who keep His commandments and follow the Savior, never-ending happiness, and joy, which is like a "well of water" inside us that leads to "everlasting life" (John 4:14 AV).

Finally and in preparation for the following chapters, the author sincerely wishes that "the study of religion [will become] increasingly viewed as an important element in the education of ... school students" [and other relevant institutions such as the family] "to ensure that the study of religion will increase in significance."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, and as it has been both emphasized and implied so far, this author sees a need for further research into faith, spirituality, and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Why? Because all truths belong to him, whether it be mathematics, technologies, science, etc., or knowledge through personal revelations, through God's Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost). Researchers need this kind of research and education today, as we prepare for the Savior's millennium reign on the earth. The earth will eventually be filled with all "the knowledge of the LORD" (Isa. 11:9 AV); moreover, God both implies and gives us the spiritual responsibility to pursue and continue that vital and indispensable

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<sup>20</sup>Ninian Smart, "Cross-cultural perspective," Britannica ACADEMIC, accessed August 8, 2023, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/study-of-religion/109466>.

education and pedagogy about all His creations and His knowledge and truths (see Gen. 1:26-28; and Isa. 45:18 AV). Heavenly Father and our Savior love us and want us to know their intelligence, wisdom, and mysteries. In short, Jesus Christ has purposefully taught and implied this by saying to us, to seek His kingdom first, and all these things “shall be added unto [us]” (Luke 12:31 AV). The following chapters will endeavor to explore, evaluate, and validate these key themes and concepts.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Jesus Christ's Character and Baptism

The central figure, chiefest character, and key exemplar for Christians to follow and achieve their ultimate goal of eternal life with God, is our Savior, Jesus Christ. By following His example daily and intently, we can have the guidance of His Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost) in our hearts. Therefore, we will naturally want to mirror His life and teachings by our daily actions. This will in turn help our families and neighbours to do likewise, so that we can all return to God's presence, where there is eternal joy and peace. Jesus has commanded us to love God and serve our neighbours with humility and purpose, so that we can enter His kingdom, and receive all of God's heavenly blessings (see Matt. 6: 4, 20, 33 AV). God sent us His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, because of His love and desire to reward us eternally. The same point was both emphasized and highlighted by Marcus Dods (2004) who argued that:

The greatest possible attainment [people] can make in this world is likeness to The Lord Jesus Christ; [and that], our prospects for future life [in heaven] ... will certainly vary with the resemblance of our character to that of Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Dods (2004) also found that Jesus Christ has all the power to bless us. By exercising great faith, "effort and prayer" we can be the channel of communicating the love of Christ to other people. The author further suggested and implied the need for true and sincere religion, where followers can offer their hearts eagerly, and by going out to perform "Christian work or to the interests of Christ's kingdom." However, Dods' study could have been broadened by stating the Ordinance and Authority necessary and required, in order to comply with the full and basic requirements to enter God's kingdom. Jesus Christ fulfilled these requirements at the start of His earthly Ministry. He was baptized in river Jordan, by John the Baptist, who had this authority. Symbolically, during the baptism, the Holy Ghost descended upon Jesus, symbolized

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<sup>21</sup>Marcus Dods, *How to become like Christ* (Project Gutenberg books, 2004), <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/13460>.

by the appearance of a dove. And Heavenly Father's voice was also heard, indicating His approval and love for His Beloved Son, and God's supplication for all the people of the world to follow Christ's example. God's voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:13-17 AV). God is pleased when we enter the gate of baptism into His Church and Kingdom. This is the true path and entrance to God's eternal family and residence; and He invites all the human family to be part of that Plan of Happiness, which is everlasting. During His ministry, Jesus taught that except a person "be born of water and of the Spirit" [he or she] "cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3 AV). Jesus Christ set the perfect example for each one of us to follow, so that we can be happy in this life and in the life to come.

Christians and some writers would welcome and support the teaching of Christ found in the scriptures and taught by Christ and His apostles. That is, the Ordinance of Baptism is representative and symbolic of Christ's death and resurrection (see Rom. 6:3-5 AV). One author appeared to have supported this teaching and doctrine. Kowalski (2021) had clearly explained and concluded that:

What connects the bap-tism of Jesus with that of a Christian is the gift of the Spirit, the experience of divine filiation, and the promised inheritance of glory with the Father. These elements ... where Paul describes the new life of the baptized with possible allusions to the event of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. The baptismal theology of the apostle is fundamentally influenced by Jesus' pas-chal event – his death and resurrection...<sup>22</sup>

Kowalski's (2021) study, however, could also have been expanded and strengthened by doing the following. His enlightened and inspired study strongly supports the spiritual significance and symbolism between baptism and Christ's death and resurrection. Nevertheless, the study comes short of pointing the readers and researchers to the depth and

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<sup>22</sup>Marcin Kowalski, "Baptism – the Revelation of the Filial Relationship of Christ and the Christian," *The Biblical Annals*, 11(3), 459–495 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.31743/biban.12263>.

the realm of spirituality, and not just academic research. Because God desires for all of us to have faith not just during worship, but also in our academic pursuit, by seeking and relying upon the power of the Holy Ghost. Jesus Christ, who possesses both academic and spiritual knowledge (see Isa. 50 AV), has both taught and implied strongly, for His disciples to seek His knowledge first. When they do so, more knowledge and blessings will be granted unto them in the long run (see Matt. 6:33 AV). In short, when researchers both understand the scriptures and have the spirit of revelation (the influence of the Holy Ghost), Christ's doctrine of Baptism is both researched and taught with transparency, faith, and spirituality. This in turn, will enhance and tremendously benefit people's knowledge of the Godhead (The Father, The Son, and The Holy Ghost). Their desire and purpose is to invite all to be baptized by immersion (in water), in the name of Jesus Christ (see Eph. 4:5; Mark 16:14-20; Acts 8:35-39 AV), and to eventually exalt them (God's children) in the Celestial kingdom forever (see Ps. 10:12-18; Dan. 2:44-47 AV).

### **2.1.1 Jesus Christ's Disciples and the Holy Ghost**

In the interest of transparency, the three members of the Godhead were present during Jesus Christ's baptism: The Father (the voice from heaven), The Son (baptized by John the Baptist), and The Holy Ghost (The Spirit, symbolized by the dove). Disciples and followers of Jesus Christ will also receive the gift of the Holy Ghost when they are baptized by immersion, and by someone, like John the Baptist, who holds the authority to baptize. In essence, Heavenly Father is saying to anybody being baptized, "I am pleased with your taking upon you the name of my Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and the gift of the Holy Ghost will be bestowed upon you, to help you with your journey back home, to me." Moreover, the Christian attitudes and characteristics discussed in Chapter one above, as well as the Beatitudes taught by Jesus in the New Testament- such as "Blessed are the meek" and "Blessed are the merciful" (Matt. 5 AV)- are the prerequisites for the believers, to enter God's kingdom. Furthermore, when anyone testifies and witnesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, it is always by and through the power of the Holy Ghost (see Acts 1:8 AV).

Qgundiran (2013) reminds us of the importance of Jesus Christ's disciples to be fruitful in bringing many souls unto Christ, because "the recommendation of fruitfulness" is "a principle that is workable anywhere, and in any culture or environment." The author added that this kind of recommendation when applied "with proper presentation of the gospel, the person

could be led to Christ and eventually to the church.” And that this is “what the church is designed for and what would make it to fulfill its task of reaching out to the nations of the world, thereby fulfilling [Jesus Christ’s] mandate and the [disciples] receiving His commendation.”<sup>23</sup> Such an understanding is crucial for Christians whose motive is to live with God in the next life, and who also need encouragement to overcome trials and challenges of this mortal life. However, Qgundiran’s study fails to consider and acknowledge the important role of the Holy Ghost, in making a disciple’s conversion workable, permanent, and spiritual. Moreover, the author’s study would have been more useful and instrumental if it had discussed how the Savior had taught His original disciples and followers, to invite more people to enter his fold and church.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ said He would send the comforter, the Holy Ghost, who would testify of Him (see John 15:26 AV). And because Jesus is the vine, and His disciples are the branches, those who are baptized have the mandate to testify and bear witness of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Ghost (see Rev. 19:10 AV). Hence, the Holy Ghost can powerfully accompany the disciples’ invitations, and spiritually motivate people to come unto Jesus Christ. In other words, the disciples must include the Savior’s Spirit (the Holy Ghost) in inviting and welcoming members into the church. This is worth noting because it highlights God’s main priority for His children. That is, He wants them to live with Him in His celestial kingdom, in a state of never-ending happiness. Accordingly, it is crucially important to Him, that we sincerely and intently love Him and, in like manner, love all our brothers and sisters on this earth (see Matt. 22:36-40 AV), so they can receive all that God has, and become His heirs (see Gal. 3:29; James 2:5 AV). In short, Jesus wants His followers to do the invitation in His own way, by the power of His Spirit (by the power of Holy Ghost), whether it is popular or not. He was crucified for the very reason, by only working spiritually and not secularly, which was not popular at all. But in Heavenly Father’s eyes, Jesus’ way is always pleasing, and it is the only way to progression, eternal happiness, and exaltation (see John 17 AV).

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<sup>23</sup>Victor Ogundiran, “MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST: IMPLEMENTING AN EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGY FOR CHURCHES IN AMERICA.” PhD diss., *University of Liberty*, 2013, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1751&context=doctoral>.

Jesus Christ will bless His followers and disciples with the influence and the power of the Holy Ghost as they prepare for eternal life with Him. In addition, and in preparation for that loftiest and divine goal means, disciples are required to fulfil the requirements summarized below (some have already been discussed as Christian attitudes, in chapter one), and are found in the holy scriptures (for example, see Matt. 5 AV). Discussion of these Christian attitudes, beatitudes, and characteristics will come later in this section. But first, as stated by two authors, (Nel and Schoeman 2019), “According to the Gospel of Matthew, discipling seems to be the signature mark of faithful disciples of Jesus the Christ (cf. Mt 28:18–20).” The writers then asked the question, “What are the congregational involvement and characteristics of the members talking about their faith?” They answered their own question by quoting other authors who said<sup>24</sup>:

When church attenders feel they are growing in their faith, they are spurred on to share that with others in their lives, and many who share their faith find it a spiritually enriching experience (Powell et al. 2012:97).

First, Nel and Schoeman (2019) present an invaluable lesson for followers of Jesus Christ, which is basically, to share the good news and become a light unto the people of the world (see Matt. 5:15 AV). Second, however, the question that needs to be asked here is, why is there no mention of the requirements necessary, to build that kind of faith, which makes disciples motivated to share the gospel news with others? The authors’ research is restricted and limited by omitting some discussion of the requirements (key features and characteristics) of true disciples, listed below, and alluded to earlier (see also Matt. 5 AV):

- Love God and love our neighbours
- Be baptized by immersion, by authority, and in the name of Jesus Christ
- One God, one faith, one Baptism
- Everyone will be resurrected

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<sup>24</sup>Malan Nel and W.J. Schoeman, “Rediscovering discipling,” *Theological Studies*, Vol 75, no. 4 (2019), <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/5119>.

- Eternal life is possible for all of God’s children
- Pray always to overcome Satan and all evil
- The meek shall inherit the earth
- The poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of heaven
- Always follow the example of Jesus Christ
- Obtain the Gift of the Holy Ghost through Baptism
- Let your light so shine before men, that they may glorify your Father which is in heaven
- Keep all God’s commandments

Furthermore, Nel and Schoeman’s (2019) study may have been more coherent and transparent by reviewing and highlighting some of the characteristics and attitudes listed above. This list and summary are representative of what the Savior repeatedly taught the people during His earthly ministry. Some may call them attitudes, characteristics, beatitudes, etc. But most often, Jesus just referred to all of them as God’s commandments. These are most crucial and key for His followers and disciples to do, and to share with all people, because of the incredible and indescribable divine opportunity, available and presented by a loving God, for all the inhabitants of the earth. In other words, our Heavenly Father desires and is anxiously waiting for His obedient children, to eventually “enter in through the gates [of God’s] city,” and live with Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, in their Celestial kingdom, throughout all eternity (see Rev. 22:4 AV).

### **2.1.2 Jesus Christ’s Kingdom, Religion, and Organization**

Daniel prophesied that the Kingdom of God, His church, His Religion, His organization, would be restored to the earth in the latter-days (today, our modern era). The prophet was talking and explaining his vision, which came to him from God, as an answer to King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which his own magicians could not interpret. First, the vision came to show Daniel that he was a dedicated servant and true witness for God. And second, to show Nebuchadnezzar and his people, and the world that God’s kingdom has a strong and everlasting foundation, different from any other. Third, the vision came to show the whole world that Jesus Christ (Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament) is the only true and living God of this earth. And that His kingdom will stand forever (the Celestial Kingdom):



[In the latter-days, this true and only living God, Jehovah] of heaven [and earth shall] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms [earthly kingdoms], and [that God's kingdom] shall stand for ever (Dan. 2: 44-47 AV).

In essence, God will miraculously lead and shepherd His religion, organization, and Kingdom, so that His doctrines, principles, ordinances, covenants, and applications, are for the sole and sure purpose of bringing to pass the salvation, immortality, and eternal life of the human family (see John 17:3; Eph. 1:10, 2:16-22; Isa. 60:18-22 AV).

### **2.1.2.1 Dedicated Witnesses for Jesus Christ**

First, dedicated disciples and witnesses of Christ, like the prophet Daniel, are prepared to lay down their own lives, for the cause of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. That is, to bring souls unto Him, so that they may be saved and be happy forever, in God's kingdom (see Rom. 1:16 AV). This rationale is strengthened and made significant by Mosoiu (2019) who explains that these dedicated disciples and witnesses would willingly suffer without shame, and despite tribulations and martyrdoms. Because they know something of God's imminent glorious rewards, which include becoming heirs of God, and receiving joy "in his everlasting Kingdom."<sup>25</sup> In addition, the author's explanation shows an important key element and practical requirement for Christians to do daily, in their journey back to our heavenly home. They are to face the realities and oppositions of life cheerfully and vigorously with faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ. During His earthly mission, He had beseeched and consciously taught the people that if anybody wished to follow Him, he or she needed to take up his or her cross and follow Him (see Matt. 16:24 AV). Of course, it means, turning away from sins, be a good person, and keep all of God's commandments the best we can possibly can. Mosoiu's (2019)

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<sup>25</sup>N.V. Mosoiu, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tm 3:12) – An Eastern Orthodox perspective on persecutions and martyrdom,' *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol 75, no.4 (2019), a5576, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5576>.

study is also significant and pertinent because it supports this paper's own objective, that religion is necessary to bring unity among people of this world, because we are all brothers and sisters in God's eyes. In brief, Heavenly Father always wants us to see and treat each other as brothers and sisters, because His Spirit witnesses and testifies to our souls "that we are [His children]" (Rom. 8:16 AV).

