

# STRAIGHTWAY

*And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him [Mark 1:18].*

## CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

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## **The Powers of Religious Pluralism In the End Time—Part One**

Dr. H. T. Spence

One of the great, subtle powers rising at an alarming and influential rate is the philosophy of *Pluralism*. Our own American society has fallen into the throes of this deceptive philosophy, following in the footsteps of its European mentors. The philosophy of pluralism now infiltrates world cultures and religions.

From a general perspective, pluralism is the belief that we live in a globalized society whose citizens are adherents to a plurality of cultures. Even here in America we have a growing pluralistic society diverse in language, dress, food, art, music, literature, and

lifestyle. Biblically, God has intended for such a pluralism of cultures to be expressed by the nations. It is only when sin infects and pervades a culture seeking to harm others that a culture becomes dangerous. More and more countries such as England and America are becoming melting pots of varied cultures. For example, the image of what is “British” is rarely seen on the streets of London today. Amidst all of our diversification of ethnicities, we are becoming more and more culturally eclectic.

There is also religious pluralism. Often religion is a by-product

*This edition includes two more articles*

**The Powers of Religious Pluralism in the End Time—Part Two**

**The Powers of Religious Pluralism in the End Time—Part Three**

of culture; more often, culture is a by-product of a religion. America is a pluralistic society of religions as well as of cultures. Our country has permitted both cultural and religious pluralism from its inception. Some religions are multi-cultural in that they transcend culture and become multi-cultural in their declaration. For example, Christianity is multi-cultural. It preaches a gospel that is for all men and for all generations. Though Christ is a Jew and was brought up in the Jewish culture, He is appointed by God to be the Saviour of the world. Christianity is not to be viewed as part of Judaism, for it is distinctively separate from any other religion.

Within a pluralistic society of religions, there are a few religions that claim absolutism. Christianity is one of these religions. Christianity declares it is the *only* way to God and the *only* way to heaven. In

our day and time, people are very apprehensive of anyone making claims of extremism or absolutism in the name of any philosophy or religion. Christianity makes such a claim: Jesus Christ is *The Truth*.

How does the Christian present this non-negotiable claim in a pluralistic society? How does he stand by this infallible claim within a pluralistic, postmodernistic society?

### **The Demands of Pluralism**

Religious pluralism starts with the premise that in a globalized society its citizens are adherents to a plurality of religious beliefs. Because of this consciousness, governments of the world are giving their own definition of "religion." They seek to define religion because they believe it only exists to promote peace and harmony among its people. Any belief they see as a hindrance to peace and harmony through claims of absolute truths becomes an object of attack. Their definition of "religious pluralism" goes on to declare that any belief of absolutism breeds fanaticism, arrogance, and ultimately a religious imperialism that leads to untold misery and suffering for society.

Pluralism is nervous about any claim of absolute truth, especially the integral absolute truth of Christianity. Jesus Christ claimed to be the Absolute Lord of lords and King of kings; true Christians have claimed this of Him throughout history. Christ is God incarnate, and

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Christ is *The Way, The Truth, and The Life*. No one can come to God but through Him. The apostles made this declaration from the beginning, believing that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

These absolute statements are unparalleled in their reach. When Jesus said He was *The Truth*, He was not implying that He simply spoke true things (which He did); He declared He is the ultimate of truth. Every train of inquiry to truth must stop at Him. At the heart of every pluralistic religion is the rejection of any declaration of absolutism.

Karl Popper (1902–1994), an Austrian and British philosopher and professor at the London School of Economics, wrote the following in his *Open Society*:

The belief that one possesses the truth is always implicitly totalitarian. To declare that such a religion proclaims, ‘I am sure,’ automatically means, ‘I must be obeyed.’

He believed that the only way to protect society is to reject all claims to absolute truths.

The famous atheist author and biologist Richard Dawkins (considered one of the world’s top thinkers and a strong promoter of atheism globally) views religion as a poisonous virus of the mind. He concludes that religion is something that must be eradicated completely

from the planet. Although pluralism itself does not go quite so far, it tends to promote and celebrate the equal validity of all religions and philosophies while being simultaneously intolerant of any religion that purports any absolute truth.

