

'Why Jesus?

Any religion will do.....or will it?

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Introduction

Slogans:

- It is arrogant to say that Jesus is the only way
- All roads lead to the top of the same mountain
- You can choose whichever religion you like; they are basically the same
- Don't all religions lead to the same God?
- Surely there cannot just be the one way!
- Don't all religions teach the same thing?



.... introduction

Terminology

Religious pluralism

- The belief that every religion is true and has equal merits
- Each religion provides a genuine encounter with the Ultimate Reality (whatever you think that to be)

Religious relativism

- One religion can be true for one person or culture while untrue for another
- Accordingly, religious beliefs are simply an accident of birth
- The choice is yours – they can all be true. It's all relative.
- There is no absolute truth



Religious tolerance

- Religious exclusivism does not mean religious intolerance
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (online)
Tolerate: *to allow somebody to do something that you do not agree with or like*
Synonym: *put up with*
e.g. Their relationship was tolerated but not encouraged.
- ***Tolerance:*** *the ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with*
- However, Christians are commanded to go beyond tolerance; they are to love others as God loves them.



.... religious tolerance

- **Peter Costello – Australian politician**

“Tolerance does not mean that all views are the same. It does not mean that differing views are equally right. What it means is that where there are differences, no matter how strongly held, different people will respect the right of others to hold them.”

- Yet in today’s politically correct culture, ‘tolerance’ is used as a sword to silence debate, rather than the shield it was intended to be.



Are all religions alike?

- Whilst it is admirable to find common grounds with others, it should not be at the expense of seeking the truth. It is possible to make honest enquiry about the various religions without arrogance or a sense of superiority.
- To explore whether all religions are aspects of the same essential 'faith', we need to ask how the major world belief systems understand who God is and how He relates to mankind. Whilst some religions would not use the word 'God' (because they do not believe in a personal deity), all faiths hold a belief in some ultimate reality or supreme power.



1. The existence of God

The existence of God

- If you're a theist, you believe that there is either just only one Creator God (monotheism) or there are many gods (polytheism).
- Orthodox Buddhists are atheists; they do not believe there is a god or any supernatural. The ultimate reality is 'Sunyata', the absolute emptiness of the great void. There is no absolute being; nothing ultimately is.
- A Muslim believes in one Creator, but the character of this god is very different from the Christian God. The god of Islam is not in any way emotionally or personally involved with people. The Quran reveals 'God's' will, but not God himself.



... the existence of God

- Hinduism – 2 main branches of theology:
 - Non-dualist: Nothing has a separate existence, only the Absolute Brahman. Everything is an illusion, for all is really Brahman and Brahman is all. Brahman is neither personal nor impersonal.
 - Dualist: The three most important representations of Brahman are Brahma, the creator of the universe, Vishnu, the preserver of the universe, and Shiva, the destroyer of the universe. The popular deity Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu. In common practice many Hindus believe and worship a pantheon of gods; in fact, there are anything from 33 million to 330 million deities!



... the existence of God

- Animists believe in spirits living in material things (e.g. idols, stones, trees) or elements of nature (sun, moon, lightning, etc)
- The folk version of most religions incorporates animistic, philosophical, and cultural beliefs, and include elements of other religions (including contradictory beliefs)
- Christianity believes in a God who not only reveals His will but also Himself. He can be known and wants to know each of us in a personal way.



2. The nature of God

The Trinity

- Christianity, Islam and Judaism are all monotheistic – that there is only **ONE** God. But Christianity affirms that God is one in a unique manner. It affirms that there is one God who exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Muslims reject the Trinitarian God, but they also misunderstand the Trinity. Muslims believe Christians worship three Gods: the Father, Jesus the son, and Mary the mother. That understanding is of course heretical, and to be rejected. It is not what Christians believe in.
- Jews reject the person of Jesus as the coming Messiah; they are still waiting for the ‘anointed one’ who will usher in the kingdom of heaven. Their understanding of God is also quite different to the Christian God.



... the nature of God

Is God part of us or separate from us?

- In Islam, Allah is an absolute sovereign, high above all and all that he is interested in is our obedience. 'Islam' means 'submission' or surrender'. He must not be described as a loving 'Father'. He has no personal involvement with his creatures. The Christian God loves us, and his heart breaks when we reject that love. This is not how the Koran depicts their god, Allah.



... the nature of God

- In eastern religions (e.g. much of Hinduism and Buddhism), it is taught that ‘God’ is in everything and we are part of ‘God’. They believe that God “is all in all.” God and creation are one. God is just all that is. God is the creation. God is the tree, the book, the river, the stone, and He is you and me and everyone else. Christianity rejects ‘pantheism’.
- Christianity teaches that God is creator and separate from us. Yet He is involved in us. Prayer in Islam, therefore, is not the same as prayer in Christianity. Christians have a relationship with God; this is blasphemy to the Muslim.



