

DO ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

INTRODUCTION

With the number of religions and worldviews in existence today and the many people from all walks of life that adhere to them, it is almost ridiculous to claim uniqueness. Well it is kinder to call such a stance ridiculous because some will call it madness, pride, sheer ignorance or even intolerance.

But in the mist of so much being thrown at us calling for our attention and examination, can there really be anything unique about the Christian gospel or the God of the Christian faith, or any other worldview for that matter? With all that we have to choose from and the many deities and demy-gods calling out for our allegiance, what reason is there for one to even consider the Christian faith? What does the gospel say that is so different (radically) from other faiths? After all, nearly all the major religions posit the existence of a God of some sort.

Really, is it not possible that all these worldviews are a smaller part of great whole, essential pieces of the bigger picture? Do all roads not lead to Rome? Are not all religions and worldviews equally valid? If there really is a God, will he not accept man's effort to get to him? Are we all not worshipping the same God through different approaches or means?

The nature of the questions being asked quickly reveals that there are two dimensions to be considered. The question of all religions leading to the same God has:

- *An Emotional component and*
- *A Rational component*

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM (THE EMOTIONAL COMPONENT)

The Emotional Component certainly makes the opinion that all roads should and indeed lead to Rome very appealing. After all ours is a generation where tolerance and acceptance are really being encouraged in many circles. And when one considers that the implication of exclusivity means eternal punishment or damnation for all who do not believe the Christian way is the only way to God, surely it is better to assume that God if he exists, has a big enough heart to accept all who come to him no matter their approach.



And so we capture this with pictorial illustrations such as that of **the elephant and the blind scribes**.

It goes something like this:

“Three blind scribes are touching different parts of an elephant. The one who is holding the tail says, “This is a rope.” Another holding the elephant’s leg says, “This is not a rope; you are wrong. It is a tree.” Still another who is holding the trunk of the elephant says, “You are both wrong. It is a snake!” The moral of the story is that all religions are like these men. They each touch a different part of ultimate reality and therefore any one of them is arrogant to say they have the whole truth.

But take a step back and think about what is being said here. Do you see the breathtaking claim that is being made? Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Moses, and Muhammad are all blind, but in fact, *I* can see! These leaders all had a small perspective, but I am the one who sees the full picture. The irony here is that although the goal is to be tolerant and eliminate arrogance, the person making such a claim is exhibiting the highest form of arrogance by claiming to be all knowing and therefore claiming to God. It is just as arrogant to say that Buddha, Muhammad, and Jesus were all wrong in their exclusive claims as it is to say that Jesus is the only way. The issue is not about who is arrogant, but what is actually true and real.

A CASE FOR TRUTH (THE RATIONAL COMPONENT)

Truth by definition is not all inclusive. What that means is that when something is said to be true, by default every other statement or claim on the issue which are opposing it become false.

The fuel for the notion of religious pluralism is the post-modern culture we have now where there is a vehement attempt to live in this world as though there are no absolute, not objective points of reference. But such a claim is misguided. All one has to do is observe what we do in the day to day and we will come to the conclusion that postmodernism is just unlivable.

For example I dare anyone who believes in the philosophy of postmodernism to cross the road at a green light. They will quickly find out that there are absolutes. It is either the vehicle or me and not both of us at the same time.

Author Rick Rood offers four criteria for evaluating religious truth-claims:

1. **Logical consistency**
2. **Empirical adequacy, i.e., being consistent with known facts, (falsifiable)**
3. **Ability to explain why reality is the way it is**
4. **Experiential relevance, i.e., it should enable us to live in the everyday world.**

The Christian often takes the hit for claiming exclusivity and therefore being arrogant and intolerant. But such a claim simply reveals that most people have not really considered the other worldviews critically. **A cursory look** at the major religions of the world reveals that every one of them has exclusive claims. At best, they are superficially similar in matter regarding morality, kindness, and the like. But fundamentally, **there are exclusive claims the worldviews make** that indicate that they are not the same. Let us examine some of them with respect to the following:

THE NATURE OF GOD

When a person makes the claim that all religions lead to or a worshipping the same God, I immediately ask the question “WHICH GOD”? Indeed the assumption of most people (even in Christian circles) is that when the theist mentions God, we are invariably referring to the same being. But looking at the concept of God in the major religions, it becomes immediately evident that this is not the case.

- **Hinduism** acknowledges multitudes of gods and goddesses (Polytheistic). Most Hindus worship one being of ultimate oneness (Brahman) through infinite representations of gods and goddesses. These various manifestations of gods and goddesses become incarnate within idols, temples, gurus, rivers, animals, etc.
- **Buddhism** say there is no deity (Monistic). Buddhists do not worship any gods or God. People outside of Buddhism often think that Buddhists worship the Buddha. However, the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) never claimed to be divine, but rather he is viewed by Buddhists as having attained what they are also striving to attain, which is spiritual enlightenment and, with it, freedom from the continuous cycle of life and death.



