

NOT MANY GODS BUT ONE!

FROM ONE GOD TO MANY GODS

While the Bible begins with the one sovereign God, creator of the cosmos and of all life forms, and author of absolute truth; it chronicles how repeatedly mankind has rejected God and turned aside to gods of his own making. Because the dynamic was the desire of people to be free to do as they pleased, they made their gods say what they wanted to hear. The Apostle Paul describes the process in this manner: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desire; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

A DEFINITION OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM:

"The belief that multiple religions or secular world views are legitimate and valid. Each is true when viewed from within its own culture."

(Glossary of religious terms in the web site maintained by Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance). "The theory that there (is) more than one...[kind]...of ultimate reality and/or truth and that therefore more than one religion can be said to have the truth" (Anton Hein, Webmaster of Apologetics Index

(<http://www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex/p14.html>). "Pluralism is an affirmation of the validity of every religion and the refusal to choose between them, and the rejection of world evangelism" (John Stott, Anglican theologian, Interview with Dr. John Stott, "Orange County Register, 1998-OCT-3).

THE BIRTH OF PLURALISM

Since the people were not of one mind as to what they wanted to believe, the gods they created became increasingly numerous. In addition tribal groups came to be distinguished by the covey of gods they had chosen. The multiplication of the gods led naturally to what is called "pluralism." All gods were believed to be equally divine and all teachings equally correct. Therefore, there could be no one absolute god who was omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, nor could there be such a thing as absolute truth. The door was thereby open for divergent, and even conflicting religious truths.

THE PROBLEM WE ARE FACING GOES ALL THE WAY BACK TO EDEN!....THE DESIRE TO BE GOD...TO BE FREE TO DECIDE WHAT IS TRUTH FOR ME. ADAM AND EVE FELL FOR IT (GEN. 3:1-6). IT IS THE

POPULAR CHOICE TODAY. SOMETHING FORECAST BY THE APOSTLE PAUL (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Eve fell for the prospect of being "like God" (Gen. 3:1-6). As indicated above, Paul warned that mankind would leave God's truth in order to hear things that pleased them. They would prefer stories (fables) that would illustrate things that would make them feel comfortable and permit them to do what they wanted to do. Unfortunately, the end result of this process is terrible. As illustrated in the Old Testament, pluralism led Israel to burn their children to the god Molech (Jer. 32:30-35), to have sex with both men and women prostitutes as a religious practice (Hosea 4:1-14), and in their violence to fill Jerusalem with innocent blood (Jer. 19:3-4).

ISRAEL AND PLURALISM

Evidently, religious pluralism characterized the family of Abraham. Joshua writes, "Thus says the Lord the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.'" (24:2). Joshua also remarks on what was a repetitive problem for Israel, i.e., their tendency to turn away from Jehovah God, turning back to the gods of human origin. "Now therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River (Euphrates) and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (24:14-15).

THE JEWS OUT OF EGYPT WANTED IT BOTH WAYS!

We are told that even while God worked great signs and wonders as He freed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery and settled them in the promised land, they turned back to the human gods. God gave this accusation in Amos 5:25-26: "Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Klyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for your-selves." He makes a similar statement in Ezekiel 20:7-8: "And I said to them, Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt." Stephen reminds the Jews that were rejecting Christ of the sorry record of their fathers in Acts 7:39-43: "And our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to Him, but repudiated Him and in their hearts turned back to

Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make for us gods who will go before us, for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt--we do not know what happened to him. And at that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'It was not to me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel? You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship them. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.'

TODAY IS A POPULAR TIME FOR THE EXPLOSION OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM!