At first sight this seems very reasonable to many people. Who would not want to promote harmony within multi-cultural societies? It is reasoned by historians and governmental leaders that religion has been the cause of many wars and bloodshed. Even during the Crusades, Christianity raised its armies against the Muslims, Turks, and Jews. Roman Catholicism arose in Europe against the Jews and Protestant Christian remnants during the Inquisition. Likewise, the larger Protestant groups arose against small remnant Christians. Hindus and Muslims still fight against one another; Muslims fight Christians and Jews over holy sites. As if this were not enough, there are continual wars fought among factions within the same religion.

It must be clearly stated that Christ was against using war to promote His Kingdom. He said to Pilate that His Kingdom was not of this world, and “if it were my servants would fight.” He also declared that those that live by the sword will perish by the sword. Pilate responded that he found no fault in Him.

In the light of Christ words, sadly Christianity has often been non-

Christian throughout its history. These historic disloyalties to Christ and His truth cannot be mended by now trying to make Christianity less offensive with its absolute truth. This would only continue its disloyalty to Christ, the Truth. Christ and His apostles declared that truth must be believed without coercion. We are to pray for our enemies as well as our friends. Trust in God and biblical love are two important ingredients for true Christianity—even these cannot be forced upon individuals. Christ and His apostles repudiated violence and tyranny.

### **The World's View of Religion**

The world governments believe that the basic purpose for religions is its promotion of morality. Morality is needed in our society, and religion will provide morality. The world believes that if all religions are to contribute to morality, they must first discard their differences to come together. Subtly, they are declaring that the differences between religions have fostered the world's major global problems. Present-day world governments are putting pressure on religious leaders by asking, "Can we not do away with these differences? Are not all religions aiming at the same goal? Religions are perhaps on different paths, but are they not all coming to the same mountain?" George Bernard Shaw gives the sentiment of the world when he stated, "There is but one religion, but many versions of it."

More and more there is the belief that religions are basically the result of human imagination. Therefore, all religions, especially Christianity, must give up their imagined claims to final truth. They must present themselves, as one liberal wrote, as "simply human imaginative responses to the necessity of finding orientation for life and for particular historical situations." They conclude it should be the duty of all religions to believe that all religions lead to the same goal, and we must get in harmony with one another to bring this about. All of their differences are relatively unimportant.

This was the burden of a play written by Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781). He was a German writer, philosopher, dramatist, and art critic, and probably one of the most outstanding representatives of the Enlightenment era. His plays and theoretical writings greatly influenced the development of German literature. One of his prominent dramas was entitled *Nathan the Wise*. The setting of this play is in Jerusalem, in the time period of the Third Crusade. The work has three main characters: (1) the Jewish businessman Nathan, who is presented as a wise man; (2) the enlightened Saladin; and (3) a Templar, who represents Christianity. These three present in the drama the hope of endeavoring to bridge the gap between the three religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

Although there are several parts

to this drama, the centerpiece is its famous “ring parable.” Here, Saladin asks, “Which of the three religions is true?” Nathan then tells the story of a father who inherited a magic ring which would make its owner a good man, accepted by God and man. His problem is that he has three sons that he loves equally. Having promised the ring to each son at different moments of weakness, he secretly makes two other rings exactly like the original. On his deathbed he gives a ring to each of his sons. These sons eventually argue and quarrel over the ownership of the real ring. Amidst their argumentation, they come before a wise judge who states that each one of them should live in such a way that he proves the power of the ring. He concludes by telling them that it does not matter in the end which ring is the genuine one. Thus, the burden of the play is to prove that all religions have the same heart and that this same heart is “active love.” It does not matter whether each son has the real ring or not; the key is that they have true active love.

### **The Assumptions of *Nathan the Wise***

There are three assumptions inherent in this drama by Lessing: the belief (1) that the main objective of all religions is to stimulate good behavior, (2) that all religions agree that this is their main objective, and (3) that all religions will accept that distinctive doctrines or beliefs are

relatively unimportant.