3. The way of salvation

- Christianity: Salvation is obtained only by putting one's trust in this Jesus, and on His death on the Cross for our sins, and on His resurrection.
- Other religions: salvation is not by grace or through faith. It is a matter of works, or through certain intermediaries, or through special knowledge. In Islam your 'works' will be weighed in a balance and if your obedient acts and religious observance tip the balance you may be allowed into heaven, but you cannot be sure.



.... the way of salvation

- Most Hindus and Buddhists believe in karma, the law of cause and effect. Your actions now will determine your destiny in your next incarnation. 'Salvation' is the release from this constant chain of re-incarnations – reaching 'nirvana' (nothingness – the state where there is neither being nor non-being) in Buddhism, or release from self and personal identity to sink into the greater Self (Hinduism).
- Buddha, Guru Nanak (Sikhism), Muhammad (Islam), Zoroaster (Zoroastrianism), Bahá'u'lláh (Baháism) claim to be no more than teachers or prophets of God. It is to their teachings or revelations they point. Only Jesus claims to be the Saviour; it is Him who saves rather than His teachings (which ultimately point to Him)!



4. The uniqueness of Christ

The person of Jesus

- Christians: Jesus is fully God and fully man
- Muslims: Jesus is a prophet to the Jews
Muhammad is a prophet who supersedes Jesus
- Jews: Jesus – no more than a man, maybe a good teacher, maybe a revolutionary
- Others: Jesus was a good man and teacher, but maybe misguided in some of his core teachings and beliefs



... the uniqueness of Christ

- Pastor Timothy Keller took part in a public discussion in a New York college with a Muslim imam and a Jewish rabbi. When it came to the person of Jesus, they all agreed with the statement:
- *'If Christians are right about Jesus being God, then Muslims and Jews fail in a serious way to love God as God really is. But if Muslims and Jews are right that Jesus is not God but rather a teacher or prophet, then Christians fail in a serious way to love God as God really is.'*
- Do you agree with that statement?



... the uniqueness of Christ

The resurrection of Jesus

- No other religion requires its founder to be alive! Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus.
- The Bible teaches that Jesus is the eternal God becoming a man who died for the sins of the world and rose again on the third day.
- Muslims claim Jesus did not die on the Cross; only someone who looks like him
- Judaism rejects the resurrection of Jesus, ever since the time of Jesus
- Other religions, e.g. Buddhism, do not believe in miracles or the supernatural.



... the uniqueness of Christ

The astonishing claims of Jesus

- When non-believers ascribe arrogance to Christians, we should point out it was Jesus himself who claims divinity:
- ***“Before Abraham was born, I am”*** (Jn. 8:58), using the name of God ‘I am’ for himself
- ***“I and the Father are One”*** (John 10:30), whereupon the Bible records the Jews stoned him because He, being a mere man, claimed to be God.
- Whilst the founders of other religions pointed to the message or the truth, Jesus claimed to **BE *“the way the truth and the life”*** (John 14:6)



What do we make of Jesus?

What conclusion can we draw of a man who claims to be divine?

There are a number of possibilities:

- i. Jesus was a legend; He never existed. But extensive historical records prove his existence.
- ii. He was a genuinely good person but he was deluded. In other words, he was sincere but wrong. He was mentally imbalanced. But even non-Christians acknowledge the greatness of his life and teachings, which can only be the product of a sound, sane and balanced mind
- iii. He knew he wasn't God but still went around telling people he was the only way to God. He was a liar! But Jesus, man of history, is acknowledged as the most moral and perfect man who has ever lived.
- iv. He was who he said he was.



... what do we make of Jesus?

C.S.Lewis:

- *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 the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.... let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*



Some common objections to the uniqueness of Christ

It is arrogant to insist your religion is right and to convert others to it!

- Sceptics believe that any exclusive claims to a superior knowledge of spiritual reality cannot be true
- But this objection is itself a religious belief. It assumes God is unknowable, or that God is loving but not just, or that God is an impersonal force rather than a person who speaks in Scripture or through the person of Jesus.
- To say that no religion is the truth is itself an unprovable faith assumption. How do you know?
- It insists that their way of viewing truths (that no religion can be the truth) is the right (and superior) way to view what truths are.



... some objections to the uniqueness of Christ

All religious beliefs are determined by the culture of the adherents

Alvin Plantinga, a Christian philosopher:

- *People often say to me, 'If you were born in Morocco, you wouldn't even be a Christian, but rather a Muslim.'*
- *I respond: Suppose we concede that if I had been born of Muslim parents in Morocco rather than Christian parents in Michigan, my beliefs would have been quite different. [But] the same goes for the pluralist...if the pluralist had been born in [Morocco] he probably wouldn't be a pluralist.*
- Upbringing is a strong factor, but so is personal choice. This is indicated by the millions of people who give up their religion or change beliefs.



