

THE INTOLERANCE OF TRUTH – PART I

“What is truth?” (Pontius Pilate’s question for Jesus, as quoted in John 18:38)

Truth is under assault! It stands the test of two major challenges: Science & Hyper Tolerance. On the one hand science is fast overthrowing the ancient idols of external morality and superstition. Here is the claim. This is the 21st century. The old truth no longer applies. There is nothing but the DNA. We are but a cosmic accident, products of nothing plus chance. Therefore, we owe no allegiance outside ourselves. God is chance. He is accident. He is the Great Nothing. God is dead. We are free to remake ourselves in any image we want. We are masters of our own souls. From the other direction, a new all-tolerant spirituality tells us, ‘All truth is subjective’. “Judge not!”, they intone, “All roads lead to the divine”. ‘We all have our own truth’. We are become our own gods!

No Other Name

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts4:12)

“I am the way and the truth and the life”, Jesus said, **“No one comes to the Father except through me.”** (John 14:6) On the face of it this statement seems to challenge the limits of arrogance and intolerance. How could anyone claim that he is the only path to God? A claim such as this one lies in direct violation of the supreme standard of the post-modern age in which we live. That standard is unquestioning tolerance. Yet the Christian faith uncompromisingly makes that claim and others like it. It claims that the truth it expresses is immutable and constant. But the world sees such claims as intolerant and narrow minded. The post-modern world, concerned as it is with being fair and inclusive, suggests that sincerity is enough, that we each can have ‘our own truth’. It becomes impossible to even admit the possibility of discovering objective truth. Reality is no gauge. And if there is no objective truth, then any opinion that claims to speak authoritatively and exclusively on any subject, is by definition not true. In that twisted logic, the only position that is inherently untrue is the one that claims a universal truth.¹

Here’s how the world thinks. One writer to the Buffalo News recently told us “It’s OK folks, your souls are saved...All paths lead to God”. She then assured, “Pagan, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindi, Jewish and Christian friends”, that “we are all going in the right direction if we truly believe that we are all both human and divine.” This is a commonly held belief. No one religion possesses the entire truth therefore all religions are valid. There is one divine reality that the various traditions approach in different ways. According to Ramakrishna, the Hindu holy man, “Many faiths are but different paths leading to the one reality, God.”² In this worldview then, what really matters is sincerity. Any belief can take you where you are going.

This has led to the acceptance of what would be otherwise viewed as some very crazy stuff. In the UK for instance, Jedi has become an official religion. It’s based upon the philosophic / religious ramblings of the Star Wars films. One tenet expressed in the movie Revenge of the Sith, says it all: “God is a point of view”. Paganism is flourishing. The New Paganism is the fastest growing religion in Australia. In large numbers, women are turning to feminist spirituality or goddess worship, - the worship of the Earth itself. Youth are flocking to Wicca. CBN cites studies that say ¾ of our youth have dabbled in “psychic activities or witchcraft”. Celebrities are touting Kabbalah, (Jewish occultism) or Scientology, a spiritual raping of its adherents. The worship of Zeus is reviving in Greece. All this return to the occult and paganism is promoting aberrant sexuality outside of marriage. Its all part of the “pagan

understanding of the world...for there is no creator". Paul speaks to this in his letter to the Romans. **"Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."** (Rom 1:24-25)

But can this really be true? Do all ways really lead to God? What essentially is argued is this: We cannot determine Absolute Truth, therefore all religions have a piece of that Truth therefore all ways are equal. The commonality between religious systems is found in a common morality. It rests on the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. But even the watering down of the various religious beliefs does not solve the problem. The tenets of the competing worldviews reflect not just a difference in approach but an outright contradiction of the other positions. These differences extend right down to the most basic level, that of defining the nature of God. To the monotheistic religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam, God is an all-powerful personal creator. Each of these believes in the one-ness of God. On the other hand many Hindus hold to the idea of an impersonal reality which is found in all things. Others believe in as many as 330 million less than all-powerful gods. Holders of the New Age philosophies find god in themselves. (So do some Hindus.) It is an insoluble problem. The contradictions are very real. By the very fact that each claims exclusive knowledge, all religions are bound to contradict each other. In light of these conflicting claims all of them cannot be true. By the laws of logic, they can all be false. But only one of them could be true. What is true then is that all of them cannot have the same value unless all of them are false. With all respect to Ramakrishna, it is impossible that they are all "...leading to the one reality, God". If all religions contradict, and all religions include a claim of exclusivity, then all religions cannot be at the same time true. Got it?