The first assumption declares that the main objective of all religions is to stimulate good behavior. We read in Matthew 7:12, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” This can be found in many religions in some form or other. Islam declares, “None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.” It is stated in Hinduism: “One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable towards himself.” Buddhism affirms, “A state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?” Confucianism tells us, “Do not do to others what you would not want to be done unto you.” Even the philosophers and secularists such as Plato wrote, “May I do to others as I would that they should do unto me.” To culminate this acknowledgment the secularist religion of Humanism states a similar thought, “Don’t do to others what you would not want done unto you.”

There is a thread of moral value running through this universe that the natural man, in an honorable quest for right, realizes exists. All human beings are created in the moral image of God. *But it is not true that all religions and philosophies are concerned about morality.* The Pantheon of Rome with its many gods is not concerned about morality, for many

of their gods were more immoral than those who worshipped them. To say that morality is religion's primary goal is not necessarily true. Religion is not in and of itself promoting a moral code. Its primary intent concerns its gods or the God. Even though pirates may have claimed a strict code among themselves concerning the treasures that they took from others, to other people this was no moral code. The primary goal of Christianity is to love God with all our hearts and then to love our neighbors as ourselves. The Bible brings these two so close together that if a person says he loves God and hates his brother, he is called a liar. But if I did love (outwardly) my brother and yet did not keep the commandments of God, I will be judged and condemned for not loving Him. If we love our neighbors but not God, how will we be judged by Him?

Another false assumption of Lessing is that the distinctives of various religions do not matter. This assumption borders on the absurd. What makes a religion different is its distinctives; otherwise, its identity would cease to exist. We carefully must acknowledge these distinctives. For example, Buddhism believes that there is one soul for the purification of the human being. This religion declares that truth is one and there is not a second truth. Yet this is different than the teaching of Christ Who said, "I am the way,

the truth, and the life." If biblical Christianity declares itself to be a totalitarian religion, then we must state that what contradicts truth is not true. Aristotle, the great philosopher observed, "The law of non-contradiction is that nothing can both be and not be at the same time." Once we know a birch tree, we can then know without any other information that it is not an oak tree. If we state that "the law of non-contradiction is false," then for this statement to be true, it must deny the fact that the law of non-contradiction is true. No religion is going to deny the fact that their distinctives are most important and needed, and that they are true.

Every religion has a right to question the validity and absoluteness of other religions, yet the questioning is in the light of its own religion. It should not take offense if questioned. We cannot take the fact of a religion's sincerity and believe that the sincerity is the proof of its validity. Sincerity's testing will often come from its worldview, and even then if that worldview is nebulous, and without any absolute foundation within itself, then it has no proof. Men have a right to declare what they believe to be true as long as they do it peacefully. But the State in its pluralism has now gone a step further in declaring that nothing will be accepted which is contradictory to the State and its philosophy.

If the State believes that all

religions are the same and with the same goal, then perhaps we need to ask the question, “Are all medicines for healing?” The answer certainly is that not all medicines are equally safe. Some could be for death. To simply state that all medicines are for healing doesn’t guarantee that it is so. Every medicine must be proved to be true for healing. Even postmodernists, who are really existentialists in perspective, will endeavor to gain proof of medicine before they take any. Therefore, whatever is true must be tested by some basis of evidence.

What is that evidence? Is it human logic? There must be some guide of infallibility; whatever it is, it must be consistent with truth. We must check truth on the basis of evidence.

In our next article we want to pursue the basis of evidence concerning religions. Are all religions the same? Do they have the same goal? What does the absoluteness of a religion mean? And is there such a thing as an absolute religion? Yes, these questions must be answered with candor.

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# The Powers of Religious Pluralism In the End Time—Part Two

Dr. H. T. Spence

In the last article we alluded to the fact that State governments of the world are pressing for religious Pluralism, seeking to destroy any religion of absoluteness. They believe that all religions are basically the same and lead to the same goal. Thus there is the pressure for all religions to come together with a common unity of purpose through Interfaithism and to relinquish their individual distinctives.