- **New Age** followers believe they are God. New Age promotes the development of the person's own power or divinity. When referring to God, a follower of New Age is not talking about a transcendent, personal God who created the universe, but is referring to a higher consciousness within themselves. A person in New Age would see themselves as God, the cosmos, the universe. In fact, everything that the person sees, hears, feels or imagines is to be considered divine.
- **Muslims** believe there is the one almighty God, named Allah, who is infinitely superior to and transcendent from humankind. Allah is viewed as the creator of the universe and the source of all good and all evil. Everything that happens is Allah's who is an unknowable God.
- **Christians** believe in a God who is loving and approachable who has revealed himself and can be known in a personal way, in this life through the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Based on this simple case of character discrepancy, it becomes obvious then that when we talk about God, we are not talking about the same God across religions.

It stands to reason then that when the word God is used, it does not mean the same thing to the religious adherents. Any attempt to force such a view on them is rather arrogant and intolerant

THE NATURE OF MAN

One of the critical issues we all must come to terms with is the issue of how we will explain the human condition. It has been said that the issue of evil is easily one of the most empirically verifiable fact in humans and yet one of the most hotly contested.

But all one has to do is take a glance through the daily news papers or stay tuned long enough to a radio or TV set and you will immediately be confronted with this issue. Stories of rape, murder, corruption and the like force us into asking the question, "How are people capable of such things, such evil deeds"?



Or let us not look too far off. How do we explain the evil we find present in our own hearts?
How do we account for the capacity for evil we know we possess? (Story about niece)

Again we must examine the major worldviews in light of this question

- **New age:** Ignorance, susceptibility to illusion, unprofitable behavior. According to this view anything negative a person experiences (failures, sadness, anger, selfishness, hurt) is considered an illusion. Believing themselves to be completely sovereign over their life, nothing about their life is wrong, negative or painful. Eventually a person develops spiritually to the degree that there is no objective, external reality.
- **Hinduism:** In Hinduism, the term *sin* (*pāpa* in Sanskrit) is often used to describe actions that create negative karma by violating moral and ethical codes, which automatically brings negative consequences.
- **Buddhism:** Here, there is no definite concept of sin only the believe in the principle of karma, whereby suffering is the inevitable consequence of greed, anger, and delusion (known as the Three poisons)
- **Islam:** In Islam, sin is considered to be an act and not a state of being. The Qur'an teaches that "the soul is certainly prone to evil, unless the Lord does bestow His Mercy" and that even the prophets do not absolve themselves of the blame.
- **Christianity:** The Christian view on sin is that it is a state of being, a nature we possess that is demonstrated in our actions.

Considering the various definitions and views of sin, it again becomes clear that the religious worldviews not all in agreement on this point.

THE PROVISION FOR SIN (HOW WE GET TO GOD)

The final point I would have us consider is the issue of how we get to God and the provision made for the nature of man. Here again there is no point of convergence between the various worldviews as some would have us believe.

It is important as we consider this to remember that we have shown earlier on that the concept of God is not the same for all.

New age: According to this worldview, eventually a person develops spiritually to the degree that there is no objective, external reality. A person, becoming a god, creates their own reality.

Hinduism: Hindus believe their position in this present life was determined by their actions in a previous life. Hinduism therefore provides a possible explanation for suffering and evil in this life. If a person's behavior before was evil, they might justifiably experience tremendous hardships in this life. Pain, disease, poverty or a disaster like a flood is deserved by that person because of their own evil actions, usually from a previous lifetime.

A Hindu's goal is to become free from the law of karma...to be free from continuous reincarnations. Only the soul matters which will one day be free of the cycle of rebirths and be at rest.

Buddhism: Buddhists believe a person has countless rebirths, which inevitably include suffering. A Buddhist seeks to end these rebirths. Buddhists believe it is a person's cravings, aversion and delusion that cause these rebirths. Therefore, the goal of a Buddhist is to purify one's heart and to let go of all yearnings toward sensual desires and the attachment to oneself.

Buddhists follow a list of religious principles and very dedicated meditation. When a Buddhist meditates it is not the same as praying or focusing on a god, it is more of a self-discipline. Through practiced meditation a person may reach Nirvana -- "the blowing out" of the flame of desire.

Islam: It is believed that Allah weighs an individual's good deeds and against his or her sins on the Day of Judgment and punishes those individuals whose evil deeds outweigh their good deeds. The Quran describes these sins throughout the text and demonstrates that some sins are more punishable than others. A clear distinction is made between major and minor sins (53:31-32), indicating that if an individual stays away from the major sins, then he/she will be forgiven of the minor sins

Christianity: For the Christian, salvation from sin and reconciliation with God is through believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the Christian, That is the only solution provided by God according to the Christian Worldview.