... some objections to the uniqueness of Christ

The elephant parable:

- “There is an elephant and there are blind scribes touching different parts of the elephant. One is holding onto the tail and saying ‘this is a rope’, another is holding the front leg of the elephant and saying ‘no this is not a rope – you are wrong, it is a tree trunk’, another person is holding the trunk of the elephant and saying ‘you are both wrong this is neither a rope nor a tree trunk, it is a snake!’”



... some objections to the uniqueness of Christ

- The moral of the story is that all of the religions are like those men. They each touch a different part of the Ultimate Reality. They all possess part of the overall truth.
- The parable is often used to illustrate how arrogant Christians are to say they have the truth.



... some objections to the uniqueness of Christ

Responding to the elephant parable:

What you are doing is that you are claiming that there are two groups of people:

- The people touching the elephant – they are blind!
- The narrator – he/she/(you) sees the whole picture that those blind people cannot.

What you are really saying from this parable is this:

- Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Moses and Muhammad are all blind. They all had only a very small perspective. They don't know what they are talking about!



... some objections to the uniqueness of Christ

- But YOU can see!
- YOU claim to have the full picture.
- YOU can see that all of those ways actually lead to God.
- **THAT'S BREATHTAKING ARROGANCE!**
- YOU claim to have a knowledge which is superior and more comprehensive than all the others
- Are YOU claiming you know everything about each of the other religions, so much so that you can draw the conclusion that each is only part of the whole truth?
- Timothy Keller: *'How could you possibly know that no religion can see the whole truth unless you yourself have the superior, comprehensive knowledge of spiritual reality you just claimed that none of the religions have?'*



Summary

I. There are very significant, irreconcilable differences between the major faiths

- What different religions have in common is that they are so different, even on their core understanding about the nature of God and how He relates to us!
- All religions cannot be true at the same time, because they teach many things completely opposite from one another
- ***They all may be wrong, but they certainly cannot all be right***, for the claims of one will exclude the other.
- People who say all religions are essentially alike haven't studied religions very deeply; the people who really know (the believers themselves) do **NOT** believe it's all the same.



... summary

II. By definition, truth excludes something – error or falsehood

- Christians and Buddhists can't both be right on this matter; either God exists or He doesn't
- Christians don't want to be accused of intolerance by saying that Jesus is exclusively the way to God and salvation. The reality is that whatever position we hold we exclude some views. **Even the person who believes that all ways lead to God excludes the view that only some ways lead to God or only one way leads to God.**
- Every view, therefore, excludes some other view – so the issue is not who is excluding people but what is actually true and real.



... summary

III. It is no more narrow to claim that one religion is right than to claim all religions are right

- How do you know that all religions are right?
- What special in-depth knowledge do you have that enables you to draw that conclusion, especially in light of serious, irreconcilable differences between the various faiths?
- The reality is that we are all exclusive in our beliefs about religion, but in different ways
- This applies to Western secular beliefs too!



... summary

IV. All truth is God's truth doesn't mean other religions are 100% right.

- When Christians assert that God's revelation in Christ is true, they are not saying non-Christian religions are wholly false or that Christ-followers have a monopoly on truth.
- However, they believe that the world's religions are a mixed bag of truth and error, of goodness and even demonic influence. (Religiosity in 'Christianity' isn't exempt either).



... summary

- Various religions can affirm common belief in human rights, personal virtues, religious liberties, and so forth – without compromising Jesus' saving uniqueness.
- But the Christian maintains that God's revelation in Jesus is true and that other religious systems are in error ***where they contradict his revelation.***



... summary

V. Christ is unique and different, even if you do not accept Him as Saviour

- The accuracy of the prophecies surrounding Jesus (Old Testament: 300 references to the Messiah which were fulfilled in Jesus, including his place of birth, time of birth, manner of birth, manner of death, his burial and his resurrection).
- The nature of his birth (by a virgin)
- His sinless life. No other religion requires an infallible founder or prophet; Christianity does.
- His teachings. Whereas other religious founders point to their message, Jesus claims to be **Himself** the truth and message. *'I am the way, the truth and the life.'* (John 14:6). The message and the messenger are one in Christianity.



... summary

.... Christ is unique and different, even if you do not accept Him as Saviour

- His claims of divinity. In Judaism and Islam, God primarily reveals His will, but not so much his nature. In Christianity, God reveals himself primarily in Jesus Christ.
- Jesus' resurrection. No religion requires the founder or prophet to be alive. In Christianity, a dead Jesus is a dead religion.



... summary

**Why Jesus? Any religion will do.....
or will it?**



Resources

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