We must candidly ask the question, do all religions lead to the same goal? To answer this question, let us carefully observe the five major religions of the End Time: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

## The Distinctive Beliefs in Different Religions

Hinduism, the oldest continuing false religion of the world, is a polytheistic religion. Its god Brahma (not to be mistaken with Brahman) is a neuter, abstract god which cannot be known. At the same time, Hinduism believes in millions of gods (e.g., Krishna). This pantheistic religion believes that everything is identical with god. Even *atman*, their soul concept within man, is the same as Brahma. God is the universe and is to be found in the common man as well as in

the rich man. God is in ignorance as well as in enlightenment. Was he god in ignorance in writing the Vedas, the sacred book of Hinduism? And was he the god of ignorance in Mohammed in the writing of the Koran, or was he the god of enlightenment? Hinduism believes that god is equally in evil and good, whereas in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam a distinction is made between good and evil.

Buddhism is not truly a religion, though it proposes to be. Because it does not believe in any particular god, it is more a philosophy. Buddhism is an embodiment of philosophical and psychological principles to lead one away from stress, desires, and fears. It also emphasizes the need of peaceful relationships with all men. Therefore, Buddhism is a more contemporarily accepted “religion” than that of Hinduism. Because it had its origins in Hinduism, popular Buddhism does mix in some polytheism through a variety of conceptual gods. In contrast, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are monotheistic religions, adamantly opposed to polytheism and atheism.

The three monotheistic religions believe that the material world and the human body are good; it is what sin has produced in these materialistic things that brings about



evil. These three religions believe that the material world was created by the supreme deity. Hinduism and Buddhism do not believe that the material world is a direct fiat of the Supreme Being, but rather an emanation of the Supreme Being as a creation of some lesser god. Therefore, matter is evil and should be avoided. In their belief man should do all he can to escape from the pull of the material body. To reach *machsha* there must be a rejection of rebirth (reincarnation), a continuous cycle of living and dying, and a final entrance into the state of *nirvana*. Through this, one comes forth with the pure world soul.

The three monotheistic religions believe that this is a devaluation of the created world and an attack on the Creator of the material world. When it comes to Christianity, such a belief is a direct attack upon the belief not only that God created the material world but also that God came down in a material world and He Himself entered into a material body. Christianity also declares the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and the bodily ascension, and that God one day will restore the physical world to perfection. The power of Redemption is to change the heart within the body—this is the hope of Christianity.

### **Irreconcilable Worldviews**

It must be seen with great clarity that religions are in existence with

totally irreconcilable worldviews. Those who believe there are no unique differences between the religions have never taken their own religion very seriously.

Let us first note their various teachings concerning guilt. Most religions teach basically the same morality, in that we ought to be good. However, honestly, we will have to admit that religious man has not been good. We have sinned against God and broken His laws. We have sinned against neighbors and even against our own children. If we are to have peace, peace with our Creator and all mankind, we must be free objectively from our guilt. Does guilt matter? Suppose a drunk driver hits and kills a child. Are we to state that it does not matter? Does God declare that it does not matter? There must be a release from past guilt; somehow we must be delivered. And somehow we must be forgiven.

What do the religions do about guilt? Hinduism deals with guilt by Karma. The Hindu believes that enough suffering will eventually atone for the guilt. The law of Karma is like the law of gravity; it will come upon a person. Hinduism does not view sin as against a personal God who can relieve guilt. In Hinduism the only way for guilt to be relieved is through enough human suffering to pay for that sin. No outside help is to be expected. Certainly no one can purify another; there can be no substitute for this purifying. And if

one has not suffered enough, he must come back reincarnated and suffer some more. This must continue until the suffering is resolved; reincarnation allows for this continual suffering to be perfected. Hinduism suggests that a child born deformed had sinned severely in the previous life; this soul has not worked out his karma and must suffer more until he dies. But the child can never find out what he did in a previous incarnation; he must continue to suffer. The full karma must be endured. Someone who lives a very productive life filled with health and wealth must have lived a better life in the previous one, even if his wealth has come through crooked dealings.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would flatly deny reincarnation and the matter of sinning in a previous life. We read in John 9 of the man born blind. When the question was asked, "Who did sin, this man or His parents?" Christ denied such a possibility. A person may be physically affected by some disease transmitted by his father or mother, such as AIDS, but the child is not actually spiritually affected by the sin of his parents while in the womb.