In his research, Mosoiu (2019) highlighted and befittingly quoted the scripture, which reads, "the kingdom of God" is peace, joy, and righteousness "in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17 AV). Nevertheless, the research is constrained and limited by not explaining the important role of the Holy Ghost to guide individuals' daily lives, so that their efforts are accepted and pleasing unto God (see 2.1.1 above; John 14:26; Matt. AV). When individuals have the Holy Ghost's influence, they are filled with love for God and neighbors. They experience peace, forgiveness, longsuffering, and goodness. And they strive daily and intently to "walk in the Spirit" of the Holy Ghost (Gal. 5:16-26 AV). There is a real spiritual, loving, and meaningful relationship between Heavenly Father and each of His children on earth, when the Holy Ghost is present. This important relationship and connection between God and us, and between each other, has been both discussed and implied to, in the abstract and throughout the thesis thus far. Because without this kind of relationship being confirmed and empowered by the Holy Ghost, God's perfect family unit(s) and long-term expectations cannot be eternal in nature.

### **2.1.2.2 Jesus Christ's Kingdom and Foundation**

Second, the vision came to Daniel to show Nebuchadnezzar and his people, and the whole world, that God's kingdom has a strong and everlasting foundation, different from any other. That is, the Kingdom of God has a perfect and solid foundation to withstand any adversarial physical or spiritual power, and to prepare the earth for Jesus Christ's imminent reign on this planet, for a thousand years of peace and righteousness (see Isa. 24:23; Luke 1:33; Rev. 20:4 AV). When the storms of life come and when the devil and his followers swarm the earth and tempt the souls of people with evil temptations and vile intentions, the sure rock of our Savior, who atoned for us, can help us to withstand, and His Kingdom remains steady and will not fall (see Matt. 7:24-25; 16; Luke 22:40-46 AV). Jesus' religion was founded upon His doctrines taught by Him and His original apostles and would continue to be carried out in His organization, by His authorized prophets and apostles (see Matt. 16:15-20; Eph.:18-22 AV).

This declaration is refuted, overlooked, or just partly agreed to by other researchers. For example, Malan (2014) asserts that:

The concept kingdom of God was neither utopian nor merely political. It was a powerful and existential type of root metaphor describing and establishing a radical new symbolic universe of God's patronage in opposition to the exclusivist Judean covenantal nomism... [Jesus Christ] proclaimed the kingdom of God and thus set himself up as its broker, in opposition to the temple elite barring the majority of people from God's presence in the temple.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, Malan both explains and implies that God's perfect and physical kingdom will not exist. Rather, it is just a metaphor to describe God's opposition to the Judean leaders' way of doing things during that generation and era. For example, they would not allow the poor people to enter the Lord's house, His Temple. Instead, God's house should be for all people to receive God's word, instructions, blessings, and Spirit, not just for the elite section of society (like the Pharisees and the Sadducees).

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<sup>26</sup>G.J. Malan, "The kingdom of God: Utopian or existential?" *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol 70, no.3 (2014), Art. #2109, 9 pages, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i3.2109>.

The Sadducees	The Pharisees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belonged to the privileged minority and had the power of the law on their side.</li> <li>• Ruled in the Temple.</li> <li>• Recognized the authority of the five books of Moses only.</li> <li>• Did not believe in the resurrection. (Acts 23:8 as well as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Represented the working-class and had the power of the people on their side.</li> <li>• Ruled in the synagogues.</li> <li>• Recognized all the writings of the Old Testament, plus oral tradition.</li> <li>• Believed in the resurrection.</li> </ul>

FIGURE 4: Pharisees and Sadducees.<sup>27</sup>

Significantly, Malan highlights and accentuates one of the key reasons why Christ’s original and primitive church failed to thrive. It failed because the Jewish leaders were more concerned about their prestige, status, and employment in society, rather than showing kindness and compassion towards the poor in the community. Malan (2014) was right. As Figure 4 clearly illustrates, the elite leaders of the Jews (Pharisees and Sadducees) were both religious leaders and people of high recognitions in the community. There was no mention at all, of the lowest classes of people in Judean society. Therefore, Christ’s religion of that time also failed in popularity because the Savior’s teachings and doctrines elevated the poor people and humbled the rich people (see Matt. 11:5; Luke 6:24 AV), which is the opposite dynamic and configuration to the one portrayed and illustrated by figure 4. Often in the New Testament, Jesus’ doctrines and truths about His kingdom were challenged by both the Pharisees and Sadducees (see Matt. 15 and 22 AV). Such deep and intense dialogues between the philosophy of God by the Savior, and the mixed philosophies of the world (presented and reinforced by

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<sup>27</sup>“Pharisees and Sadducees,” Google, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://www.google.com/search?q=sadducees+beliefs+versus+the+poor+chart&sca>.

the Judean elite) made the latter very angry and eventually, led to Jesus Christ's crucifixion and death (see Mark 15 AV).

At this stage, the writer of this thesis wishes to return and clarify where Malan's (2014) study is found wanting and limited, as implied to earlier. Malan strongly argued that "The concept kingdom of God was neither utopian nor merely political." In other words, there is no such thing taking place in some future time and place. This reasoning made Malan's study constrained in perspective and context, because it fiercely went against Jesus Christ's honest, true, plain, clear, and literal instructions to all Christians (see Jesus's prayer below). He was sincerely, intently, and urgently teaching His followers to pray for Heavenly Father's Kingdom to come down to earth, and to unite with Christ's Kingdom, which would be established on the earth in the latter days:

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen (Matt. 6 AV).

Not only that Malan's (2014) research is limited, but it also needs to be deepened and broadened, in order not to misrepresent or misinterpret Jesus' intention and original meaning of His kingdom. The Lord Jehovah (Jesus) had revealed to the prophet Daniel (see section 2.1.2 above) a real physical and tangible church, to be built up by God himself, in the modern era, which will stand forever. Jesus also taught frequently and passionately about His Kingdom (like in His prayer-model just discussed) during His entire earthly mission and ministry. In addition, many other scriptures pointed to or implied strongly about this Heavenly Kingdom and its divine destiny(see Matt. 13:11; 6; Isa. 9:6-7 AV).

Furthermore, in our Heavenly Father's Kingdom and because of His eternal love for us, His two greatest commandments, to love God and to love our neighbors, are greatly emphasized (see Matt. 22:36-40 AV; and discussions in other earlier sections e.g., 1.3.1). It also means that each follower of Christ must put on the whole armor of God during their mortal life, in order to be happy now and throughout the eternities. The armor of Jesus Christ includes the following attributes and qualities, taught in the scriptures, like in earlier sections of this paper (e.g., 1.3.3), and as illustrated in Figure 5:

- Love God with all your heart, mind, and strength
- Children’s obedience to parents
- Parents’ kindness to their children
- Servants’ obedience to their masters
- Masters’ fairness to their servants
- “loins girt... with truth”
- “breastplate of righteousness”
- “feet shod... with.. the gospel of peace”
- “Shield of faith”
- “helmet of salvation”
- “Sword of then Spirit...the word of God”
- “Praying always”
- “seek God’s mysteries”(see Eph. 6; Exo. 20 AV)



FIGURE 5: The Armor of God.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup>“Put on the whole armor of God,” CONCORD, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://concordchurchofchrist.org/2019/04/05/put-on-the-whole-armor-of-god/>.

This paper is still talking and emphasizing the importance of God's kingdom having a solid foundation, built upon Jesus Christ and His apostles, which will last throughout the eternities. The qualities just noted and illustrated, clearly point to this solid foundation which is also recommended and prescribed by other authors. For example, Echeta (2021) says:

The lessons drawn from Jesus' feeding of 5000 people [are applicable today, these lessons include] (1) attending to people's spiritual hunger through scriptural and moral teachings, (2) ensuring proper supervision of food distribution, (3) sharing food items through organised groups, (4) creating awareness that feeding hungry people is one of the greatest services we can render to God and that this attracts huge blessings and (5) church leaders and ministers should be sensitive to the physical, psychological and emotional needs of their followers and address them aptly.<sup>29</sup>

By way of explanation, Echeta (2021) is both teaching and strongly implying the need for people to study the word of Jesus Christ because it motivates them to do good in their communities. There are many good organizations that can help us to organize and give of our excess food, clothing, etc., to feed the hungry and comfort the needy. Such Christian acts will in turn, bring down God's blessings upon us. Moreover, the author recommends and implies that, when religious leaders are sensitive to the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of the people and their communities, both the givers and the receivers will undoubtedly receive God's approval and blessings, promptly. In other words, Echeta's study is crucial, because it explains and illustrates this paper's own key themes about our Heavenly Father's benevolence, ultimate blessings, and joyful destiny for all His children living on the earth. He sent His Beloved Son Jesus Christ, to be baptized and show us the way to live in kindness, compassion, and harmony with each other. And when the earthly wars finally stop, and Jesus Christ returns to physically rule in His kingdom upon this earth for a thousand years, there will be joy and happiness, as

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<sup>29</sup>U.F. Echeta, "Feeding of the hungry by Jesus (Lk 9:10–17) as model for addressing the COVID-19 hunger challenge in Anambra State, Nigeria," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 77(1), (2021), a6293, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i1.6293>.

God and His prophets have both taught and prophesied purposefully and intently, throughout the earth's history (see Isa. 2:1-5; Rev. 20:4-5 AV).

### **2.1.2.3 Jesus Christ's Kingdom becomes the Celestial Kingdom**

Third and finally, the vision came to Daniel to show King Nebuchadnezzar and the whole world, that Jesus Christ (Jehovah of the Old Testament) is the only true and living God (under the guidance of our Heavenly Father) of this earth. And that His kingdom will never be destroyed again but shall stand forever (see Dan. 2 AV). This kingdom will become, and is called, the Celestial Kingdom, liken unto the "glory of the sun" (1 Corin. 15:40-41 AV). This is significant and also worth noting because people need to see the long view, of where God and Christ really dwell, and where They ultimately want God's children to live with them, in a state of never-ending joy and happiness. And Hodges' (2013) study strongly supports and underpins these concepts by saying that:

The present earth would become the place of [Jesus Christ's] millennial kingdom, which itself would be an embryo of eternity... informing the thousand-year millennial age rolled into the eternal celestial kingdom of God.<sup>30</sup>

Significantly and above all, without the Savior Jesus Christ, the Celestial Kingdom would not even be possible. It means people's relationship with the Savior is key. Because without Him, Heavenly Father would not accept our devotion, and therefore, there would be no Celestial Kingdom. As Jesus has taught emphatically, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6 AV). Our relationship with God includes the way we show reverence for God and His Son Jesus Christ.

According to the author Loba-Mkole (2005), the "Son of Man...creates a sense of Jesus' solidarity with his fellow beings. Such an understanding would certainly have led to Jesus'

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<sup>30</sup>Blair Dee Hodges, "My Principality on Earth Began: Millennialism and the Celestial Kingdom in the Development of Mormon Doctrine," *Dialogue: a Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol 46, no.2 (2013), <https://www.dialoguejournal.com/articles/my-principality>.



exaltation by his followers.”<sup>31</sup> This points to the strong and real relationship between the Savior and His followers. However, this study is limited because it does not explain exaltation as an actual reward for those who will become heirs of God. Thus, the study needs to be broadened and talk about the actual physical exaltation, which is also the highest blessing and gift from God for His children, who will be His heirs in the Celestial kingdom (see 1 Cor. 15:40-41; Titus 3:7; Heb. 1:14 AV).

In summary, the Celestial Kingdom is where our Heavenly Father bestows His highest blessings upon the righteous. These are His children who have a valiant testimony of His Son, Jesus Christ, by following Him, and by keeping all His commandments (see Rom. 8:17, 4:13-16; Gal. 3:28-29; Heb. 1:14 AV). This thesis has been trying to explain about this highest condition of joy and happiness for us, as God’s children, as implied in this paper’s topic. Again, the topic reads, “Religion builds and strengthens a person’s character in preparation for eternal life with God: He desires for us, His children, happiness now, and forever, in the Celestial Kingdom” (see also Figure 6 below). Figure 6 implies, illustrates, and reiterates again, the true love of our Heavenly Father for all His children upon the earth, not just those who desire to live in the Celestial Kingdom, but in other of God’s kingdoms of glory (see John 14:2 AV). God does not force His children to do anything, that is why He sent His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer, be crucified, and die, because of His pure love and compassion for each one of us. The Savior’s “Atonement” (sufferings and resurrection) is our true model of Godliness, and our perfect example of persuasion and righteousness. To be exalted like our Heavenly parents (see Gen. 1:26-27 AV), and our Savior Jesus Christ, is God’s ultimate and greatest gift for all His children. Moreover, Exaltation means receiving all that Heavenly Father has, living in His presence in the Celestial kingdom, and receiving Their power to create worlds like He does (see Rev. 3:21, and 21:7 AV).

Furthermore, as it has been both explained and implied throughout this paper, without our Savior Jesus Christ, Heavenly Father’s perfect plan for his children will fail miserably. Thus, both God and the Savior’s names should be revered and spoken of with respect, honor,

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<sup>31</sup>Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, “The social setting of Jesus’ exaltation in Luke-Acts (Lk 22:69 and Ac 7:56),” *HTS Theologiese Studies /Theological Studies*, Vol 61, no.1/2 (2005), a441, <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/441/340>.

and glory. Jesus names are many including, Messiah, Jehovah, Holiness, Almighty God, and Son of Man. Son of Man implies that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, or, the Son of Man of Holiness (the Son of Heavenly Father), or simply, Son of Man (see Matt. 16:13-17 AV). This important concept is also not included in the research by Loba-Mkole (2005). He refers to the solidary relationship between the Son of Man and His followers, but there is no mention about the importance of Jesus, as the Son of our Heavenly Father, The Man of Holiness (see Exod. 15:11 AV).