Intolerance in religion is seen as a negative. The reason is that we are living in a materialistic and pleasure-seeking society which wants to be free to do whatever one pleases without being condemned by society. This is readily visible in the obstruction given the expression of Christian teachings in schools, in political and other public forums...because Christianity is judgmental. At the same time there is an openness to public statements about other religions which are not condemning. Many want "self" to be at the center rather than God. As Gross has correctly stated, "We live in a civilization in which, as never before, man is preoccupied with SELF. The popularity of the idea is understandable. Never before has a general philosophical system so concerned itself with SELF. Never before have we so revered self-indulgence. The Idea focuses directly on modern man's vulnerable psyche and newly acquired emotional rights. The lure is irresistible. To egocentric modern man, the prospect of SELF instead of GOD seated at the center of a world philosophical system is exquisitely attractive." (The Psychological Society, Gross, M., Random House, 1978, pp.4,14).

AS A CONSEQUENCE, RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IS ALIVE AND WELL TODAY!

As Christian missionaries have gone into the world, they have faced religious pluralism in the form of well-established belief systems replete with seasoned traditions. Particularly in Asia they have found many who in syncretistic fashion have merged aspects of various non-Christian religions into their personal belief system. This has escalated into a movement toward a world religion that would incorporate the elements of the religions of the world into one religion.

THE ROOTS OF THIS MOVEMENT ARE TRACEABLE.

At the New World Conference on Missions held in Jerusalem in 1928 some Protestant leaders voiced the need to not consider other world religions enemies, but stand with them and be willing to learn from

them. By 1932, a study of the purpose of missions chaired by W.E. Hocking of Harvard suggested that followers of Christ should do their good works, but not claim a monopoly on salvation. They should work toward sharing rather than toward conversion. While they should be willing to share good things that come from Christ, they should be equally willing to accept things others have which we do not have in Christianity (Rethinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry After One Hundred Years by the Commission of Appraisal, W.E. Hocking, Chair, New York: Harper and Row, 1932, pp. 29-48).

FEW ARE IMMUNE TO THIS CURRENT!

Even the Catholic Church is not immune to this current. On 12/9/2000) The Dallas Morning News carried the following statement: "Tempering a controversial Vatican declaration on Salvation, Pope John Paul II said Wednesday that all who live a just life will be saved even if they do not believe in Jesus Christ and the Roman Catholic Church. The pontiff, addressing some 30,000 pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square for his weekly general audience, strongly reasserted the liberal interpretation of the Bible's teaching on salvation that emerged from the Second Vatican Council. "The gospel teaches us that those who live in accordance with the Beatitudes--the poor in spirit, the pure of heart, those who bear lovingly the sufferings of life--will enter God's kingdom," John Paul said. "All who seek God with a sincere heart, including those who do not know Christ and his church, contribute under the influence of grace to the building of this kingdom."

THERE IS, IN FACT, A WORLD WIDE MOVE UNDER WAY TO ACHIEVE ONE RELIGION. AT ITS HEART IT WOULD NOT ONLY BE PLURALISTIC, BUT ALSO SYNCRETISTIC.

Not only would all world religions be considered equally true, but it is held that by comparing and studying the contents of the world religions, persons would be free to pick and choose what they found acceptable as they went about personalizing a religious faith of their own choosing. No one would negatively judge the choices of others, as they would only be considered variations on the same theme. We are asked to believe that the only hope for a world at peace, for a world without poverty, for a world where the causes of suffering have been eliminated, a veritable utopia...would be found in this one world religion. Notice that this "one world" movement features benefits on earth, rather than in future life. In fact, their ideas of future life and how to obtain it are so varied and contradictory that it is easy to see why this would not be featured.

THE MOST FORMIDABLE BLOCK TO THIS IS CRISTIANITY WITH ITS INSISTANCE THAT ONLY THE FIGURE OF CHRIST AND CHRISTIANITY REPRESENT ABSOLUTE TRUTH....THAT ALL OTHER RELIGIONS ARE IN FACT FALSE AND CANNOT OFFER

**SALVATION FROM SIN. THEREFORE CHRIST MUST BE
ATTACKED AND HIS CLAIMS BELITTLED. JESUS IN NO WAY
CAN FIT INTO THIS ONE WORLD SCENE!**

Jesus came with credentials that the gods of the world religions do not possess including:

(a) more than 300 Old Testament prophecies given between 1500 and 450 BC that specify that He would be born, of what tribe He would be, at what time His birth would occur, where He was to be born, that He would be born of a virgin, the attempt on His life soon after his birth, His sojourn in Egypt, His growing up in Nazareth, much of His teaching content, that He would teach in parables, that He would be betrayed by one of His disciples for 30 pieces of silver, that He would die with thieves, that He would be buried in a rich man's tomb, that He would be raised from the dead on the third day, and that He would establish an eternal kingdom...all of this to save the lost by His sacrifice.