Although denying reincarnation, the three monotheistic religions are profoundly different from each other. First of all, Islam's authority is the Koran; Christianity's authority is the Old and New Testaments; and Judaism's is only the Old Testament. As for their view of Jesus, Islam and

Judaism do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God as Christianity believes; but Islam does believe He is a true prophet and divine in His birth.

When it comes to salvation, Christianity believes in the principles presented in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, that Christ's death on the cross was a sacrifice for sin. His resurrection and ascension were the proof of it. The sufferings of Christ for our sins brought salvation for us instead of our own sufferings for our sins. It also declares that God does forgive in this life (Rom. 5:1, 2). The guilt of sin can be removed by Him, and this can be done because of the claim that He is the Son of God. Christ truly came to be the Saviour.

Islam and Judaism flatly deny this claim. Islam acknowledges that Christ is divine, but flatly denies that He is God. Islam does not believe that Jesus died on the cross, but that He was snatched up into heaven and that someone else was crucified on the cross (Barabbas or someone else). According to Islam, works are the saviour of man, but apart from that Islam has no saviour. Works are weighed in the scale of God's justice. So none can know if his good works will outweigh the bad; only the future will reveal it.

Judaism does not deny that Jesus died on the cross, but it does deny that He died as a Saviour and that He was God. To the Jew salvation

is based upon keeping the Law and being good with the hope that God will be generous in the future end. But Judaism has not always believed this. It at one time believed in the sacrifice for sins—an atonement. Judaism also believed that a Messiah would come. Isaiah 53 prophesied that He would come to atone. It believed that when Messiah would come He would take the place of the lambs. Christ declared Himself to be the Lamb of God. Yom Kippur today cannot be kept without the sacrifice of a lamb for the forgiveness of sin.

Christianity differs from all of the religions concerning atonement and guilt. There cannot be compatibility between it and other religions. One of the key elements of Christianity is the reconciliation of man to God, including the fall of man, the guilt of man, and the destiny of man. According to Christianity there is no hope for man's salvation outside of God.

### **The “Way” of Religions**

Basically all religions speak about the *way* of their religion. There is usually a gate at the beginning in order to get on the *way* and a gate at the end, either heaven, nirvana, or something similar. The gate at the end depends on merit, on the progress you have made on the *way* to get to that final gate. It is like so many universities that have entrance exams as the initial gate; how you

get through to the final gate will be a final exam of what you have learned throughout all the years. Final exams become the evidence of whether you get through the final gate of graduation; it is all based on your performance.

This “Merit Principle” appeals to many people in a religion because many things in life are achieved this way. What is the entrance gate? In Contemporary Christianity the entrance gate is the joining of the local church or water baptism. Then what the professing Christian does along the way, or the “merit of life,” to him is the final thing. However, the New Testament declares salvation is not based on merit or works; it is a free gift from God by grace alone (Eph. 2:8, 9). It cannot be achieved except through faith.

When does this salvation come to the life? To the Christian it is at the beginning, not at the end. Note clearly John 5:24:

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*

Everlasting life comes at the gate. To whatever point that believing continues in the heart and life, and at whatever point one dies, salvation continues in the present tense. This truth is seen in marriage; when is the spouse accepted? Is it after years of work and circumstances in

the marriage that a spouse is finally accepted? No, it is at the beginning. The wedding is an announcement that the spouse to be has been accepted, and that is the reason the wedding is taking place. Salvation must be like this: it is the acceptance of Christ at the beginning, and He accepts us at the beginning. But once the marriage is underway, the outworking of that acceptance is to be seen.