In conclusion, Our Heavenly Father's plan is a perfect plan because He is a perfect being with pure and perfect love for all His children. God's Son, Jesus Christ, was sent to earth to die for us, and to provide the gift of the Resurrection for everyone. Christ was the first person ever to be resurrected (see John 14:2, 11:25-26; Acts 26:23; Rom. 5:8 AV). In addition, if we are valiant in our testimony of Jesus Christ and keep all of God's commandments (see Heb. 12:2 AV), we will live in the Celestial kingdom (the highest mansion), where our Heavenly parents and Jesus Christ dwell eternally, as mentioned earlier. Otherwise, we will find ourselves either in the second kingdom, called the Terrestrial kingdom (liken unto the glory of the moon), or some other lower kingdom (see Figure 6), liken unto the glory of the stars (see 1 Cor. 11:11, 15:40-41 AV).

In other words, if we are baptized by immersion, by a man holding the authority to do so, and endure to the end, by following the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, we are promised to live with God in His Celestial kingdom. Jesus is our chiefest example to secure us that divine and celestial reward if we trust Him fully (see Matt. 3:16-17, 28:18-20, 25:45-46 AV). And when Jesus comes again, He will perfect His Father's plan so that many of His children can be Heirs of the Celestial Kingdom (see Rom. 8:16-18 AV; and Figure 6). The scriptures are true, and the Holy Ghost bears witness to our souls that these things are true, and that our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, love us very much.

In short, God's plan for us is perfect, eternal, merciful, just, and unparallel (1 Cor. 2:11; John 14:26-31 AV). Our Heavenly Father's love includes giving us "Agency," the freedom to choose where we want to live in the next life (see Josh. 24:15; Matt. 26:39 AV). As Jan Muis (2008) has both befittingly and purposely stated, God does not coerce us because he is the

“liberator who wants the salvation of his people.”<sup>32</sup> This understanding is crucial in making clear to us the importance of our own freedom to choose our own destinations in life. The key implication drawn from this is that God is not a dictator or tyrant who demands that His children must obey, or else, there are huge consequences and punishment, if we do not keep all His commandments. Instead, His loving invitation is that He wants us to be happy with our own choices, no matter how appealing and eternal the prize and consequence may be. He has given us the gift of agency to choose. Thus, there is nothing compared to our kind Heavenly Father’s plan throughout all the history of humankind. Significantly, Figure 6 shows and summarizes the three stages of our whole existence: (1) we lived with God as spirits before we came to earth, (2) we live in mortality where Jesus Christ died for us, and (3) we will live forever in one of God’s Kingdoms of Glory. In the end, all of God’s perfect and eternal plan will eventually make sense and come to fruition, because our Heavenly Father’s love for us, His Children, is the greatest of all His attributes (see John 14:2; 1 Cor. 15:40-41, 53, 2:9 AV). After all, Christians firmly believe and aspire to the following eternal truths as frequently taught by Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16 AV).

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<sup>32</sup>Jan Muis, “God our King,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol 64, no.1 (2008), a22, <https://hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/22>.

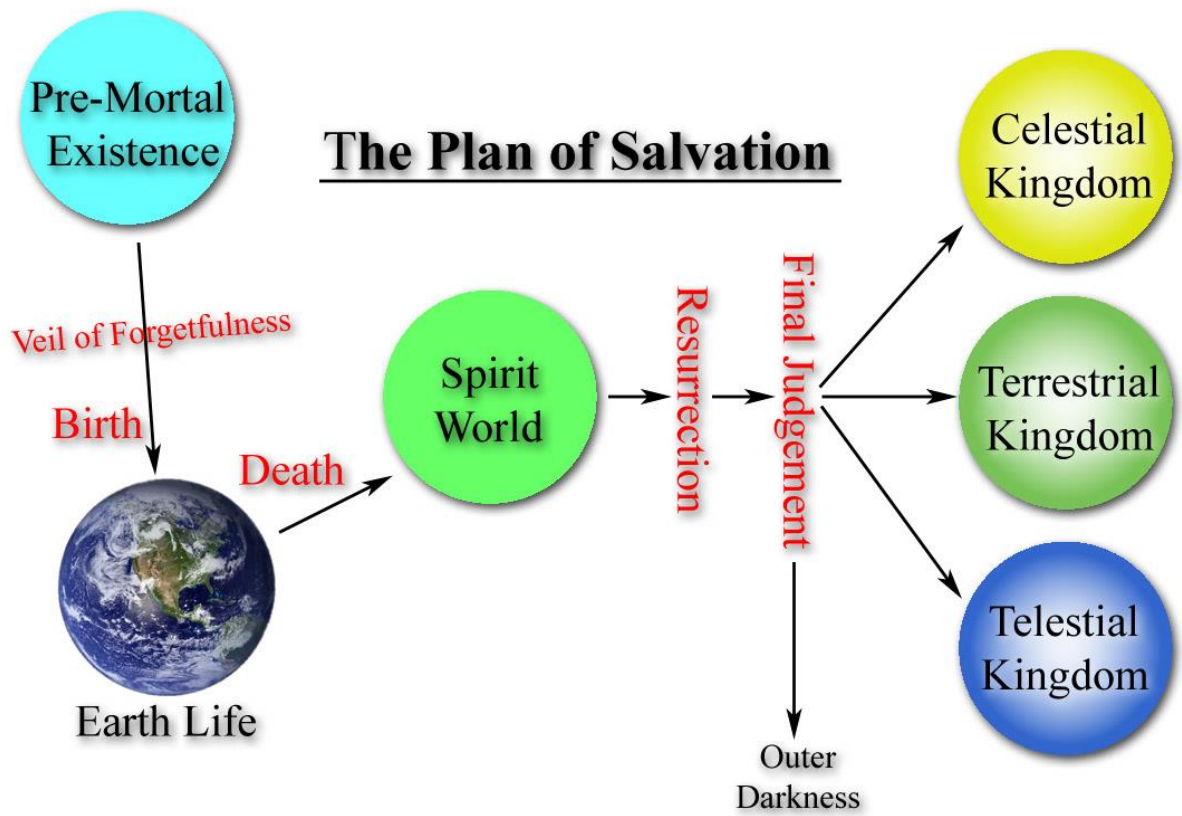


FIGURE 6: The Plan of Salvation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>“The Plan of Salvation,” Google, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://www.google.com/search?q=the+plan+of+salvation+diagram&rlz=1C1UEAD>.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This researcher focused on “Document analysis” of reports and interviews,<sup>34</sup> as well as using online eBooks, journals, articles, and other online resources to present his ideas and beliefs. These are essentially all ideas and beliefs from The Bible AV, which the researcher wanted to clarify, analyze, and prove methodologically. He understood that the results might be quite different from his original thoughts, because a “study of religion... is by no means an academic area isolated by its own exclusive methods of study and research.”<sup>35</sup> His main ideas are that a person’s character is strengthened by keeping God’s commandments taught in a Christian religion. Religion is the organization where God’s Will is manifested, explained, and taught, on how His children can achieve happiness in mortality, and everlasting joy with Him, and His Son Jesus Christ, in their Celestial kingdom, in the next life.

The researcher firmly believed that God is real and loves all His children so much, that He gives them the agency to choose which of His kingdoms (many mansions), the people wanted to live in, eternally (see John 14:2 AV). Moreover, it is Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ’s main desire for us to do our best to reach the Celestial kingdom (the highest) where the Gods dwell (see 1 Cor. 15:40-42; Eph. 4:13 AV; and Figure 6 in Chapter two). Thus, the researcher wished and wanted to prove these vital beliefs using an “Analogous way [which] attempts to combine and explain situations, rules, classifications and incidents of the daily life... in a way that has some relevance in our own situations, rules and classifications.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Research Guides,” Libguides, accessed November 4, 2023,  
<https://libguides.newcastle.edu.au/researchmethods>.

<sup>35</sup>Georgios Gaitanos, “Methodology for the Study of Religion,” ResearchGate, accessed November 4, 2023, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337331492\\_Methodology](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337331492_Methodology).

<sup>36</sup>Gaitanos, “Study of Religion.”

Moreover, “Qualitative Research [assisted and enabled this researcher] to gain a better understanding of complex concepts, social interactions or cultural phenomena.”<sup>37</sup> Overall, the researcher used the following model, Figure 7, as a basis for his overall philosophical thinking, as just been briefly described.

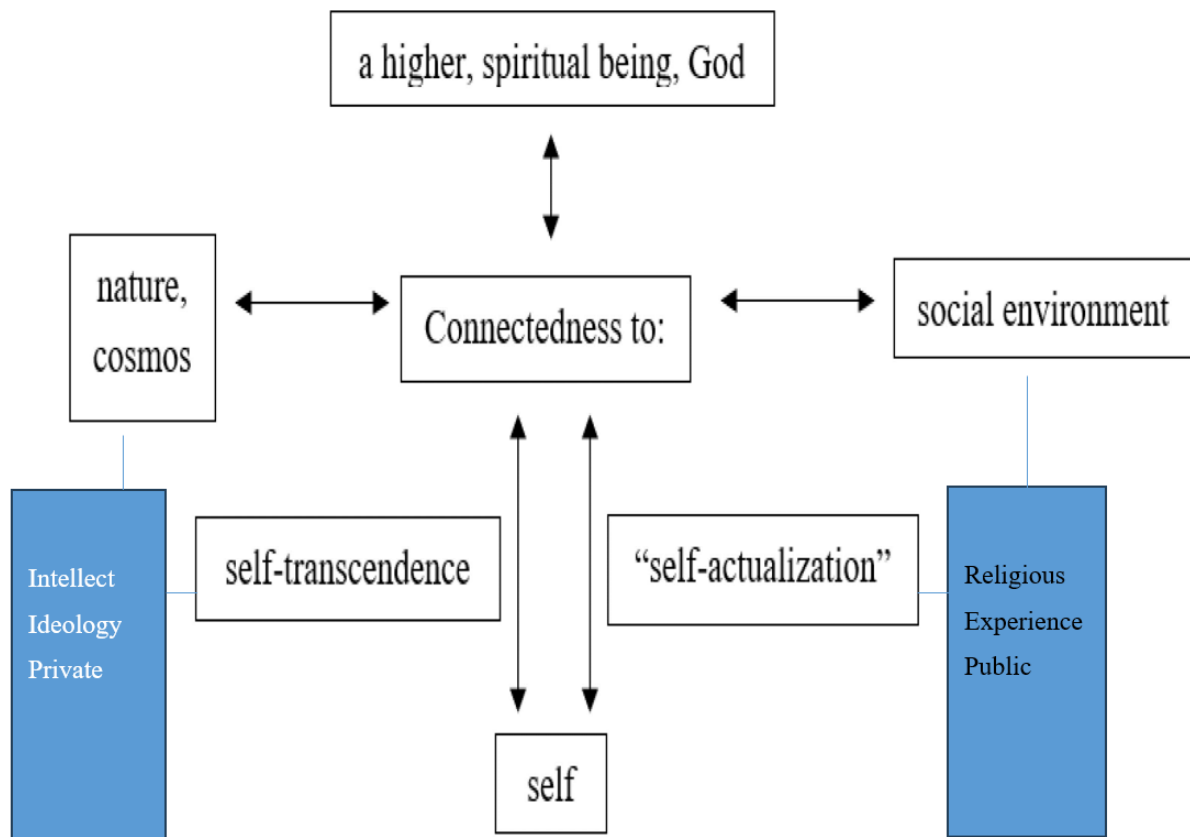


FIGURE 7: The Methodological model for this religious research. This model was adopted from the original models by Huber (2004) and Bucher (2014), as illustrated in Figures 8 & 9, respectively).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Libguides, “Research Guides.”

<sup>38</sup>Sarah Demmrich and Stefan Huber, “Multidimensionality of Spirituality: A Qualitative Study among Secular Individuals,” MDPI, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/11/613>.