It is important to know that all these are unique and exclusive approaches given by the various worldviews. So they are all claiming to be true. The assertion made by some that only Christians claim exclusivity in that sense is not therefore true.

THE BURDEN OF PROOF

If truth is relative, then the statement that truth is relative is an absolute truth and would be a self-defeating statement by proving that truth is not relative. But, if truth is absolute, then the statement "truth is absolute" is true and not self-defeating. It is true that truth exists. It is true that truth will not contradict itself.

So considering all we have so far discussed concerning the various worldviews, it is becoming clear that since they all claim to be true when there are clear contradictions in their fundamental claims, they cannot all be true.

There are two possible conclusions we can arrive at then when we consider the religious worldviews:

- None of them is true
- Only one of them is true

We cannot say that all of them are true because each of them claims to be true. And so the test of truth must be applied to all of them.

Since truth is that which is logically consistent, empirically verifiable and experientially relevant, it brings something very interesting to the table:

THE ISSUE OF THE HONESTY OF THE HEART OF THE ENQUIRER.

Because if truth will contradict all other opposing claims, the issue then is if we are willing to accept truth if it is proven to be so, regarding the positions we hold on religious worldviews. Whether Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, New age adherent Christian, etc, are we interested in the truth?

One of the saddest moments in history as far as I am concerned, is when Pontius Pilate interacted with Jesus before his crucifixion. Pilate had a rare opportunity to have an eternally relevant response from one who claimed to be truth personified, yet because his enquiry was not honest, he didn't even wait for an answer.

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” “What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again...

John 18: 37,38

Someone has said that the burden of proof lies with all religious worldviews and our stance should be that of religious agnostics in examining the truth claims they all present.

A CASE FOR CHRIST

Since we are on the same page now regarding the fact that all the world views claim uniqueness and are exclusive because they all claim to be true, allow me to present to you the uniqueness of the Christian worldview for consideration.

1) CHRIST IS THE CENTER PIECE OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Jesus Christ is unique firstly in the fact that the worldview he represents, is necessarily built around him. Let me explain, if you asked the Muslim or Buddhist if their worldview necessarily had to be revealed by Mohammed or Buddha, they will insist that they were the proponents of that religion but cannot insist that it had to be them who brought the revelation. In theory, God could have chosen anyone to pass on the revelation.

But we see in Christianity a worldview that is built around the personality and Character of Christ. So much so that if you separate him from the worldview or prove his character to be false or dubious in any sense, the entire system would come crashing down.

2) THE NATURE OF THE GOD REVEALED

A careful study of the all the religions/the major religions today and what they teach about the nature of God reveals a very interesting point. None of them apart from the Christian faith have terms or analogies for God as a God of love. Their definitions and descriptions of God do not put him across as a relational being. Yes there is wide spread understanding of God as Judge, terrifying, punisher of the wicked and even in some circles a vindictive being. But outside the Christian context, you will never come across a description of God as a “Loving Father”. It is a thing unheard in some religions to use such terms regarding God.

So the concept of God in the Christian message as a relational being is entirely unique.

I honestly believe that with all that sets us apart as unique individuals, there is nothing more personal than a Face.

For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.....2 Corinthians 4:6

So in the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, we have to appreciate that God is not just a God far away, he is also a God that is near. In the gospel we do not come to creeds or forms or statues or just rules. We come to a person in loving fellowship and through this life takes on meaning and we walk in purpose and in fulfillment

3) THE NATURE OF MAN (THE ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF THE HUMAN CONDITION)

Oh wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death (Sin)?... **Romans 7:24**

Use words such as ego, confidence, ambition, flaw, failings, shortcoming, immorality and the like to describe the human condition and most people will not have any problem with you. After all, “to err is human”.

But one of the most empirically verifiable facts is the lostness of man. And the Christian message hits it bulls' eye. We are not just people with huge egos or ambitious drives. In the word of God we are told clearly

“Deceitful and desperately wicked is the heart of man, who may know it?”

The issue here is sin. Yes sin. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It is only in the Christian message that the human condition is accurately described. In simple terms, we are lost.

I like putting it this way. Our hearts have been reverse polarized. We love what we are supposed to hate and hate what are supposed to love. We live with selfishness and greed when we were meant to live in selflessness and fellowship. The first symptom of our lostness is evident when Cain killed his brother Abel. His angry reply to God's question about the whereabouts of Abel was a question to which the answer was indeed simple but clouded in our judgment.... “Am I my brother's keeper”? Yes Cain, you are.

