



ONE WAY TO GOD?

*Speaking truth in the
postmodern age*

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I WAS EXCITED TO FINALLY RECONNECT WITH AN OLD FRIEND ON THE PHONE ONE NIGHT.

I hadn't seen him since we worked at a Christian camp together and, after 10 years of searching, I finally got his number from a mutual friend. It was great to talk with him again, but what he said on the phone that night made my heart sink to the floor:

“Christianity works very well for you, Jeff, but it does not work as well for everyone.”

It hurt to hear him say how all religions point to the same God. It just so happened I was taking a seminary class on apologetics, which is the defense of Christianity. That class helped me to better understand his position, called pluralism.

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My friend didn't get his ideas from nowhere. Even the apostles dealt with a pluralistic culture, but more than ever before I hear people say, "I'm spiritual, just not religious." This is often an indicator of pluralism, a phenomenon that seems like a natural reaction to things going on in the United States today. Religions once thought strange and foreign are now followed by neighbors and Facebook friends. To disagree is "intolerant." And, while the last generation may have denied the truth of supernatural things, people today question objective truth entirely. They care more about how a religion benefits them than whether or not it is true.

In an email, my friend told me all religions are true when understood metaphorically. God is not a person, he explained, but an ideal we seek in whatever way it reveals itself to us (whether as Jesus or Buddha). Because of this, he believes

religions should "coexist," striving for the same noble goal with only cultural differences.

Because my friend made it clear that the years apart had not diminished our relationship of trust, I felt permission to challenge him. I told him that religions make statements of fact that weren't intended to be metaphors. Although he claims to honor all worldviews, he's really just patting them on the head. For example, Christianity draws a line, saying other worldviews come from an unwillingness to worship the true God (Romans 1:21-23). If Jesus is not the only way to God (John 14:6) then Christianity is false. Either way, my friend's claim that all religions are true simply doesn't work.

Showing my friend that pluralism doesn't work won't automatically drive him to Jesus. He has legitimate concerns about Christianity that must be addressed.

"How do you know your religion is right and others are wrong?"

People call Christianity judgmental and narrow, but so are all perspectives. No one can say, "Don't judge other people's worldview" without making a judgment of his or her own. The question isn't whether we make judgments, but how to do it properly. Just as in a court case, we can mount up evidence for or against a given worldview. For example, author Gary Habermas has shown how a miraculous resurrection appears to be the only reasonable conclusion using only facts that are largely undisputed (see sidebar for more).

"Isn't it intolerant to believe people go to hell if they disagree with you?"

My friend rejects God for condemning someone like Gandhi simply because he didn't call on Jesus, but Romans says that all people know that God exists, that they are guilty of sin and need Christ's forgiveness. God is much more than tolerant. He is loving. The treason in our hearts warrants a cosmic punishment but—because of His love—God took that punishment on Himself so we don't have to face the consequences of sin.

Knowing the answers to my friend's questions is important, but not enough. If I simply shoot truth back at him, he'll dig in his very intelligent heels and entrench himself in a battle of wits until we just stop talking. So, how can I love him and move the conversation forward? I haven't figured it all out, but here's what I'm trying:

PRAY: I'm asking the Lord to reveal Himself to my friend in a clear way. God is not depending on me alone to save the day.

DON'T ANSWER, DIALOGUE: Instead of a lecture, I'm trying to show respect by asking questions to get a complete understanding of his genuine concerns.

COMPARE RELIGIONS: He wants to respect all worldviews, so maybe we can do a side-by-side study. He can experience the gospel and see how all religions are not equal, nor do they have the same goal.

SWAP STORIES: Like many people today, my friend is open to hearing my own spiritual journey, and he can't argue with my experiences. Hopefully he will recognize similar ways God has been involved in his own life. I'm asking him to tell me his story too, through questions like, "When in your life did you come to that point of view?"

It amazes me that, after all the years apart, my friend still

confides in me about a lot of things he's going through. He's been hurt badly by Christians who didn't live the gospel well, but he still has a strange respect for me. He said, "I remember a Jeff Grant who cared more about underprivileged children than he ever cared about religion."

The most important thing I can do for my friend is love him. First Corinthians 13 says that no matter how much we know, it is pointless without love. Underneath his mental defenses lie emotional barriers, and behind that there is a spiritual issue. Jesus overcame the barrier of sin and rebellion in our hearts by loving and sacrificing for us. Now, through the Holy Spirit, He has chosen to use you and me to dive into the broken lives of others. ■

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ACTION POINT

Think through the people you know. Has God placed anyone in your path who claims that Christianity is too narrow? This week, ask the "sometime" question: "Sometime, would you tell me about your spiritual journey?"

CONNECTING WITH A PLURALIST

For further reading, try these web articles:

SWAPPING STORIES:

"Sometime, I'd like to hear about your spiritual journey. Would you be up for that?" This simple, casual question opens doors to presenting the gospel. Learn how to do it at www.crupressgreen.com/sometime-overview-and-guide.

COMPARING RELIGIONS:

Those who believe all religions have the same basic message can quickly discover what the most common faiths do teach by visiting www.everystudent.com/features/connecting.

TESTING WORLDVIEWS:

How can we judge a worldview to decide whether it is worth our faith? Find out at www.reasons.org/articles/worldview-tests.

PROVING JESUS:

What evidence is there that Christianity is more than a human creation? One of the primary approaches to answering this question is addressed at www.crupressgreen.com/body-count-evidence-for-the-resurrection.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS:

Many people have a misunderstanding about what Christianity teaches, or some legitimate concerns, many of which are addressed at www.crupressgreen.com/answering-objections-to-the-gospel.

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Or look for these books:

SWAPPING STORIES ///

Questioning Evangelism

by Randy Newman

COMBATING PLURALISM ///

"O" God: A Dialogue on Truth and Oprah's Spirituality

by Josh McDowell and Dave Starrett

COMPARING RELIGIONS ///

The Compact Guide to World Religions

by Dean. C. Halverson

PROVING JESUS ///

Did the Resurrection Happen?

by Gary R. Habermas, Antony Flew and David J. Baggett

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS ///

The Reason for God

by Tim Keller