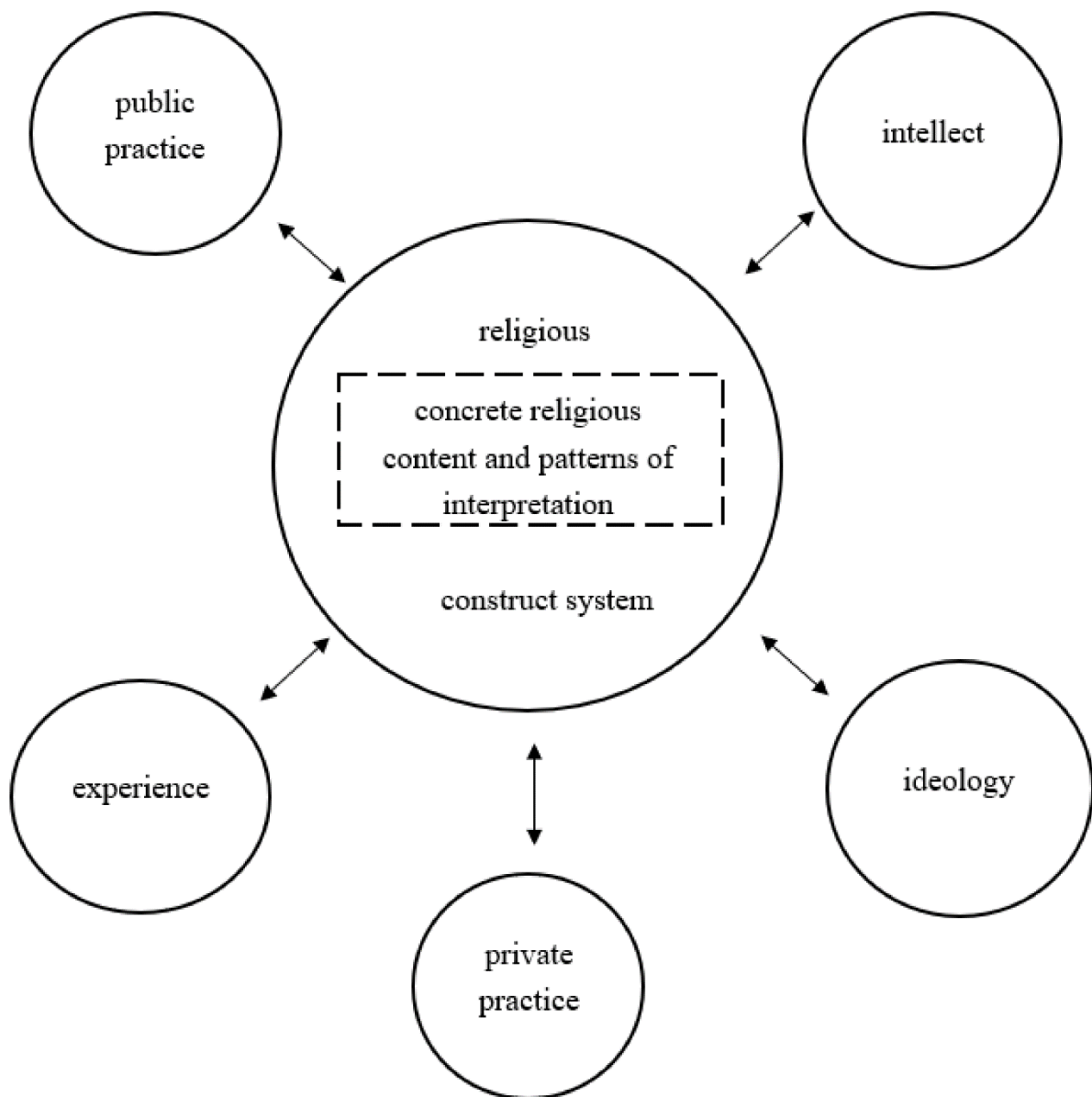


FIGURE 8: The model of religiosity by Huber. Based on *Religiosität: Messverfahren und Studien zu Gesundheit und Lebensbewältigung* (p. 88) by C. Zwingmann & H. Moosbrugger (Eds.), 2004, Münster: Waxmann. © by Waxmann.

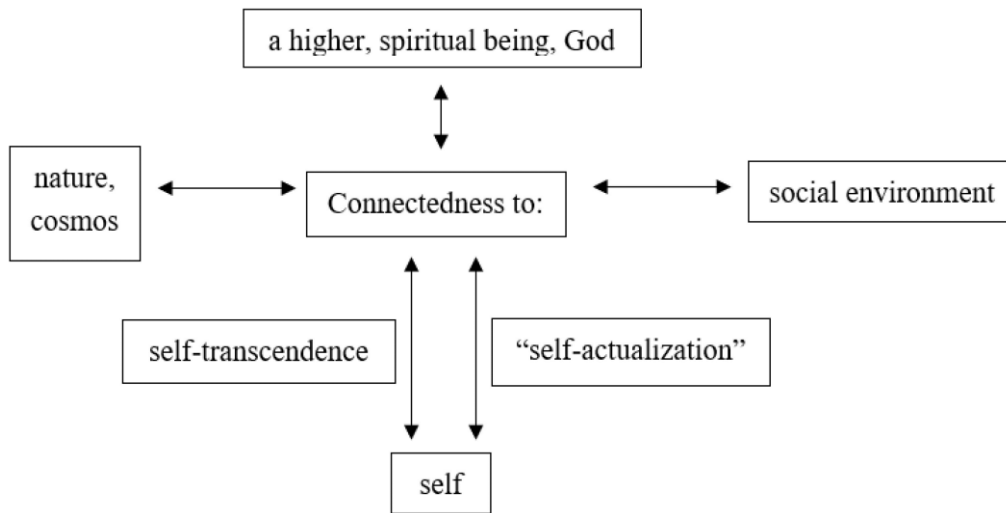


FIGURE 9: The model of spirituality as connectedness by Bucher. Based on *Spiritualität* (p. 40) by A. Bucher, 2014, Weinheim: Beltz. © by Beltz.

### 3.2 The Structure

Figure 10 below, illustrates the methodological research structure and body, used by this researcher to guide his overall philosophical ideas, reasoning, and judgment.

#### 3.2.1 The Philosophy

God the Father is all powerful and all loving, “a higher, spiritual being” (Figure 7). His Beloved Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, taught us that the Holy Ghost would be sent to “teach [us] all things” (John 14:26 AV). Thus, through listening to our conscience (God’s gift to each of His children on earth), by following Christ’s perfect example, and by the power of the Holy Ghost (the third member of the Godhead), each of us could literally seek and find our own individual philosophy of life’s experience and spiritual growth. For example, philosophers, prophets, faithful Christians, and countless individuals are examples of those who searched to know God’s desire for us, spiritually (see Chapter 1). Thus, this thesis’ philosophy was based on “the attempt to analyze and describe the nature of religion in the framework of a general



view of the world”; and set out “to analyze religious language.”<sup>39</sup> Because God wants us to understand what really makes Him happy (and vice versa). He wants us to gain a spiritual understanding of His work and glory- to become Gods like He, and His Son, Jesus Christ. This is both central and crucial to this thesis’ argument.

Furthermore, the research philosophy was interpretive and subjective, which from this paper’s perspective, began with each person’s mortal birth, as well as our own spiritual and individual “connectedness to [God]” (Figure 7). In addition, as people grow older and develop this spiritual connection with Heavenly Father, people come to know that their “knowledge of reality, including the domain of human action, is a social construction.”<sup>40</sup> Each person’s relationship with God cannot be made perfect without the intervention, sufferings, and atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ. Figure 10. illustrates a summary of the key sections and elements of the methodology.

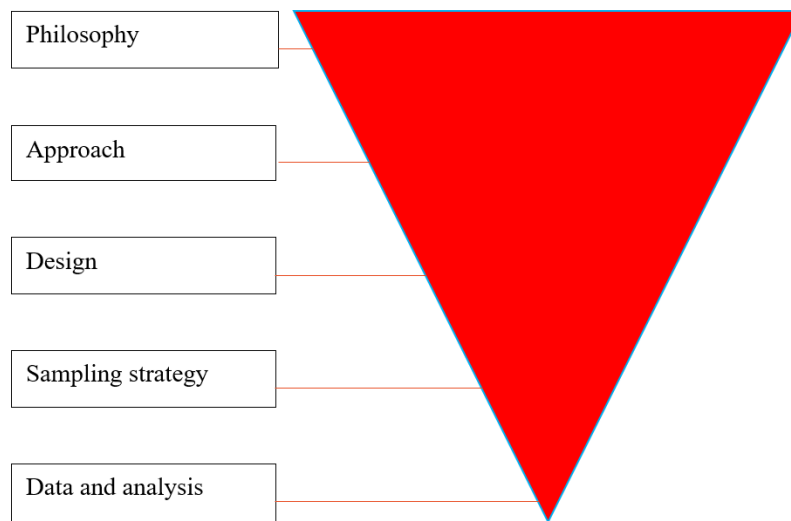


FIGURE 10: The Structure for this Methodological chapter is a logical flow chart, starting from high-level research (philosophical) down to practical research (data).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Rudolph Bultmann, “Philosophy of religion,” Britannica, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/study-of-religion/Basic-aims-and-methods>.

<sup>40</sup>Geoff Walsham, “Doing interpretive research,” *Eur J Inf Syst*, 15, 320–330 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000589>.

<sup>41</sup>“Methodology Example,” GradCoach, accessed December 22, 2023, <https://gradcoach.com/how-to-write-the-methodology-chapter/>.

Our knowledge from God comes by way of intellect, our private life and prayers, our association with nature (natural environment), and the reality of the cosmos. This gives each of us a sense of “self-transcendence” and a starting point in life’s journey. In addition, our social environment is where we find true religion and interactions with our fellow-beings. This would help and solidify our preparation to return to God, who created us spiritually in the first place, before we came to earth to receive a physical body. Hence, without this social experience we would not reach our state of “self-actualization,” where we would advance and become decisive, to choose which of our Heavenly Father’s kingdoms (mansions) we wanted to live in, in the next life (see Figure 7 and Figure 6). In short, this philosophy is interpretivism. Because interpretivists believe that subjective interpretation is necessary in order to comprehend reality which is “at the heart of philosophy.”<sup>42</sup> Lumen supported this concept by saying, “interpretive researchers view social reality as being embedded within and impossible to abstract from their social settings.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, each person’s understanding of the cosmos, experiences with the natural and social environments, including having a strong religious foundation, are essential and prerequisites, in order to make a choice where he/she wants to be in the next life. God sets the standards and provides the consequences and eternal rewards, but His gift of Agency, is entirely left to each person’s freedom to choose. Thus, God is both a merciful and a just being, and a Creator also (see Figures 6 and 7; and Matt. 5 AV).

### **3.2.2 The Approach**

Having outlined its philosophy, the paper now continues to define and explain the research approach, the qualitative study. First, “researchers [including this paper’s author] bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these

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<sup>42</sup>Sofia Miguens and Gerhard Preyer, *Consciousness and Subjectivity* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110325843>.

<sup>43</sup>“Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Interpretive research,” LumenLearning, accessed December 20, 2023, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-research-methods/chapter/chapter-12-interpretive-research/>.

inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study.”<sup>44</sup> This researcher chose the qualitative approach because it enabled him to: discuss and analyze some of the current discourses by other researchers; delve deeper into the lay people’s spiritual feelings and aspirations; highly recommend the role of the Creator in our daily lives, and His ultimate desire for us, to be heirs in His Celestial Kingdom. Furthermore, a qualitative approach would promote and enhance this author’s own voice, to be both relevant and replicable in the research-field. Second, the theoretical or interpretive stances taken by the researcher shape the people being studied and expose the sorts of problems and questions being examined. In addition, the interpretive and qualitative approach produced “data collection, data analysis, writing, and evaluation,” which would then be suitably used “to change society or add to social justice.”<sup>45</sup> Third:

Interpretive approaches rely on questioning and observation in order to discover or generate a rich and deep understanding of the phenomenon [religion] being investigated. This is closely associated with qualitative methods of data collection.<sup>46</sup>

What were the other reasons why the researcher chose a qualitative approach? Because there were many online resources, such as journals, articles, eBooks, and other relevant information, that either agreed or disagreed with him. These views helped him to make judgments on how strong or weak his own ideas were. He learned from this information the importance of consulting credible sources of academia, who already studied similar ideas; he also learned from the few participants he talked to and interviewed, how important their perspectives were in any academic research. Most importantly, how his own views of God and

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<sup>44</sup>John W. Creswell, “02 Creswell 2007 Chapter 2,” A? accessed December 22, 2023, <https://mycourses.aalto.fi/course/view.php?id=19936#section-0>.

<sup>45</sup>Creswell, “Chapter 2.”

<sup>46</sup>Helm. “Two traditional research paradigms.” Accessed December 22, 2023. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/helmopen/rlos/research-evidence-based-practice/designing-research/types-of-study/understanding-pragmatic-research/section02.html#>.

the next life, were very crucial, for both the advancement of future research, and in making a strong voice that could very well promote society, and the cause of God spiritually. This is very significant as we prepare for Jesus Christ's millennial reign on this earth (see Isa. 9:6-7 AV). Therefore, a qualitative approach was applied in here because the researcher was able to have some interviews, observe and analyze subjectively. He focused on describing people's actions and ideas, and not just counting or measuring things. In other words, it was not a quantitative research or approach. Qualitative research was specifically chosen because a religious "qualitative research is shaped by very different ideas – about the nature of social phenomena and how they can be understood."<sup>47</sup> Without this approach, the researcher would not have been able to discuss people's feelings, religious practices, attitudes, and the role of spirituality, which are both critical and central, to people's journey back home, to their heavenly parents.

Furthermore, the research approach was an inductive one. That is, the study was "a top-down approach, where the researcher" began "with a theory or hypothesis and then" tested "it using specific observations or data."<sup>48</sup> The researcher intentionally took this view and approach because he saw God as providing the original overall plan, before the world was created by Him, and we, as His children, would experience life and make our own choices and decisions, whether we would chose to follow His plan, or not. In one sense, this researcher used God's truth (others called it theory) and tested it, using life's situations, observations, people's opinions, and already established views and data found in books and online resources, to clearly present and argue his religious thesis and case.

### **3.2.3 The Design**

It followed that the design for this methodological chapter would be better served by using mainly the Phenomenology strategy, although some elements of the Ethnography strategy also came into play during the study. Thus, Figure 11 was specifically chosen to see where those elements of ethnography fitted inside the major phenomenological umbrella and

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<sup>47</sup>Martyn Hammersley, *What is Qualitative Research?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/id/b7c371e5-f0f9-4972-9003-a4bd554b3bca/9781849666077.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup>GradCoach, "Methodology Example."

design. First, the researcher used the phenomenology design because he knew from the start that his selected audience would be small in numbers and very easy to access. The people chosen would be individuals, both students and adults. And most of the data would be results of observations, and brief interviews. And the duration and time to do them would be much smaller, compared to the case of an ethnographic design.

## ETHNOGRAPHY VERSUS PHENOMENOLOGY

Ethnography focuses on the collective experience of a community	Phenomenology focuses on the individual experiences
Data can be collected through interviews, observations, and analysis of documents and artefacts	Interviews are the main method of data collection
Studies the culture, behaviour, attitudes and belief	Studies individual experiences
May take a considerably long time period than phenomenology	May not take as much time as ethnographic studies
	<i>Visit <a href="http://www.pediaa.com">www.pediaa.com</a></i>

FIGURE 11: Ethnography versus Phenomenology.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, phenomenology posed and constituted the following advantages for this paper's religious research:

- It is one of the most commonly used designs for qualitative research
- It describes how people experience a phenomenon like religion
- It avoids biases and preconceived assumptions to do with human feelings, responses, experiences, emotions, imaginations, etc.
- It usually involves samples of participants (about 10-15)
- And analysis includes themes, and generalizations on how a phenomenon like religion, is perceived or experienced<sup>50</sup>

The researcher really cherished using the phenomenology design, because he liked the freedom of discussing and explaining God, His spiritual and eternal design, and also God's overall goal for the human family, to live and associate with Him eternally. These truths and verities are nothing to be ashamed of (see Rom. 1:16 AV), especially, in our blessed world of advanced technology and intellectual enlightenments. In fact, these ideals, and important suggestions, are still found lacking in our contemporary and material world. And yet, these ideals call for our urgent contemplation and our special attention. Because these ethics and high standards could only advance research, continue intellectual debate, and promote spiritual growth,.