Let us review for a moment again some of the competing concepts of God. Christians and Muslims believe in one all-powerful God. However Christians hold that God manifests himself in three persons. Muslims see this as metaphysical sleight of hand and claim Christians are closet polytheists. Hindus think Muslims and Christians are about 300 million gods short of a full deck. Buddhists don't concern themselves with God at all. Those who hold to New Age beliefs think they are probably god. They just haven't realized it yet. Or maybe it's the universe that's their extended body. How are these competing concepts to be reconciled? According to the laws of logic: They all can't be right.

You see, Truth cannot violate the basic laws of logic. It is absolute and it is unchanging. By definition it is exclusive. If two statements contradict, they both can't be true. Jesus cannot both be God, (the Christian position), and not be God, (the position of Islam). There is no way to reconcile these two claims. They are mutually exclusive. As Ravi Zacharias puts it, "Everything cannot be true. If everything is true, then nothing is false."^{3 4}

But logic is not the real problem. It is at essence, the acceptance or rejection of the Gospel that is at stake. Christianity is different than any other religion. Other faiths; Islam, Hinduism, Kabbalah, paganism, - offer ways in which man can strive to come close to God. There is no assurance of 'salvation'. In contrast the Gospel presents God's plan: Where God does the work of a salvation that man can never achieve on his own. That is why the world is so intent on proving that Jesus is not 'The Way'. That would take Man off his throne. That would mean change, - surrender. So the world presents Jesus as just another way to God. They call him an avatar, an emanation of the divine, one of the christs, - a prophet revealing another piece of the Truth. But not the whole Truth itself!

You see, the real problem is Jesus Himself. The “religious world” is happy to recognize him as a ‘great man’, a moral teacher beyond compare. But that is not who He said He was. He claimed to be the very God, the only way to the Father. C.S. Lewis addressed this problem in the oft-quoted Mere Christianity. He wrote: “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell... You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”⁵

THE INTOLERANCE OF TRUTH – PART II

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24)

It has been put forward that: All religions are basically the same; - That all are just different means to the same end. That just doesn't fit the facts. All the various faith traditions hold to doctrines that contradict each other on the most basic points. We're going to look at just how they do and why it matters.

One God...Simple Like That!

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

The Bible is consistent, - and clear on this matter. There is one God, - Jehovah, - and He is completely separate from creation. Deuteronomy 6:4 leaves no room for the subjective opinion of the reader. By the uncompromising laws of logic, either it is true - or it is not. It makes a difference because who God is defines just who we are. That ultimate nature of God will necessarily affect the nature of morality itself. It makes a difference who makes the rules.

Whether the source of your morality is a transcendent God, or your own inner consciousness is vitally important. If nature is your God, as it is to neo-pagans, (Wiccans & New Agers), or if we are all a part of the divine nature, (New Age & Eastern religions), - then all becomes relative. But if the moral law comes from the loving nature of the very God of the universe, - then morality becomes something very different indeed. The answers to the great moral questions flow naturally from just how we answer the question. Who is God? The issues of abortion, euthanasia and cloning are easily answered once we understand that there is an author of life and The Law who has given life value. To those who see all truth as relative, these will always be personal choices. These are two paths that cannot converge. The exclusive nature of Truth makes this so.⁶ The question has always been the same. Who sits on the throne: God or ourselves?