Salvation is based upon accepting Christ and living in the *way* till the end of our days. Christ and not our merits is what keeps us in the *way*. One receives this entrance through the New Birth. We are given in this eternal life a new way, new powers, and new desires which are pleasing to God. It is a free gift, and this grace is to be the source of our works and character. Works are a fruit of this gift rather than the condition. Now this does not mean we will never sin, but if we do, we can repent and find forgiveness. In all of this, one who has passed through the gate will give clear evidence of a changed life. As a body without life is dead, so faith without works (working out of that faith) is dead. There is no other religion that claims as Christ does the offering of full and complete salvation!

### **What Is Truth?**

In the view of key religions of the world and the evidence that they are not the same, there must also be this

matter of Truth. No matter how one defines his philosophy or religion, an allegiance to that belief is demanded. Truth is that which we are to accept; it must be accepted no matter what the context.

Suppose you were taken to court, accused of something you did not do. The prosecutor presents his case against you very cleverly, but it is false. You then present your case and prove that you did not do what you have been accused of. The judge then gives his verdict. If he says something like: "I don't believe in objective truth, and I do not care what truth is given; each side has a right to his story and each side has a right to be believed. Therefore, I am going to accept the prosecutor's presentation because it appeals to me in my cultural and personal liking and background." We would never accept this judge's pluralistic view about the case. We want the truth to be vindicated. Society may be pluralistic about values, but it should not be about facts. Values are what we individually choose; but facts of whether two plus two is four or that Raleigh is the capital of North Carolina, or facts that prove one right or wrong cannot be altered or changed. They are established facts of truth.

Pluralism believes that all religions belong to the category of values and not of facts. Most religions do not base their beliefs simply upon values; they base them upon facts. They

claim to present the truth. Even secular humanism claims to have the truth: for example, they claim that because we did not come into existence by a fiat act of God we are not accountable to such a Being.

Pluralism asserts that religion only declares “value” and not “fact.” We must acknowledge that Christianity is not an announcement of values but of “fact.” It is the announcement that Christ invaded the history of the world and that through His death, burial, and resurrection, redemption is provided for whosoever will. While Islam claims that Christ Jesus did not die on the cross, Judaism claims He did not rise from the dead; Christianity claims both to be

true! We believe absolutely that these “truths” are matters of historic fact.

All three religions cannot be true: only one can be true and the others false. The story of the empty tomb cannot be fitted into any contemporary worldview of which it is not the starting point. The Resurrection is not the *product* of belief; it is to be the *ground* of belief. We cannot give up the claim that Christ is “The Truth.” Truth is superior to falsehood. Political and religious correctness is a danger in that it is not based on truth. Therefore, we must find the truth and declare it, and it cannot share pluralistically with any other.

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# The Thirty-second Men's Prayer Conference

*June 5-7, 2014*

Theme

**"Help, Lord; For the Godly Man Ceaseth"**  
(Psalm 12:1a)

## **June 5th (Thursday)**

5:00 P.M., Evening Meal: The Dining Common

*Welcome & Song*

*Evening Meal*

*A Heart Meditation* — "Walk Worthy of the Vocation"  
Ephesians 4:1

6:30 P.M., First Preaching Session —

**"Help, Lord; for the Godly Man Ceaseth"**

7:45 P.M., A Season of Prayer

9:00 P.M., Second Preaching Session —

**"The Godly in Living"**

10:00 P.M., A Season of Prayer

11:15 P.M., A Season of Prayer or Rest

(Throughout the night until 6:00 A.M.)

## **June 6th (Friday)**

6:00 A.M., A Season of Prayer

7:00 A.M., Breakfast: The Dining Common

*Breakfast*

*Songs*

*A Heart Meditation* — "Walk in Love"  
Ephesians 5:2

8:30 A.M., Third Preaching Session —  
**“Seeking a Godly Seed”**

9:45 A.M., A Season of Prayer

11:45 A.M., Lunch: The Dining Common

*Lunch*

*Songs*

*A Heart Meditation* — “Walk as Children of Light”  
Ephesians 5:8

1:30 P.M., Fourth Preaching Session —  
**“Yea, and All That Will Live Godly Shall Suffer  
Persecution”**