Second, the researcher also prized using certain elements of ethnography in his design. The following explanation gives ample reasons why the researcher used some elements of Ethnography in his study:

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<sup>49</sup>“Ethnography versus Phenomenology,” Pinterest, accessed January 1, 2024, <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/836895543234275542/>.

<sup>50</sup>“Phenomenology,” Deakin University, accessed December 31, 2023, <https://deakin.libguides.com/qualitative-study-designs/phenomenology#:~:text=>.

Ethnography is a qualitative method for collecting data often used in the social and behavioral sciences. Data were collected (see also chapter 4) through observations and interviews [this researcher did not do any group interviews or collect any group data, due to time constraints], which would then be used to draw conclusions about how societies and individuals function. Ethnographers observe life as it happens instead of trying to manipulate it in a lab. The researcher was trying to give good explanations and portray senses of transparency and persuasiveness, as a result of flexible and invaluable debates and dialogues by other researchers online, in order “for the Board to review”[ his research, commendably].<sup>51</sup>

In other words, phenomenology (which supports individual progression), and ethnographic design (which advance social skills and character), were both needed in this paper, to show that the individuals could not reach their heavenly home without a combination of both individual effort and social integration. Moreover, it was relevant that there was some study of popular religious and Christian cultures, and their common values, which would help individuals discover their spirituality and true inner identities. As it had been both sufficiently mentioned and implied in earlier chapters (and Figure 7), many attitudes found in religions, and among the Jewish, Islamic and Christian sectors, would assist the individuals to discover their true relationship and their real sense of “connectedness to ... God,” their loving Heavenly Father. These are important because individuals could not be stronger in characters without these important group-cultures and religions. And this paper could not shy away from these cultures where God’s values are taught on a daily basis, important for individual experience and continued spiritual growth towards their heavenly destination. Now, even though this paper did not have time to find more complete data from these different religious and community cultures, the key point from the researcher’s perspective was to present the individual as part of a larger community. This aligned rightly with his thesis, that religion is necessary for the individual’s progression and eventual exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom. As one author had both fittingly and wisely suggested:

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<sup>51</sup>“Ethnographic Research,” University of Virginia, accessed 31 December 2023, <https://research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs/ethnographic-research#:~:text=>.

At home and in the community, the educational process places a greater focus on exemplary and ingrained behaviors... The traits that increase moderation are religiosity, compassion, affection, responsibility, respect for teachers and parents, a desire to study, socialize and form friendships, compactness, a desire to assist others, and deliberation.”<sup>52</sup>

In short, we could not reach heaven alone. We need our Savior, our Redeemer, and our Lord Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice and perfect example; we need each other - no person stands alone in this mortal journey that leads to heaven; we need Christ’ religion and community; we need to live in this world in peace and harmony with our fellow-travelers; and we need each other’s voice and knowledge to learn from, and to grow both academically and spiritually. All of this combined, was the reason why the above design was put into place.

### **3.2.4 The Sampling Strategy**

The researcher used the “non-probability sampling” strategy, which entailed “selecting participants in a non-random” (or a non-representative) way. In other words, participants were selected “based on ease of access,” also referred to, as “a convenience sample.” It would have been ideal to get a true “random sample,” but there were real constraints such as costs, time, resources, and practicality,<sup>53</sup> that made life difficult for the researcher. Non-probability sampling would be much faster and “more cost-effective than probability sampling,” because the respondents were known to the researcher.<sup>54</sup> The interviews were short (they took minutes

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<sup>52</sup>Suherman Suherman, “Character education in the family as a strengthening of moderation during the pandemic era,” *Journal of Social Studies*, Vol 18, no. 2 (2022), <https://journal.uny.ac.id/index.php/jss/article/view/53229>.

<sup>53</sup>GradCoach, “Methodology Example.”

<sup>54</sup>“Non-Probability Sampling,” QuestionPro, accessed 13 January 2024, <https://www.questionpro.com/blog/non-probability-sampling/#:~:text=>



not days, as shown in chapter 4), the participants did not require much persuasion, and the results and surveys, or questionnaires, were “finished in shorter times.”<sup>55</sup>

These above considerations, constraints, and limitations caused the author to be satisfied and resort to using the non-probability option. Essentially, it was not the researcher’s aim to get a representative view of the whole population, but rather, to emphasize the spiritual relationship between God and each of His individual children, through and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because each person has his or her own moral agency, individuality, and “own temperament.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, focusing on the individual, “allows for comparison and classification and allows for further research, which will promote scientific [or professional] thinking and enable some human activities to be better understood.”<sup>57</sup>

### **3.2.5 The Data and Analysis**

The data could contain and consist of diaries, interviews, articles, blog-posts, academic-research, web-pages, social-media and “even audio and video files.” [In addition], “they are put through data analysis as a group, with researchers seeking to identify patterns running through the corpus as a whole.”<sup>58</sup> In this particular study, data collection mainly consisted of information and data collected from web pages, articles, academic research, interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Chapters one to four presented such data. For example, Figures 1 to 3 were about the common attitudes of followers among the monotheistic religions, and the importance of their prophets. Figures 4 to 6 were part of the Literature Review. This latter data had to do with aspects of Jewish leaders and their oppositions and retaliations against

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<sup>55</sup>“Non-probability sampling.” Statistics Canada, accessed 13 January 2024, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/edu/power-pouvoir/ch13/nonprob/5214898-eng.htm>.

<sup>56</sup>Gaitanos, “Study of Religion.”

<sup>57</sup>Gaitanos, “Study of Religion.”

<sup>58</sup>“What is thematic analysis?” XM Experience Management, accessed 16 January 2024, <https://www.qualtrics.com/experience-management/research/thematic-analysis-in-qualitative-research/>.

Christ's teachings, as well as the information about the Savior's overall Plan of Salvation for the earth's inhabitants. The first part of chapter four would be a summary of the results, such as charts, graphs, and other articles or web-page information, already presented in the first three chapters of the thesis. The second part of chapter four would contain the results of interviews, questionnaires, and observations, that were compiled after chapter two was written and submitted to the supervisor.

In beginning to analyze all of the above data, six qualitative analyses came to mind, which were: content, thematic, "grounded theory", discourse, narrative, and IPA ("Interpretative phenomenological analysis.")<sup>59</sup> The researcher's key idea behind the analysis was to align itself with the fundamental aim of the thesis: to attain God's Celestial Kingdom, by a person's sincere desire to both serve God and his/her fellow beings. Hence, the researcher had chosen three of the above types of qualitative analysis namely, content, thematic, and IPA. Why? Because there was no one perfect method for analyzing his data. Thus, it would be better, at least for this study, to adopt more than one method: "This is called Triangulation."<sup>60</sup> The researcher relished this idea because he was really trying to understand the collected data, in conjunction with his own overall understanding of God, and the social aspects of this important and overriding phenomena, called religion. Mathison (1988) seemed to agree and support this concept fully by explaining that:

This conception shifts the focus on triangulation away from a technological [or technical] solution for ensuring validity and places the responsibility with the researcher for the construction of plausible explanations about the phenomena [for example, religion] being studied.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>GradCoach, "Methodology Example."

<sup>60</sup>GradCoach, "Methodology Example."

<sup>61</sup>Sandra Mathison, "Why Triangulate?" *Educational researcher*, Vol 17, no.2, 13-17 (1988), File:///C:/Users/maate/Downloads/Why\_Triangulate%20(1).pdf.

Furthermore,

Qualitative researchers deploy a wide-range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand...[Because] each practice makes the world [and the study of religion] visible in a different way...[Therefore,] there is no single interpretive truth.<sup>62</sup>

In summary, first, content analysis was chosen because it enabled the researcher to research themes within the collected data, and analyze “language used within [the data] to search for partiality or bias. Then the researcher could “make inferences” concerning the themes and messages “within the texts,” the audience, the writer, “and even the culture and time of surrounding the text.”<sup>63</sup> Second, thematic analysis was chosen because it had to do with feelings and personal opinions of people. It would reveal the participants’ experiences and emotions, and “the meaning behind the words people use”: [It] “is the analysis of [people’s] feedback.”<sup>64</sup> Third, IPA was chosen because it is “a qualitative approach which aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience” [In addition], “IPA is a particularly useful methodology for examining topics [such as religion] which are complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>N.K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (SAGE Publication, 2018),

<https://www.daneshnamehicsa.ir/userfiles/files/1/9->

[%20The%20SAGE%20Handbook%20of%20Qualitative%20Research.pdf.](#)

<sup>63</sup>“Content Analysis,” Columbia University, accessed January 12, 2024,

<https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/population-health-methods/content-analysis#Overview>.

<sup>64</sup>“Qualitative Data Analysis.” Thematic, accessed January 26, 2024,

<https://getthematic.com/insights/qualitative-data-analysis/>.

<sup>65</sup>Jonathan A. Smith, and Mike Osborn, “Interpretative phenomenological analysis as a useful methodology for research on the lived experience of pain.” *British Journal of Pain*, Feb;

In other words, this researcher wished and wanted to make his own moral and specific views about God and religion, very transparent and clear, for both the readers and other researchers. Earlier, in this paper's own philosophy, the researcher said that each person eventually would create his/her own ethical and spiritual philosophy, which would explain and expound his/her own distinct moral understanding of life. Thus, the "ethical substance [or subject] is the way the researcher legitimates self morally."<sup>66</sup> And since the researcher was discussing religion, he wanted to legitimize and clarify his thesis and proposal in a manner that was not biased or neglectful of the agency (and ethics) of those he interviewed, observed, and critiqued.

Before the conclusion, the researcher was very aware of his own weaknesses and strengths. A few of them had been either indirectly or directly referred to in earlier sections of the paper. For example, this author had both implied and discussed the first five dot points below, in his previous considerations. But he did not have the time, finance, and the means to cover the rest of the points. Nevertheless, he has given here a summary of the key and important instructions. Implementing all of the following, will reduce his limitations and weaknesses, and will greatly increase and enhance his (and other researchers') strengths and competence in producing a more complete and credible research in the future:

- plan and manage finance properly
- understand there are limited resources
- be flexible and be more proactive
- understand nuanced and complex aspects of research
- Respect "ethics principles"
- prepare a more detailed data management plan
- adequate training, such as internet modules

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9(1): 41-42 (2015), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4616994/#:~:text=>

<sup>66</sup>Denzin and Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*.

- participation of marginalized and vulnerable populations
- sensitivity to the rights of people with disabilities
- make use of consent forms
- knowledge of “participants with different needs”
- view “research ethics in a global context” (See Mac-Seing 2021).<sup>67</sup>

Finally, and as the researcher had both suggested and implied earlier, the key value and strength of his study was to arouse and reveal respectively, the spiritual feelings of participants and the ethical aspects of the data from the internet. This was crucial in determining the role and reality of the Holy Ghost in our individual lives, and understanding God’s own purpose for all of His children: to become His rightful heirs, throughout all eternity (see John 17 AV). Welch had both strongly and wisely encouraged us towards that eternal goal, by inferring and suggesting that: “the eternal truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ [are here]; [we need to] “live our religion;” [and] “we have a work to do to prepare for that exalted sphere [that awaits us in God’s presence]” (see Welch 2005).<sup>68</sup>

### 3.2.6 Conclusion

This paper’s philosophy and methodological theory (as summarized in Figure 12 below), goes as follows. Each person ever born, or will be born on this earth, will eventually have his or her own spiritual philosophy, ethics, and full awareness of God’s plan of salvation and exaltation before the final judgment. When we are brought back to God’s presence in that day, we would have done all that we could to arrive at our final destination, either, in the lowest kingdom of glory, in the middle kingdom, or in the highest kingdom, known as the Celestial Kingdom- where our Heavenly Father and His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, dwell. We could not then, blame anybody else or God, because of our complete understanding, and our full use of our own moral agency. Because of God’s paramount wisdom and pure love for each

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<sup>67</sup>Mac-Seing et al, “How to navigate the application of ethics norms in global health research,” *BMC Med Ethics*, 22:140 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-021-00710-7>.

<sup>68</sup>John W. Welch, “Hugh Nibley’s Articles of Faith,” *BYU Studies Quarterly Sep 2017*, Vol 44, Issue 2, Article 4 (2005), <https://paperity.org/p/83400233/hugh-nibleys-articles-of-faith>.

person, He would offer us that incomparable gift in life, without it, He would not be both a merciful God, and a just God also. Each of us, would have been given ample time and preparation for the next life- including our experiences during the millennium, when Jesus Christ returns to rule and reign on this earth, as prophesied by His ordained prophets (see Rev. 20 AV).

Satan (Lucifer) would force us to be good, without any consideration of our own freedom to choose. This was the very reason why he was cast out of heaven in the premortal existence (Rev. 12; Isa. 14:12; Gen. 3 AV). But Jesus Christ, who voluntarily died for our sins, and provided the free resurrection for all, wanted us to be free in choosing our own divine destination (see 1 Cor. 15 AV). For this and other reasons already implied and discussed before, the researcher pointed to the data that he had collected, the interpretation that he had chosen, and the type of analysis needed to present his thesis in a more complete, competent, and transparent manner. In other words, the researcher chose a qualitative approach, and a predominantly and phenomenological design, so that he could analyze his aims and themes, in a manner that would clearly highlight the spiritual merits of his research. And by the same token, the author was optimistically pointing to a greater acceptance by many researchers, to seek and use the gift of the Holy Ghost, to enhance research both academically and spiritually: Jesus Christ, our perfect exemplar, had both academic supremacy and spiritual sovereignty (see Isa. 50:4 AV). He practiced both of these cognitive skills and knowledge fully, in His entire mortal life and mission. His true desire was for each of us, to also develop these qualities (see Matt. 5 AV). In addition, the author of this methodology did not, and would not, ignore the fact, that other researchers have their own individual agency, philosophy, and temperament, which would make this debate even more interesting in the future of research.