(b) He claimed to be God which other religion founders did not claim,

(c) He did miraculous works to prove the divine nature of His teaching which the others could not do,

(d) He claimed to be without sin while his competition did not,

(e) He taught wonderful teachings as no man had ever taught,

(f) only He died on a cross for our sins,

(g) He was raised from the dead as the empty tomb validates,

(h) only He lived among us for an additional forty days after His resurrection before He ascended into heaven during which time He proved himself alive to His followers,

(i) only He had over 500 of His followers who were available after His resurrection to give their testimony that He was alive again (Cor. 15:1-8).

JESUS HAS BECOME THE ENEMY!

Regarding attacks on Jesus, notice the presuppositions concerning Him that were given at a very important conference promoting religious pluralism. Their attacks have centered on the idea that Jesus is God, that He died for the sins of the world and was resurrected from the dead, and that Scripture that reports this is not reliable. In 1985 at the so called "Jesus Seminar" attended by 200 self-designated "religious

scholars" congregated to set the record straight on Jesus, a number of operational assumptions were given.

(1) There is a distinction between the Christ of faith (as presented in the first creeds) and the true historical Jesus.

(2) Modern biblical scholarship has dispensed with the Jesus who spoke of a final judgment and of the end of the world. The seminar members see Jesus not as a prophet of judgment but as a witty subversive who had no views on such theological matters.

(3) The Jesus of the written culture of our day is different from the Jesus of the oral culture of His time. In other words, by the time our written account was prepared, the bulk of the real teaching of Jesus had been lost and can only be found in bits and pieces in ancient fragments which reflect short, often quoted statements (Jesus In An age Of Controversy, Douglas Groothuis, Kingsway Publication, Lottbridge Drove, Eastbourne, E. Sussex BN23 6NT).

WITHOUT A GOD-GIVEN SOURCE, THERE IS NO HOPE FOR SOCIETY. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM HAS NO FUTURE OTHER THAN OFFERING A CONTINUAL DRIFT TOWARD VIOLENCE, IMMORALITY, AND ULTIMATELY SELF DESTRUCTION FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

1. BECAUSE THERE IS NO SINGLE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY. ONCE THE CONCEPT OF MANY GODS IS ACCEPTED, NO ONE IS REALLY IN CHARGE. IT IS ENOUGH TO LOOK AT THE TEACHINGS OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS TO SEE THERE ARE GREAT CONTRADICTIONS IN THEIR CONCEPT OF GOD AND IN THEIR CONCEPT OF SALVATION. While the Hindus believe in 300,000 gods, the Buddhists do not even believe in a god or gods. When the Parliament of the World's Religions issued their report, they did not use the word God lest they offend the Buddhists. Their monks say that when a Buddhist prays he is in fact meditating and speaking only to himself. So far as salvation is concerned, the Buddhists believe in following the eight paths of Buddha in order to reach Nirvana and the termination of all desire. On the other hand, the Muslims, in a concept of salvation that seems geared primarily to men, offer the prospect of a very sensual life style (Lutzer, pp. 47-49). It is clear that when everyone has his/her own truth which may or may not be different from everyone else's truth, it would seem to reflect Biblical times when everyone did what was right in his own eyes...and that was not a good time (Judges 17:6).

2. IF THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS UNIVERSAL TRUTH, THERE CAN BE NO BASIS FOR UNIVERSAL ORDER. IN FACT, THERE CAN REALLY NO LONGER BE A RIGHT OR A WRONG. FURTHERMORE THERE COULD BE NO SUCH THING AS SIN.