Making The Choice

“[C]hoose this day whom you will serve,...as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”. (Joshua 24:15)

Jesus knew the exclusive nature of Truth. He did not shy away from stating it. “**I am the Truth**”, he stated, claiming to be the only way to the Father. He rejected the notion that every religion was in essence teaching the same thing, even addressing the notion that ‘many paths’ lead to salvation. “**Enter by the narrow gate**”, said He, “**for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.**” (Matthew 7:13-14) And so He put forward that only He, as the Christ and the very Son of God, had the exclusive answer to the ultimate questions of life.

So let’s just look at a few areas where the various world faiths disagree.

The Reality / Identity of God

- **Hinduism** – It is not so much a religion as a religious system of related beliefs. Hindus may worship many gods or no god at all. There are no universal moral demands. Hinduism views man as a part of an impersonal divine force. All material reality is illusion. Therefore sin and even life itself is illusion.⁷
- **Buddhism** - Buddhism is somewhat related to the Hindu religion. It began as a reaction to what its founder, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), saw as errors in Hinduism. He rejected the validity of the Hindu scriptures and the notion of the individual soul. He emphasized ethics over ritual and believed that the material world was real. Buddhists reject the concept of God.⁸
- **New Age** - The New Age has much in common with the religions of the East as well as ancient Babylonian rituals, nature worship and the occult. Often the earth is viewed as a goddess. The common underlying principal of the New Age Movement is that all truth is relative. Divinity is found within the self.⁹
- **Islam** – Allah is the single creator of the universe. The Arabic name for God in pre-Islamic days was just one of many gods that were worshipped in the temple at Mecca.¹⁰ It originated from the Babylonian god Bel¹¹ (often called Baal in the Bible), and was often worshipped in female form.¹² Mohammed’s religion both had its roots in and was a flight from paganism. Allah himself was just the personal name of the Arabian moon god.¹³ It has evolved into the worship of a god of high power, justice and little mercy.
- **The God Of The Bible** – The Bible too teaches that there is One God, the Creator / Father, Holy and Righteous and totally separate from His creation. Before creation, before time, God existed in a community of love – The Trinity. God is love. It is the supreme virtue, the essence of His very being. We see the operation of the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, beginning with the creation act itself. To the Bible believing Christian, God loved us enough to make man in His image. He longs for us so much that He sent His Only Son to die for us.

The Means of Salvation

- **Hinduism** – Reincarnation is the key. The uncreated eternal soul may be reborn thousands of times, living each time a life of suffering, until the ultimate release and union with the infinite. In each new life they pay for the karma of their previous life. They seek release from this cycle of constant reincarnation through; works, knowledge or ritualistic religious devotion.
- **Buddhism** - Like the Hindus they hold to the cycle of reincarnation. And all life is suffering. Nirvana is achieved when we let go of all of our desires. It is only through self-effort that this ‘salvation’ can be achieved.
- **New Age** - The New Ager achieves his quest when he realizes that he is already a part of the divine nature. He taps into that personal divine potential by achieving a higher consciousness. As such there is no sin. Man is neither good nor bad, and all religions are essentially the same. This is of course a natural conclusion of any world-view that denies the absolute nature of truth.
- **Islam** - Unlike the Christian notion of salvation through the grace of God’s love, Islam teaches that God has no love for the sinner. Everyone must work out his or her own salvation through acts of the will. Our good and bad deeds are weighed on a scale. We can never be sure of our salvation.¹⁴
- **Christianity** – Salvation is through grace, the free gift of God. It is the only religion in which you do not have to work for your salvation.

The Special Question: Is Allah The Same As The God of The Bible?