FIGURE 12: Our communication with God and the influences that affect our individual philosophy and choices; and the impact that determines where we will live in the next life.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONTENTS AND RESULTS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This thesis had highlighted our Heavenly Father's (God's) perfect plan for all His children upon this earth. From the earth's existence, it was a perfect plan, because it would honor our agency to choose, and by the grace of Jesus Christ's sufferings and resurrection in Jerusalem (His Atonement). It was a plan that called for our obedience to God's commandments and by following the perfect example of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Those commandments would be instituted and found in His church and religion, built upon the foundation of His apostles and prophets, and Jesus Christ "being the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20 AV). These commandments included loving God, our neighbors, and being baptized like Jesus was (Eph. 4:5; Matt. 3:13-17; Luke 10:27-28 AV). Moreover, God's love and desire was for us to love Him and our neighbors daily, so that we could live in the presence of God and His Son eternally, in their Celestial and Highest Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:40-42; Rev. 2 and 4 AV). Furthermore, Jesus promised to send us God's Holy Spirit (the Holy Ghost), to assist and guide us in our mortal journey. Faithfully following the holy Ghost, would finally lead us to live eternally and joyfully, in the Celestial kingdom with of our Heavenly Father, His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, as well as with our family members, who would have valiantly kept all of God's commandments (John 14:26 AV).

Thus, the structure of the Results chapter was designed, driven, and based on themes that were carefully selected by the researcher, from the data and findings (and their analyses) that he researched and conceived from both internet resources, as well as from personal interviews and observations. First, the importance of prophets in God's work and glory. Second, the exemplary life of Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father's love and purpose. Third, the Gift of the Holy Ghost, available for us, God's children. Fourth, His religion and organization. Fifth, the Celestial Kingdom, where God and Jesus Christ dwell in a state of never-ending happiness, also available for His obedient children.



## 4.2 Themes

### 4.2.1 God's Prophets

First, the results about prophets. Through His prophets, God would declare and reveal His plan, and “His secret,” for His children (see Amos 3:7 AV). God created the first mortal man, named Adam. He was also the first prophet of God. He commanded Adam and his wife, Eve, to take care and control over the earth, and create a family: to “have dominion over the earth... And be fruitful, and multiply... upon the earth” (see Gen. 1: 26-31 AV). From Adam, came other Old Testament prophets, including Abraham, Moses and Daniel, who would still be revered and adhered to, by the three most leading and prominent monotheistic religions of today: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity (see data and Figure 3 in section 1.4). In addition, this researcher presented and promoted the view that:

The concept of monotheism should have and will have a future in [Religious] Studies, whether we dismiss it or not. We should discuss it, define it, disambiguate it, disburden it, but we should not discard it.<sup>69</sup>

This point of view also supported Jesus' passionate desire and commission, at the conclusion of His mortal ministry, for His prophets and apostles (see also section 1.4) to:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:19-20 AV).

### 4.2.2 Jesus Christ's perfect Example and our Heavenly Father's love and purpose

Second, the results highlighted that God's plan for all mankind was a perfect design, made possible by His Son, Jesus Christ's perfect example. This consisted of His baptism, His

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<sup>69</sup>Christian Frevel, “Beyond monotheism? Some remarks and questions on conceptualising ‘monotheism’ in Biblical Studies,” *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 34(2), Art. #810, 7 pages (2013), <https://verbumetecclisia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/810/1839>.

character and attributes, His atoning sacrifice in Gethsemane, culminated by His resurrection from the dead, on the third day (see sections 1.1; 2.1; and 2.1.1 ). Klaus Nürnberger added that:

For Christians, it is a particular content – God’s suffering, transforming acceptance of the unacceptable – that was revealed in the Christ-event and that constitutes the Christian faith. Believers assume that God, the Source and Destiny of all of reality, uses this historically emergent content to disclose God’s benevolent intentionality.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, followers of Jesus Christ used His example to both strengthen their faith in God’s plan for what awaited them in the next life; and also, to live in peace and harmony with their neighbors in this life. During His earthly ministry, the Savior kept teaching, and presenting these two branches of the same tree- God’s two greatest commandments- which would eventually lead each obedient individual person, unto the tree of eternal life (see sections 1.3.3; 1.5; and Matt. 22:36-40 AV).

Above all, the findings of section 1.5 talked about Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ’s love, and its spiritual impact upon the human family. Love had always been the highest attribute of both the Father and the Son, as taught throughout the Holy Bible (AV). Danie J. Dreyer also talked about God’s love and hope in Christ in this way:

This Christian hope ought once again to be voiced in all its fullness amidst the despair and false hopes of our age. Although Jesus Christ inaugurated the Christian hope of God’s reign, it has not yet been completed. It encompasses history and cosmic process. This hope embraces personal and communal fulfilment. It is a divine gift [and love], yet liberates humanity for partnership with God. Biblical faith and hope [and love] are themes of transformation, which is personal, social

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<sup>70</sup>Klaus Nürnberger, “Systematic Theology – An experiential approach: Core assumptions of my ‘Invitation to Systematic Theology,’” *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol 39, no. 1, a1863 (2018), <https://verbumeteclesia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/1863>.

and world transformation. It is a life transformed to the image of God and lived in the likeness of God. The ensuing Christian life is the ability to live in the presence of a faithful God without fully knowing.<sup>71</sup>

Heavenly Father, His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost (three members of The God Head), were always united in purpose, in the premortal, mortal, and in heaven, to grant us eternal life. They had loved all of us so much, so we might attain both their gifts of immortality (through Christ's resurrection), and eternal life (through Christ's Atonement). Heavenly Father's divine and eternal love, His truths, and doctrines had been taught in the holy scriptures by our Savior, His apostles, and His prophets (see Deut. 10:17-22; Matt. 5:48; Rom. 8:14-21; and John 17 AV).

#### **4.2.3 God sent us the Holy Ghost**

Third, the results and interviews in this section, were researched to support the claim already taught by our Savior, Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:26-27 AV).

If we follow the guidance of the Holy Ghost (see Section 2.1.1, 32-35), which teaches us God's will for each of us, Jesus promised:

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the

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<sup>71</sup>Danie J. Dreyer, "Participatory eschatology: A challenge for dualistic and non-dualistic thinking," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol 41, no 1, a2069 (2020), <https://verbumeteclesia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/2069/4186>.

last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that [everyone] which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:37-40 AV).

Talmage believed and elaborated upon this power and gift of divine influence upon all of us, if we keep God's commandments:

Whereas the actual person of the Holy Ghost cannot be in more than one place at a time. Yet we read that through the power of the Spirit, the Father and the Son operate in their creative acts... and in their general dealings with the human family.<sup>72</sup>

And this general dealing and influence of the Holy Ghost upon us, if we choose to listen to its whisperings and promptings, was evident during two separate interviews (two minutes each) between two Christian men and the researcher. Sometime this year, inside a Temple (house of worship), the latter asked each of them, why Jesus promised to send us the gift of the Holy Ghost, after His earthly ministry? (see John 14:26 AV). Here were the two men's responses:

The Holy Ghost testifies of Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father's work, to bring us back to their presence, so that we may have eternal life and exaltation. This wonderful news is far more important than my own current abilities, capabilities and imaginations. And this also sets a road map for me, for the rest of my life. Because each new day is part of my preparation to be with God and my loved ones, eternally. The second man said: I would not know if Jesus Christ and his teachings were real or true, if it was not the whisperings, comfort, and the quiet voice of the Holy Ghost. I am thankful for God's wisdom, in providing us with His Spirit, His Comforter, to realize our true and eternal possibilities and potentials. I am happy

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<sup>72</sup>James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Project Gutenberg eBook, 2013), 166, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/42238>.

we have this moral compass to guide us back to heaven. And I hope that my family and I would be worthy to have eternal life with our eternal God in heaven.

Again, with an emphasis on another of the paper's key themes, the critical role of the Holy Ghost in our daily lives, is significant, to advance both our character, our relationship towards each other, and our knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and our eternal friend. Without Him, our research for spiritual things, and a full understanding of God's love for each of us, will be permanently limited:

Of all the things of which the Holy Ghost testifies, the most precious for us is that Jesus is the Christ, the living Son of God. The Savior promised, "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me."<sup>73</sup>

#### **4.2.4 Jesus Christ's Religion**

Fourth, the results below were the outcomes of much shorter interviews (one minute per student), and questionnaires, about students' answers and responses to the question of, why is religion important to each of them? The students this researcher taught, interviewed, and observed, were from Year 8.1 (2024) class (ages 13-14) in Balga Senior High School in Western Australian. Their brief but significant responses could be generally summarized in the following paragraph. And except for just one student, who said he did not understand religion, twenty-one students expressed themselves in this way (see Appendix A for the complete data and findings):

Religion helps us to go to heaven. Our families teach us good values, like going to church. It is only obvious, that we follow our parents' religious teachings. Religion helps us to know about God. You get good and warm feelings when you attend church. And God makes everything, like the earth, people, animals, and plants. The

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<sup>73</sup>Henry B. Eyring, "Our Constant Companion," accessed April 02, 2024, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2023/10/47eyring?lang=eng#kicker1>.

Bible teaches us to go to church. We are Christians, so religion is important in our way of life. We need to understand how God becomes our creator.

Most of the above students somewhat affirmed and supported the belief and the author's theme, that Jesus came as the light and life of the world (see John 1:4, 9) and that in His church and religion, there was "One Lord, one faith, and one baptism" (Eph. 4:5 AV). And the church was built upon the rock and foundation of apostles and apostles, and Jesus Christ "being the chief corner stone" (see Eph. 2:18-22 AV). Moreover, Jesus Christ's religion was already explained in earlier sections of the paper, such as section 2.1.2, 36-37. In short, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, so that we too, if we choose to do so, be baptized in the same manner, and thus, become part of His church and kingdom upon the earth.

Still, because of our Heavenly Father's incomprehensible and everlasting love for all of us, His children, we are free to choose Christ's religion, or not. God would never force us to live with Him and His Beloved son, Jesus Christ, eternally. God is both merciful and just. The following quotation elaborates upon this truth and doctrine:

How and where and with whom do you want to live forever? You get to choose...When you make choices, I invite you to take the long view—an eternal view. Put Jesus Christ first because your eternal life is dependent upon your faith in Him and in His Atonement... It is also dependent upon your obedience to His laws. Obedience paves the way for a joyful life for you today and a grand, eternal reward tomorrow.<sup>74</sup>

#### **4.2.5 God's Celestial Kingdom**

Fifth and finally, the results about the theme and the doctrine of God's Celestial Kingdom. The same kingdom was spoken of by Daniel the prophet (see Dan. 2 AV), and discussed in earlier sections, for example, section 2.1.2.3, 45-50. This time, a different class of Year 8.2 (2024) students at Balga Senior High School, were asked a different question of,

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<sup>74</sup>Russell M. Nelson, "Think Celestial," accessed April 01, 2024, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2023/10/51nelson?lang=eng#p12>.

whether they liked the prospect and divine potential, of living forever with their families, in the presence of God (see Appendix B). The students' responses could be summarized as follows:

Heaven is where we find joy not pain. God made heaven a place of peace and happiness. It is a beautiful place, different from this earth. I love my family and want to be with them forever. We are going to die but God makes heaven eternal. I like to have peace and happiness, not worries and sadness. Heaven must be a beautiful place, relaxing, and enjoyable. Only God could make such a place where there is always peace and great things to see and experience. I like my parents and family to experience heaven, where there is good feelings all the time. Peace and happiness is what we are looking for in heaven.

In addition, five adult-men were interviewed for 1-2 minutes each (during a Sunday worship environment in 2024), by the researcher, about their feelings and testimonies of God's eternal reward for us, after this life. Here is a brief overall summary, of what they said and shared, in a very warm and sincere manner (see Appendix C):

I think of my family and really want God to grant us an eternal family. I am glad that God has a plan for us, and not just this mortal life. The ordinances of baptism and others God provides in His church, are so binding for us to be with Him and His Son, forever. Faith in Jesus Christ is so vital, to receive all that God is preparing for the righteous. I want to know God through Jesus Christ and be with my family forever.

Both the students' and the adults' answers and responses revealed and pointed to yet, one other theme this paper wanted to raise again, for emphasis. That is, each of God's children has a conscience, capacity, and heavenly guidance (Holy Ghost), to help her or him, choose between right and wrong, and whether to follow Jesus Christ, or not. Thus, even though Heavenly Father wants us to make it to the Celestial Kingdom, where He and His Son, Jesus Christ, dwell eternally, He has other kingdoms prepared for His children, according to their use of agency (see John 14:1-4 AV; and Figure 6, 49-50). As one author had honestly and sincerely explained:

All the children of God—with exceptions too limited to consider here—will ultimately inherit one of three kingdoms of glory, even the least of which “surpasses all understanding”... There, our loving Savior [Jesus Christ], who, we are taught, “glorifies the Father, and saves all the works of his hands,”... will send all the children of God to one of these kingdoms of glory according to the desires manifested through their choices.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Dallin H. Oaks, “Kingdoms of Glory,” accessed April 02, 2024, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2023/10/17oaks?lang=eng#p4>.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Research Questions and Aims

The structure<sup>76</sup> of this chapter begins with a review of the researcher's questions and aims. God, our Heavenly Father, loved all His children on earth so much, that He sent His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to show us the path to His highest Kingdom, called the Celestial Kingdom. Jesus was baptized to show us the first step to enter that kingdom. The original religion and church that He and His apostles established in mortality, focused on this Baptismal covenant (and other ordinances), as well as the Gift of the Holy Ghost, which testifies of the reality of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost), the Atonement (Christ's sufferings, crucifixion, and resurrection), and the truths of His gospel. This gospel and religion helps us prepare for eternal life with God and our loved ones. And what is our Heavenly Father's main purpose? God's main desire for all His children is to obtain eternal joy and happiness in the Celestial kingdom, where the Father and the Son dwell. Thus, He wants them to use their gift of agency wisely. Nevertheless, God's love is not limited to having a home and residence in the Celestial kingdom. He loves all His children so much, that He has prepared for them many kingdoms or mansions, for their eternal rewards, suited to their choices and desires, manifested and demonstrated throughout their mortal life (see Figure 6; John 14:1-7; 1 Cor. 15:40-42 AV).