HAMARTIA, the Greek word for sin has the concept of being off target, of missing the mark. If there was no divinely given target to hit, or model to follow, there could be no sin. Even as the topic assigned to me states, if there were no authoritative God who is the source of absolute truth, we would all be adrift. However, such is not the case! That there has long been progress toward eliminating the word "sin" from our vocabulary was lamented many years ago by Karl Menninger M.D., famous psychiatrist and co-founder of the Menninger Clinic in Topeka Kansas. In his book entitled "Whatever Became Of Sin?," he writes: "In all of the laments and reproaches made by our seers and prophets, one misses any mention of "sin," a word which used to be a veritable watchword of prophets. It was a word once in everyone's mind, but now rarely if ever heard. Does that mean that no sin is involved in all our troubles, sin with an "I" in the middle? Is no one any longer guilty of anything? Guilty perhaps of a sin that could be repented and repaired or atoned for? Is it only that someone may be stupid or sick or criminal--or asleep? Wrong things are being done, we know; tares are being sown in the wheat field at night. But is no one responsible, no one answerable for these acts? Anxiety and depression we all acknowledge, and even vague guilt feelings; but has no one committed any sins? Where, indeed, did sin go? What became of it?" (Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973, p. 13). Needless to say, the abolishing of the word "sin" cannot make sin go away. Sin exists because there are universal truths that are so important to our lives that they cannot be violated with impunity!

JESUS SAID THAT BECAUSE "I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE; NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT BY ME" (JOHN 14:6). HE FURTHER ASKED THE FATHER ON BEHALF OF HIS DISCIPLES TO "SANCTIFY THEM IN THE TRUTH; THY WORD IS TRUTH" (JOHN 17:17). HIS PROMISE, "YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE" (John 8:32), WAS NO EMPTY PROMISE.

God's truth meets all the criteria of absolute truth:

- a). Absolute truth is universal because it applies to everyone, and continues to be truth regardless of whether or not anyone believes it (Rom.3:3-4). No one is exempt from God's truth and will eventually be judged by it (John 12:48).
- b) Absolute truth is consistent. It does not contradict itself, it cannot confirm and at the same time deny the same thing because God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18).
- c) Absolute truth can be known as promised in John 8:32 above. It was the mission of Christ to bring grace and truth to the world (John 1:17).

d) Absolute truth makes one free. This is the nature of truth. It unlocks the unknown, it exposes the secret. In every situation, whoever has the most complete knowledge of the truth regarding that situation will have the greatest freedom.

e) Absolute truth should be prized. For this reason Solomon, the wise man of old said, "Buy truth, and do not sell it" (Prov. 23:23).

THE PURPOSE OF THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD IS TO BRING ORDER, PURPOSE AND PROPER DIRECTION FOR ALL THINGS OF LIFE. AS WE ARE TOLD IN 2 TIM. 3:16-17, "ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS; THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE ADEQUATE, EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK."

It teaches how families are to be formed, and how discipline is to be enacted within the family so the family can be a happy and sound place in which to live and in which to train children. It teaches us how employers and employees are to relate to each other. It teaches us about how governments should function and how citizens are to be obedient, to pay their taxes, and to obey the laws. It tells us how to have good interpersonal relations with all whom we meet. It teaches us to treat others as we would like to be treated. It teaches us how to change an enemy into a friend by agape love. It teaches how to right wrongs, and to seek reconciliation with both God and mankind. Above all, it enables us to know God and to learn of His love for us, and of the salvation He has extended to us through Christ. A salvation that cost the life of our sinless Savior who took upon Himself our sins and thereby was able to give us His record of sinlessness (2 Cor. 5:21). It warns us about a hell to avoid, and a heaven to enjoy eternally. It tells us how to become members of the Church, the family of God, and enrolls us as heralds of the Kingdom, as Ambassadors of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

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