- Islam was founded by Mohammed in the 7th century as reaction to paganism and rampant immorality. Yet Allah was just the chief god among many in the temple in Mecca. Pre-Islamic Allah worship was very much like Baal worship; centering on the moon, the stars and the sun.¹⁵ The religious symbol of the crescent moon is still a part of Islam. With its roots deep in paganism, and despite some superficial similarities, - the emergence of Islam cannot be explained by the geographical influence Judaism and Christianity may have had on Arab culture.¹⁶
- In contrast to Christianity, Islam was born amidst war and violence. The Prophet himself ordered the destruction of his enemies and united the Arab people into a vast army to spread the new faith in the name of Allah. While Muslims do accept the Torah of Moses, the Psalms and a Gospel of Jesus, the Koran takes precedence. They believe those earlier scriptures were somehow corrupted and are no longer perfectly accurate. In the Islamic tradition, Allah is a righteous judge, - unlike the Biblical God of love.¹⁷
- In Islam, God is an unapproachable being. This is in stark contrast to the message of the Bible; the universal love of God for all mankind.
- The Koran is known to have 99 names for God. Yet not one of those connotes the notion of fatherhood. In contrast, Christianity is built on the Fatherhood of God and the saving work of His Son Jesus. All those who believe in the Son are adopted into the family of God.¹⁸

In sum: The Allah of Islam is not the same god worshipped as Father by Christians and Jews. In fact, Mohammed chose Allah as chief of a pantheon of gods from the temple of Kabla. Even according to the Koran, Allah does not resemble the Christian God of love. The God of the Bible loves even the sinner. **“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:8) The Koran tells us that this

unapproachable Allah hates the sinner. Instead of calling for repentance and offering forgiveness, the Koran calls for war against the unbeliever. Sura 8:68 states, *“It is not for any prophet to have prisoners until he has made wide slaughter in the land.”* And in Sura 66:9 we read, *“Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal sternly with them.”* The Christian concept of a loving, forgiving God can in no way be reconciled with the Islamic notion of Allah.

Jesus: The Stumbling Block

- **Hinduism** – Hindus believe in many divine incarnations, - especially of the god Vishnu. Jesus was just one of many manifestations of God. Since they hold that God can be found by many paths, they object to the notion of Christ as the unique Son of God.
- **Buddhism** – There is no God therefore: No Son of God. He was just a good teacher.
- **New Age** – Though Jesus was a great teacher: He was no more divine than any other human being. They deny too some of His teachings. He certainly could not be the Savior. Holding that there is no sin: Therefore there is no need of a Savior.
- **Judaism** – Though they share the same God as the Christians, Jews do not accept Jesus as Messiah. Though the Old Testament prophecies are explicitly fulfilled in the New Testament, Jews do not see the connection.
- **Islam** – Islam denies the Trinity, therefore it denies that Jesus is God’s Son. He is merely a prophet, inferior to Mohammed. In the Koran, there is no notion of God as Father. So translated into Arabic, the idea that Jesus is the Son of Allah is nothing less than blasphemy. Sura 19:88 is a direct denial of even a possibility of any connection with the Christian faith. It reads, *“ Those who say the Lord of mercy has begotten a Son preach a monstrous falsehood, at which the very heavens might crack, the earth break asunder, and the mountains crumble to dust. That they should ascribe a Son to the merciful, when it did not become Him to beget one.”*
- **Christianity** - Jesus is the personification of God’s love, entering human history. He brought not only the message of that love and the resultant forgiveness available to all, but he brought the message of Himself. He was the expression of God’s love; the love of the One God, living in holy community for all time; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁹ Through Him, that love is now available to all who receive Him. Christ is God’s eternal Son. In John 8:58 he announces, **“before Abraham was I am”**. The **“I am”** in Hebrew is transliterated as Yaweh, the name of God. Jesus is the very God!

The stumbling block remains. It is Jesus. Without the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, no other commonality is really significant. Jesus said, **“I am the way”**. All others say; ‘He is not’.

Summing Up

We return to the original question: Is it arrogant and intolerant to claim that Jesus is the only way to God? Do not all paths converge at the ultimate divine reality? Logic tells us they cannot. In their essential defining elements, there is no consistency. These systems cannot be reconciled. The source of reality is different for each. The starting point makes a critical difference. How you view the great moral issues of life will necessarily be affected. If truth is relative, if reality is an illusion, if you seek the divine within yourself, or recognize no divinity at all you will get one set of answers. If you look to an All Powerful, Loving, Lawgiver, Creator God, you will have an entirely different set of answers. That is precisely where we as Christians find the source of our morality, in the character of that loving

God. No, all paths do not converge. The truths espoused are not just different. They blatantly contradict each other. No amount of deeply felt sincerity, no strained attempt to reconcile, can bridge that chasm. With each tradition making essential claims that contradict the essential claims of another tradition, there is no logical way to be theologically inclusive.