I dare say that over time we have become more sophisticated in doing and inventing new ways of doing evil. Nowhere is this clearer than in observing the behavior of children. How selfish and demanding they can be. They want what they want when they want it, how they want it and where they want it.

“The bent of his heart is towards evil and imagination from birth”.

So when we say that man without Christ is a sinner, it is not an insult. Rather, it is an accurate diagnosis of the human condition. This is only evident in the Christian message.

4) THE SOLUTION FOR THE SIN PROBLEM

One of the major points which all other religions find themselves in a choke hold or difficulty is understanding the justice and mercy of God. How can God be just and merciful at the same time? Does being merciful mean he set aside his justice to be lenient sometimes? If that is the case then can he really be considered as a just God since that will mean he is not Just all the time?

You will never read in any other faith the concept of grace apart from the Christian faith. As the average Muslim and you will immediately realize that the emphasis is on works. For them in the

end your good deeds have to measure up and outweigh your bad deeds and then you “may” stand a chance of being given mercy. So in the end when enough sweat has been poured and sufficient blood has been shed, then God will consider what to do with you

In the Hindu scriptures we are introduced to the concept of karma. Here you come back again and again after death in many different forms to atone for past sins until you attain the state of Brahman. Let me add that you are not guaranteed a fixed number of times to return and also a memory of your past sins so technically speaking it is an endless cycle.

To look at it another way, one can sum up the core concepts of the major worldviews into 3 categories, namely:

- A. Epistemologically:** Right thinking
- B. Existentially:** Right feeling
- C. Pragmatically:** Right doing

The idea is that through thinking the right way, making the accurate emotional connections and acting the right way will bring you to a place of meaningful connection to ultimate reality. It is essentially putting the cart before the horse.

But this is where Jesus Christ stands absolutely unique. The Christian faith cannot be reduced to a system of dos and don'ts. Because Jesus Christ did not come into this world claiming to give us new thoughts about God, or to give us new experiences with God, or to tell us to do new things for God.

Jesus Christ came into this world, claiming to be God. In the gospel we are introduced to a God who takes the initiative in reconciliation. He came to give life dead people who are living in separation from God. This is utterly unique in world religions. Because no one else is making that claim.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me....John 4:6

It is only in the Christian faith that we are introduced to the concept of grace. It is only in grace that the Mercy and Justice of God can be reconciled because of the introduction of a new factor, love. So in the gospels, God does not have to set aside his justice before he can be merciful. He can be merciful because of his justice.

It is through Christ death and bodily resurrection that we are guaranteed salvation.

It is only the Christian worldview that has at its centre as a pivotal claim, a historical event, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For the wages of sin is death....so For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that who so ever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life...and now the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is very important for us to realize that without appreciating the diagnosis of the human condition as sinful and lost, we will never appreciate the necessity of Christ in the events of world history.

CONCLUSION

Although the claim of the religious pluralist in that all religions are equally valid is an emotionally appealing one, we need to realize that such a view is intolerant, because it forces a claim on the worldviews that they do not make themselves.

All the major worldviews hold to their distinctive and uniqueness, so that is not something unique to the Christian worldview. Moving forward, our battles will be that of ideas regarding the exclusive claims of the worldviews.

To say that the claim of Christ in being the exclusive way to God is arrogance is to completely miss the point. Because in that sense he is actually unparalleled. No one else in history or in any of the worldviews is making such a claim or has made such a claim apart from Him.

Christ Jesus Claimed to be the incarnate son of God, God with us. He claimed to be the only way to God and the only solution we have for our sin problem and reconciliation with God.

I invite you to consider his claim on the basis of the evidence available to us.

The Christian worldview has a radical response to the question; Do all roads lead to Rome? Do all Paths lead to God?

And the response is this; THERE IS NO PATH

There is no change in your thinking or in your feeling or actions you can bring about that will deliver you from you sin condition. There is however a person who can transform your nature



and bring you into a meaningful relationship with God, the results of which will be right thinking, right feeling and right doing.

Jesus Christ Claims to be the person who can do this. On the basis of the evidence available to us, I believe he has told us the truth. And so let us subject his claims to the test of truth and see if he passes that test.

There are a number of possibilities such a test will reveal.

First, maybe he was genuinely a good person who was deluded. He was sincere, but he was wrong; he believed that he was the Son of God, but he wasn't. In other words, he was mentally imbalanced.

Or perhaps Jesus *knew* he wasn't God but went around telling people that he was the only way to God regardless. In other words, he was a sinister character purposely telling lies.

Or finally, perhaps Jesus was who he said he was. Perhaps he made these radical statements because they were true and real. In other words, he is indeed the way to God. If that is the case, then the question becomes if we are willing to accept this, to accept him

I pray if you are here in search for truth, you will be humble enough to accept what Christ offers. Because it is no arrogance to accept from him what is on offer nowhere else.