What new information does this author suggest, could benefit research in the long term? His sincere and true wish, as mentioned and implied in the introduction chapter, is to encourage and promote spiritual knowledge, with the divine assistance of the Holy Ghost. Consequently, this will both expand and refine research like never before. In other words, more research into the example and character of Jesus Christ, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, will only advance knowledge in a limitless capacity. As Jesus has taught intently, plainly, and lovingly: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [including our knowledge of all fields] shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33 AV). God and Christ are our

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<sup>76</sup>"How To Write The Discussion Chapter," GradCoach, accessed April 06, 2024, <https://gradcoach.com/discussion-chapter-examples/>.

sources of all knowledge and wisdom, now and forever (see John 16:30; Rom. 11:33; Col. 2:3; 1 Sam. 2:3 AV). Furthermore, and according to their loving and divine plan for humankind, God's knowledge will eventually fill the whole earth "as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9 AV).

## **5.2 Key Findings**

Firstly, the results, data, and findings suggest that without God's prophets, the world would not fully comprehend or understand God's (Our Heavenly Father's) commandments and plan for us. The data also supports the truth that Jesus Christ was God's perfect Son and example, to help us return to God's presence. The findings promote the doctrine that the Holy Ghost is our helper to advance our knowledge of spiritual things and to testify of truths, especially of Jesus Christ, as our Savior and Redeemer. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, atonement, resurrection, and continuing involvement in our daily lives (through the whisperings of the Holy Ghost), we have the potential to live with God and Christ forever (in the celestial kingdom). The data further identifies Christ's religion as necessary for our spiritual progression, by loving God and our neighbors each day. Finally, the results and analysis clarify and identify the Celestial Kingdom as God's highest kingdom in the next life (see Figure 13).

In brief, God's purpose and plan of eternal happiness, is the greatest indication of his eternal love for all His children, as demonstrated in Figure 13. Here, we are shown that we lived with God as His spirit children before we were born into mortality, to obtain a physical body, just like Jesus Christ had exemplified. After we die, we live in the world of spirits, until our resurrection, made possible because of Jesus Christ's first resurrection. He will then assign us, after His final judgement, to one of His three kingdoms of glory, determined by our free agency, our desires, and our obedience to God's laws, while we are living on this earth (see 1 Cor. 15:39-42; Rev. 20:12-13; 1Pet. 3:18-20, 4:6 AV).

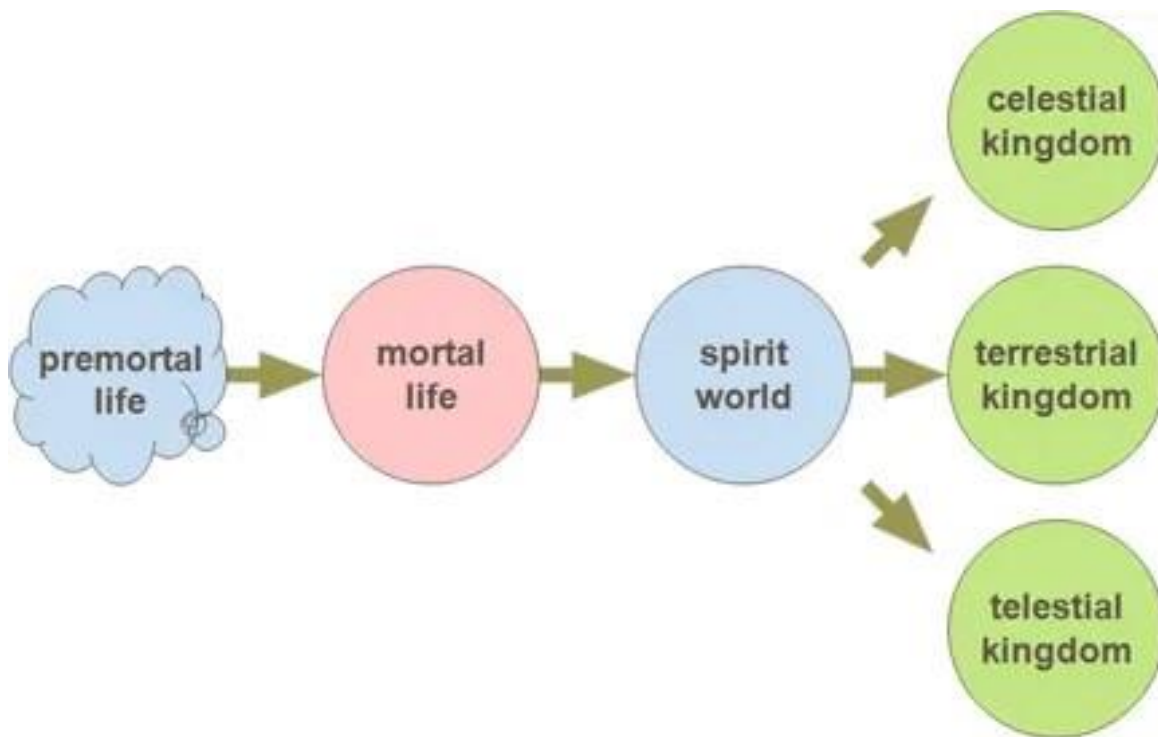


FIGURE 13: The Plan of Salvation by Brad McBride | Posted on Feb 21, 2016.<sup>77</sup>

## 5.3 Interpretations

### 5.3.1 Prophets

Prophets are a conduit through which God our Heavenly Father, has spoken and revealed his mind, to the rest of the human family, ever since Adam, the first prophet, who was created in the image of God (see Gen. 1:26-31 AV). Other prophets included Abraham, Moses, and Daniel. Prophets are dedicated servants and witnesses of God, who would dedicate their lives in His service. In particular, prophets proclaim, teach, and bear special witness and testimony of Jesus Christ’s ministry, atonement, and the resurrection. Our Savior is the only sure way for peace in this world and eternal life in the world to come.

A previous study (page 41) had interpreted and supported this attribute and dedication by God’s prophets, which is still evident and practised in monotheistic religions today, such as

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<sup>77</sup>Brad McBride, “The Plan of Salvation – What’s Missing?” accessed April 09, 2024, <https://www.thusweseem.com/2016/02/plan-salvation-whats-missing/>.

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. For example, Mosoiu (2019) wrote that, these dedicated disciples [and prophets] of Jesus Christ, would willingly suffer the shame of the world, despite experiencing martyrdoms and many tribulations, because they know something about eternal rewards with God, and receiving joy “in his everlasting kingdom.” The writer also both implied and noted that through God’s prophets and servants, our Heavenly Father’s simple and loving message, in order to receive such a joyful and everlasting reward is, for us to turn away from sins, be a good person, and keep all of God’s commandments the best we can possibly can.<sup>78</sup>

While some authors may disagree, this researcher is of the view, that the role of prophets and their emphasis upon people to refrain from sins, is an inevitable spiritual requirement from a perfect and holy God, in order to create acceptable relationships between Him and his imperfect children, living in a fallen world. Therefore, it would not be impossible to research such commonly used concepts, like history and spirituality, because they could only strengthen, uplift and advance the field of research. As this scripture wisely advises and encourages us to do: “Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. [And] Prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:19-21 AV).

In addition, prophets and monotheism are other important and interrelated spiritual concepts, which “we should not discard.” Rather, we “should discuss,” define, disambiguate, and disburden them. Because they “will have a future in [Religious] Studies”<sup>79</sup> (see section 4.2.1).

### **5.3.2 Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ was the only sinless prophet, the Beloved Son of the living God, foretold by all His previous prophets, who would lay down His life for all mankind, through His Atoning sacrifice and Resurrection (see section 4.2.2). Such divine and complete love from both God the Father and God the Son, for us, transforms and gives Christians and people the hope they need to overcome “the despair and false hopes of our age.” It’s a kind of love which

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<sup>78</sup>Mosoiu, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

<sup>79</sup>Christian Frevel, “Beyond monotheism?”

“encompasses history and cosmic process.” And it is a “Biblical faith and hope ... [that] is personal, social and world transformation” which prepares us [for eternal life with God and his Son, Jesus Christ].”<sup>80</sup> In brief, Jesus was the greatest because He taught everything by love, sacrifice, and example, including being baptized, so that the rest of us would know the gate to enter, and the path that leads to our Heavenly home (see section 4.2.2; and John 15:1-14 AV).

In relation to a previous literature review, these key points just mentioned, were mostly confirmed and verified. As Dods (2004) had pointed out before:

The greatest possible attainment [people] can make in this world is likeness to The Lord Jesus Christ; [and that], our prospects for future life [in heaven] ... will certainly vary with the resemblance of our character to that of Jesus Christ.<sup>81</sup>

In addition, Dods also reminded us that Jesus Christ has all the power to bless us. Thus, by exercising our faith, “effort and prayer”, we can be the channel of communicating the love of Christ to other people. Because sincere religion is where the followers can offer their hearts eagerly, and outwardly performing “Christian work... [for] the interests of Christ’s kingdom.” (see also section 2.1).

The difference between Dods’ study and this researcher’s, is that the former did not teach or imply the importance of Baptism. This is significant to the latter and his key aims, because Baptismal ordinance by an authorized servant (like John the Baptist who baptized Jesus), is vital to entrance into the Kingdom of God. The two basic requirements into God’s kingdom (Celestial kingdom, the highest) are personal righteousness before God, and receiving God’s ordinance of Baptism. Jesus had taught this clearly, intentionally, and unmistakably, during His whole mission, and just before He ascended into heaven, after His victory over death:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all

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<sup>80</sup>Danie J. Dreyer, “Participatory eschatology.”

<sup>81</sup>Marcus Dods, “How to become like Christ.”

things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (John 28:18-20; see John 3:1-5 AV).

The thesis' results therefore, highlight a couple of important things. One is to remind the reader of the researcher's aims about each person's commitment to God's commandments (including receiving God's ordinance of Baptism) in order to live with God eternally. The other is to add value of how research might benefit by exploring the point already being made and implied throughout this paper. That is, the ordinance of Baptism is an inseparable component of receiving the full gift of the Holy Ghost from our Heavenly Father, which could only advance our spiritual research indefinitely.

### **5.3.3 Holy Ghost**

When Jesus Christ was baptized, both The Father and Holy Ghost were present, by voice and by the symbol of a dove, respectively. Thus, the baptism of Jesus Christ was approved and ratified by all three members of the Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Ghost). Moreover, it was an example for all followers of the Savior, to receive this gift, in order to live in the presence of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, in the next life:

And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit [Holy Ghost] descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he [God the Father] that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. (John 1:32-34 ; see also 14:26-27 AV and; section 4.2.3).

As mentioned and implied specifically in chapter four, the key and most precious mission of the Holy Ghost, is to testify to all the people of the earth, that we have a loving Heavenly Father, who sent His only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for our sins, and to provide the only path to live in the presence of God, eternally.

A previous study by Qgundiran (2013) reminded us of the importance of Jesus Christ's disciples to be fruitful in bringing many souls unto Christ. This is a practical quality and a "recommendation of fruitfulness" applicable and "workable anywhere, and in any culture or

environment.”<sup>82</sup> (see section 2.1.1). However, a significant point was not included or highlighted in the author’s recommendation. That is, without the gift of the Holy Ghost, such recommendation would serve only as a temporary solution and purpose. Jesus, on the other hand, had reminded us to seek Him and His Spirit, because without it, “ye can do nothing” (John 15:5; see John 15:6-16; Eph. 4:30; Gal. 5:22-26 and; 1 Cor. 4:20-21 AV). But with God’s Spirit, every spiritual blessing is intended to make both our mortal experience and the next life the most memorable and the happiest.

This difference in results, therefore, between this paper’s and the previous studies, is due to the exclusion of the Holy Ghost from spiritual research. So, what does this researcher’s results contribute to a Religious field of research? It is the need for the inclusion of the Holy Ghost in spiritual and ethical research. Because, as one other author had similarly explained and implied:

As embodied persons who have been entrusted with God’s spirit, we should pursue with all our hearts and all our means, that is, with all possible human measures to fight [Covid-19, or whatever] ... in bringing healing and restoration to all of God’s creatures and to nature ... [And because we are all] created in the image of God ... [and have] been endowed with God’s spirit, [we] can wholeheartedly and passionately pursue responsibly ... the love for wisdom [including researches such as scientific research, and many other efforts, etc.,] and the wisdom of love [in] addressing the unmasked injustices and marginalizations.<sup>83</sup>

#### **5.3.4 Jesus Christ’s Religion**

At this stage, it is helpful to remind the readers, that it is not the Thesis’ intent to say what religion is Christ’s true one, or not true. We are free to choose our own religion and direction in life (as outlined and implied before, and in the previous sections of this chapter).

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<sup>82</sup>Victor Ogundiran, “MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST.”

<sup>83</sup>D. P. Veldsman, “God’s spirit (of wisdom) has been sent into the world, not Covid-19: A contextual systematic-theological perspective,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 76(1), a6222 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.6222>.

Although, the former point (about true religion, or vice-versa) could well be a future topic for some researchers to explore, as a result of this, and many other similar papers. Suffice to say, one of this researcher's key aims, was to present as many Biblical references as possible, to show how much Heavenly Father loves all His children. He sent His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to show us by example, the only true way to God's presence (see Figure 13 and section 5.3.5).

And, as it had already been pointed out and implied in the results chapter, that the Year 8 school students' answers to the questionnaire, reaffirmed and confirmed the need for Religion in our lives, and in our search for spiritual, divine, and eternal blessings, which our Heavenly Father has in stored for all of us. Moreover, we are naturally and spiritually inclined (particularly the young people), in desiring to live with our families forever (see section 4.2.4). Furthermore, and from God's own eternal perspective, He sets the requirements for His children to reach that heavenly and loftiest goal: In His church and religion, there would be "One Lord [Jesus Christ], one faith, and one baptism" (Eph. 4:5 AV; see section 5.3.2). And His religion would be organized, built upon the rock and foundation of apostles and apostles, and Him (the Savior) "being the chief corner stone" (see Eph. 2:18-22 AV and; section 4.2.4).