This is especially true of Christianity where the message is the person of Jesus. Among all the founders of the world's major religions, Jesus is the only one to have claimed divine status. He says, **"I am the way, and the truth"**. Peter said of him, **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** (Acts 4:12) The claim is exclusive. It must be. Truth is exclusive. It was, as we have seen, a claim backed up by the fulfillment of prophecy. It was a title asserted through public miracles and healings. It was a truth ultimately affirmed by his own resurrection from the dead. The message is this. Man is lost and in need of salvation. All other religions can offer only the route of personal responsibility, self-effort and personal will as the means of that salvation. The message of Christ is much bigger than that. He offers the love of God.

The message of Christianity is thus: We know the truth. We know the law. But we cannot, and do not follow it. So God sent his only Son to pay the price we could not pay for our sins. He is the only way. And, **"whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."** (John 3:16) Whoever believes! The offer is open to all. That is the intolerance of the Gospel!

Yes, the Gospel is exclusive. It claims there is only one way. You cannot come by sincerity. You cannot come by good works. You cannot find God through religion. You can only come through the person of Jesus Christ. He is the expression of the Father's love. He is the truth. And the truth demands a response. It demands action. It demands belief. It calls us to a radical, life transforming commitment to Christ. It offers eternity with God to all that accept him. That is the intolerance of Truth! That is the intolerance of the Gospel!

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- ¹ John MacArthur, *Why One Way?*, W Publishing Group, 2002, pg 7-9
 - ² Fritz Ridenour, *So What's The Difference?*, Regal Books, 2001, pg 94
 - ³ Ravi Zacharias, *On Truth*
 - ⁴ Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakeable Foundations*, Bethany House, 2001 pg 296-297
 - ⁵ C S Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg 52
 - ⁶ Keith E Johnson, *Do All Paths Lead to the Same Destination?*, Leader U.
 - ⁷ Fritz Ridenour, *So What's The Difference?*, Regal Books, 2001, pg 89-96 - (Applies also to many of the passages dealing with Hinduism)
 - ⁸ Fritz Ridenour, *So What's The Difference?*, Regal Books, 2001, pg 104-106 - (Applies also to many of the passages dealing with Buddhism)
 - ⁹ Fritz Ridenour, *So What's The Difference?*, Regal Books, 2001, pg 151-160 - (Applies also to many of the passages dealing with The New Age)
 - ¹⁰ Gibb, *Encyclopedia of Islam Vol. I*, pg 406, as quoted by Dr. Robert Morey, in *The Cult of the Moon God*, excerpted from *The Islamic Invasion*, 1992
 - ¹¹ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. I, pg 117, 1979, as quoted by Morey
 - ¹² Dr Arthur Jeffrey, *Islam: Mohammed and His Religion*, 1958, pg 85, as quoted by Morey
 - ¹³ Dr. Robert Morey, in *The Cult of the Moon God*, excerpted from *The Islamic Invasion*, 1992
 - ¹⁴ Gregg Laurie, *Do all roads lead to God*, World Net Daily, May 20, 2006
 - ¹⁵ Otto Zeller Verlag, *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Quran*, pg 36, 1973, as quoted by Morey
 - ¹⁶ Dr. Robert Morey, in *The Cult of the Moon God*, excerpted from *The Islamic Invasion*, 1992
 - ¹⁷ Fritz Ridenour, *So What's The Difference?*, Regal Books, 2001, pg 79-86
 - ¹⁸ Timothy George, *Is The Father of Jesus The God of Muhammed?*, Breakpoint, October 23, 2001
 - ¹⁹ Timothy George, *Is The Father of Jesus The God of Muhammed?*, Breakpoint, October 23, 2001