When compared to previous and existing studies, one writer substantially supported this paper's own findings. That is, Christ's teachings learned in His religion and taught throughout the Bible (AV) are summarized, as loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. In brief, Echeta (2021) has fully supported this theme by pointing out the practical applications and elements of these two key commandments, in suggesting that, followers of Christ need to attend to "people's spiritual hunger through scriptural and moral teachings," by feeding people when they are hungry, and "be sensitive to the physical, psychological and emotional needs of" their Christian communities<sup>84</sup> (see section 2.1.2.2).

However, an existing study by Malan (2014), gave a contrasting point of view. Therefore, this thesis's author did not find what he was looking for. Malan had reported and firmly believed that (see also section 2.1.2.2):

The concept kingdom of God was neither utopian nor merely political. It was a powerful and existential type of root metaphor describing and establishing a radical

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<sup>84</sup>U.F. Echeta, "Feeding of the hungry by Jesus."



new symbolic universe of God's patronage in opposition to the exclusivist Judean covenantal nomism... [Jesus Christ] proclaimed the kingdom of God and thus set himself up as its broker, in opposition to the temple elite barring the majority of people from God's presence in the temple.<sup>85</sup>

In contrast, this paper's aim is not a figurative or metaphorical explanation of Jesus religion and practices, but a thesis on the actual event and kingdom, to be established upon the earth by our Heavenly Father (see Matt. 24:30-3; Dan. 7:27 and; Zech. 14:9 AV). In short, the two researcher's studies differ. Malan's study focused upon performance and attributes, while this paper's researcher was looking at God's purpose, of eventually perfecting his religion and organization, when His divine Son, Jesus Christ, will return to rule and reign on this earth, with his saints, as "Lord of lords, and King of kings" (Rev 17:14 AV) for a thousand years of peace (see 1Tim. 1:17; Rev. 19 and; Isa. 40 AV).

Thus, this researcher's results could contribute to the field of religious study. The suggestion is based upon Jesus Christ's requirements for a candidate who wants to enter His religion and kingdom. He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5 AV). Because God loves all of His children, His Spirit [Holy Ghost] can assist them to know about His religion, which is a vehicle by which they can find what they need to do, to face life's challenges, and to qualify to live in the presence of God, after their mortal journey. It is a religion based upon Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice, which offers us "an invitation to enter into the work of loving reconciliation [with our Heavenly Father and his Son]."<sup>86</sup> By the same token, researchers (if they are willing), can research the above baptismal statement by Jesus, to enhance their knowledge of content and spiritual awareness. Most importantly, the Holy Ghost will increase the researchers' knowledge of the mysteries of God, presently missing from the spiritual and ethical field of research. As Jesus has taught, challenged, and implied for us to do for our

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<sup>85</sup>G.J. Malan, "The kingdom of God."

<sup>86</sup>Wahyoe R. Wulandari et al, "Besorat Hageulah: The Gospel of atonement in metanarrative justice and God's love," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 79(1), a8149 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8149>.

spiritual growth and progression in this, and the next life [including the help we need in our current and future study and research]:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:26 AV).

Some have studied, researched, and believed, that it was by the same spirit, that led Christopher Columbus to research, search, and sail to discover the new world, including the Americas. For example, Mark E. Petersen noted in his address, the following final testament and statement, by the famous discoverer, Christopher Columbus:

In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, who inspired me with the idea and afterward made perfectly clear to me that I could navigate and go to the Indies from Spain by traversing the ocean westward.<sup>87</sup>

Another observation about the Holy Ghost which guided Columbus' search for knowledge and discovery of the Americas was recorded as follows:

God inspired [Columbus]... who, by the Spirit of God was led to rediscover the land of America and bring this rich new land to the attention of the people in Europe. That man, of course, was Christopher Columbus, who testified that he was inspired in what he did.<sup>88</sup>

Overall, we similarly need God's Holy Ghost to assist us in our spiritual research and religious studies. The Holy Ghost also testifies, and bears witness of both the Father and the Son (see John 15:26 AV). And since Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are omnipotent and also

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<sup>87</sup>Mark E. Petersen, "The Great Prologue," accessed April 25, 2024, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/mark-e-petersen/great-prologue/>.

<sup>88</sup>Ezra Taft Benson, "A Man among the Gentiles," accessed April 27, 2024, [https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-student-manual/chapter-4-1-nephi-12-15?lang=eng#figure1\\_p4](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-student-manual/chapter-4-1-nephi-12-15?lang=eng#figure1_p4).

united in purpose (see Rev. 19:6 and; John 17:21-22 AV), they are our ultimate sources of all knowledge and wisdom (see also Ps.1 47:5; Pro. 2:6; Matt. 6: 28-34; Luke 2:52 and; Acts 15:18 AV).

### **5.3.5 God's Celestial Kingdom**

As mentioned in the Thesis' title, and highlighted or implied again, in chapters four and five, Jesus Christ's religion, including His perfect example, are vital in helping and supporting us, so we can attain the Celestial kingdom. This is the highest kingdom where we can live in the presence of God the Father, and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in a state of never-ending happiness. Moreover, Jesus has fervently implored and taught us to: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9 and; see section 5.2.5; 1 Cor. 15:40-42; 2 Cor. 12:2-4 and; John 3:16 AV), so we may reach our ultimate destination filled with joy and power (see John 17:1-5 AV).

When compared with a previous and existing research, this key theme and promising aim, of living in the celestial kingdom with God and Jesus Christ in a most incredible state of joy, sounds both irresistible and breathtaking. Hodges (2013) also imagines and celebrates such a situation and theme in an analogous way by saying:

The present earth would become the place of [Jesus Christ's] millennial kingdom, which itself would be an embryo of eternity... informing the thousand-year millennial age rolled into the eternal celestial kingdom of God<sup>89</sup> (section 2.1.2.3).

On the other hand, another previous and existing study by Loba-Mkole (2005), with a different perspective, asserted that, the disciples of Jesus Christ were attributing exaltation as a sign of respect for the "Son of Man." [Thus, creating] "a sense of Jesus' solidarity with his fellow beings...[or] exaltation by his followers"<sup>90</sup> (section 2.1.2.3). In contrast however, this paper's researcher was always writing and promoting the idea, that there would be an actual reward for those who would live in the presence of God after this life. In other words, this researcher wishes to highlight the tangible and physical exaltation, which is also the highest

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<sup>89</sup>Hodges, "My Principality on Earth Began."

<sup>90</sup>Loba-Mkole, "The social setting of Jesus' exaltation."

blessing and gift from God for His children, who would be His heirs in the Celestial kingdom. Dallin H. Oaks elaborates upon this perspective by saying:

Baptism and its associated covenants are requirements for entrance into the celestial kingdom.[But other] ordinances and associated covenants [of the gospel of Jesus Christ]... are requirements for exaltation in the celestial kingdom, which is eternal life [the highest of our Heavenly Father's blessings for His children].<sup>91</sup>

#### **5.4 Specific Limitations, Recommendations, and Conclusion**

The paper thus far, has both implied and pointed out some of its weaknesses and strengths, including the following. The specific limitations being the short interviews, smaller groups, and brief questionnaires. In short, time was a limiting and key factor for this thesis' researcher. Nevertheless, these results also pointed to the specific strengths of the paper and therefore, specific recommendations for future research. The key strength for this thesis is the need for, and the role of the Holy Ghost, in guiding us in our future research for religious and spiritual studies. And the other idea is the ordinance of Baptism (by an authorized servant of God), as a requirement for entrance into the religion, organization, and kingdom of Jesus Christ: during a latter-day period, a time of "restitution of all things," in preparation for Jesus Christ's rule and reign on this earth (Acts 3:20-21; see Eph. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:17; Isa. 65:21-22; Rev 7; 20:4-5 AV). This last perspective about baptism is reserved for those who agree and wish to pursue that path towards eternal life. Both the Holy Ghost and the ordinance of Baptism should be useful topics and recommendations for some researchers to examine, investigate, and study. Consequently, this could only advance and progress our knowledge of religious concepts and phenomena, than we currently possess and enjoy.

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<sup>91</sup>Dallin H. Oaks, "Covenants and Responsibilities," accessed April 09, 2024, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2024/04/47oaks?lang=eng>.

Many promote the opposite view that “God’s existence cannot be proved.” That is, religious and scientific knowledge “are restricted to human cognitive powers.”<sup>92</sup> But such studies ignore and disregard the wisdom found in these words of the Savior, Jesus Christ, who teaches, “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5 AV). Our knowledge and advancement of spirituality and religious study is limited without the help from our Heavenly Father, His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost (the Godhead). And as one world-renowned heart surgeon explains: “There is no conflict between science and religion. Conflict only arises from an incomplete knowledge of either science or religion—or both.”<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, other outstanding and brilliant scholars and leaders also appear to support and encourage this path and vision for the future of religious research by saying: “We call on leaders in institutions of high-er learning to take the long view; ... and to work collaboratively to support the academic study of religion.”<sup>94</sup>

In conclusion, we are all children of God, and fellow-travelers in this world of trials and errors, seeking for help, and to find the meaning of life. Often, we hurt each other by the things we both do and say, because of our weaknesses, and because we are living in a fallen world of sin. Thus, we need to forgive each other and look to heaven for inspirations, in order to move forward towards the future and eternal possibilities. “It could also be that reminding people that [we have,] a powerful God [who] loves and forgives [us, would also increase our] self-

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<sup>92</sup>Cornel W. du Toit, “Secular spirituality versus secular dualism: Towards postsecular holism as model for a natural theology,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Vol 62, No 4, a416 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v62i4.416>.

<sup>93</sup> Russell M. Nelson “The Tie Between Science and Religion,” accessed May 11, 2024, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/russell-m-nelson/the-tie-between-science-and-religion/>.

<sup>94</sup>Jodi Magness and Margaret M. Mitchell, “Religious Studies & the Imagined Boundaries of the Humanities,” *Daedalus*, Vol. 151, No. 3, *The Humanities in American Life: Transforming the Relationship with the Public* (Summer 2022), pp. 166-179 (14 pages), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48681151>.

confidence.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed, God in his wisdom and mercy, gives us that confidence and reassurance repeatedly, by teaching us to build our characters “upon [his] rock [example]” (see Matt. 7:24-25, and Luke 6:47-48 AV). And that is why Heavenly Father sent His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us, to provide a free resurrection for each person, and to set the standards, in order for us to gain that eternal and heavenly reward. In brief, we need Jesus Christ’s religion and prophets to help us towards that loftiest and highest goal (see Eph. 2:19-22 AV). This means, we need the help of God’s prophets, who stay “in line with the [ancient] biblical prophets who were always at the helm of national appeal for justice, righteousness and calling [us to follow our Savior].”<sup>96</sup> That is the only sure way for us and our families to live in the presence of our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, eternally, in Their Celestial kingdom, where there is peace, fullness of joy, and everlasting happiness (see Matt. 13:43; 1 Cor. 15:40; Rev. 21 AV). Finally, and as Russell M. Nelson has gently and kindly reminded each of us, “God loves all of His children everywhere and wants each of them to choose to return home to Him.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Marie Good, Michael Inzlicht, and Michael J. Larson, “God will forgive: reflecting on God’s love decreases neurophysiological responses to errors,” *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, Volume 10, Issue 3, March 2015, Pages 357–363, <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsu096>.

<sup>96</sup>K.T. Resane, “Prophet and politician dining around the same table: God’s message in conflict?” *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 44(1), a2835 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2835>.

<sup>97</sup>Russell M. Nelson, “Rejoice in the Gift of Priesthood Keys,” accessed April 09, 2024, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2024/04/57nelson?lang=eng>.

**Appendix A: Year 8.1 class students on why religion is important**

Students Number	Why is religion important to you?
1	Religion helps me and my family live in heaven
2	My family believe in God
3	We are Christians
4	I believe in Christ
5	My parents teach me about religion
6	It is obvious that I follow my parents' teachings and church
7	I want to go to heaven
8	Muslims teach about God and true religion
9	My family are Christians
10	We like going to church
11	Parents and church teach me about religion
12	Church and religion convince me about God
13	Religion helps me to know about God
14	I feel good about going to church
15	God made everything like people, plants and animals
16	God created the earth since the beginning
17	I am a Christian
18	Parents teach me
19	I feel good about religion
20	The Bible teaches me about God and church
21	Religion is a way of life
22	I don't know anything about religion

**Appendix B: Year 8.2 class students on why living forever is important**

<b>Students Number</b>	<b>Why is living forever with your family and God important?</b>
1	I want to be happy forever
2	It makes people happy
3	Heaven makes me feel good
4	There is peace in heaven
5	There is no pain in heaven
6	It feels ok talking about heaven
7	I like the idea of peace with God
8	I want peace
9	Good people live in heaven
10	It must be relaxing in heaven
11	Good and beautiful in heaven
12	Heaven will be enjoyable
13	I am a Buddhist
14	It will feel good
15	I think it will be good and happy
16	It will be beautiful
17	I think it is good and great
18	It will be ok
19	I like peace
20	I think it is happiness
21	People say it is good
22	My parents teach me
23	I feel great about it
24	It is a beautiful place
25	I think it will be peaceful and beautiful
26	I like the idea
27	God is great
28	There is no worries
29	There will be no violence
30	It will be a different place from earth
31	God rules the earth and lives in heaven
32	I like happiness
33	There is peace and no pain in heaven



### **Appendix C: Christian-men on why an eternal reward is important**

<b>Adults number</b>	<b>Why is an eternal reward important?</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>God is kind and I really want to be with my family forever</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>God's plan is wonderful because mortal life will end</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Baptism and other gospel ordinances bind us to our Heavenly Father, through our Savior, Jesus Christ</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Without faith in our Savior Jesus Christ and his Atonement, we cannot live with our families forever</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Heavenly Father wants us to have eternal life, through His Son, Jesus Christ</b>

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