2:45 P.M., A Season of Prayer

4:30 P.M., Evening Meal: The Dining Common

*Evening Meal*

*Songs*

*A Heart Meditation* — “Walk Circumspectly”  
Ephesians 5:15

6:00 P.M., Fifth Preaching Session —  
**“Delivering the Godly Out of Temptations”**

7:15 P.M., A Season of Prayer

8:45 P.M., Sixth Preaching Session —  
**“Setting Apart the Godly for Himself”**

10:00 P.M., A Season of Prayer

11:15 P.M., Refreshments and Rest

### **June 7th (Saturday)**

6:00 A.M., A Season of Prayer

7:00 A.M., Breakfast: The Dining Common

*Breakfast*

*Songs*

*Concluding Message*

*Benediction*



# **The Powers of Religious Pluralism In the End Time—Part Three**

Dr. H. T. Spence

A number of religions on the planet today claim absoluteness. Judaism for several thousands of years has claimed to be the supreme religion, the only revealed religion of the truth from God to man. After God made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He then made an exclusive covenant with the nation Israel; no other nation has known such a covenant. In those days in order to find favor with the true God, man had to come by way of the religion of Israel. If he was not born into the nation of Israel, he became a proselyte (initially seen in Exod. 12:43–49), taking on the way and manner of Israel's living. In fact, all other nations were viewed as vile and cursed.

In Ephesians 2 Paul declares to the Gentile Christians that they were without hope and without God being alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. Romans 11:16–20 also declares that the Gentile world was not originally part of the olive tree blessed and anointed of God. Even at the outset of the New Testament, Christ made it clear to His disciples that they were only to go to the house of Israel and not to the Gentiles (Matt. 10:5, 6). Christ even went so far to say to the begging Syrophenician woman, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the

house of Israel," and "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs" (Matt. 15:24–27). Certainly the world of the Gentiles is clearly addressed in Romans 1:21–32. But Israel was the appointed nation of absoluteness; only through this nation would any hope of salvation and reconciliation to God be found.

## **The Death of Judaism's Absoluteness**

In the New Testament when Christ brought the new wine of Christianity to Israel, the Jewish Christians believed it had to be placed in the old wine skins of Judaism. Such Jewish Christians were called "Judaizers" in early Church history. These Jews had professed to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, but they also believed that the Gentiles should come to Jesus as Messiah and Saviour through Judaism. These Judaizers believed every Gentile male had to be circumcised and enter into salvation through the keeping of the Law (Acts 15:1).

In the light of this spreading heresy, the apostle Paul defended the Gentiles' right to become a believer in Jesus as the Christ solely through the grace of God. This was the burden of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:11. Paul was strong in his belief about this gospel of grace at this Council, as revealed in Galatians

2. Paul circumcised Timothy in Acts 16 because he was half-Jew, believing this would help the testimony of Timothy before the Jews. However, when Titus was pressed to be so by certain Jews (Galatians 2), Paul refused to have this young man circumcised, for Titus was a full Greek. Paul also was defending the biblical gospel as resolved at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

The Judaizers believed in the absoluteness of Judaism, even to the point that any concept of salvation, including salvation through Christ Jesus, had to come through the absoluteness of the Jews' religion. By the time Jesus came to earth, the religion of the Jew was dead and in a state of apostasy. Paul knew that Judaism was dead, and the evidence of this was the Jews' rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Its absoluteness was now in apostasy, no longer in God. Jesus' death destroyed the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, making them one new man in Christ.

For the first time, the "true" religion appointed by God was now presented universally to the "whosoever will." Christ absolutely declared that this new wine of salvation through Christ alone is the *only* way to God, putting to death the old wine skin of apostate Judaism.

### **Christianity—the Appointed Absoluteness**

This newly ordained religion

called Christianity stepped forward in history, and its gospel was preached as the *only* way to God. It declared that Christ Jesus was truly the Son of God, co-equal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, as one of the distinct members of a Trinitarian God. This second member of the Trinity (designated as *the* Son) was sent to this earth; while maintaining His deity, He took on a human essence, nature, and body, and lived among mankind some thirty-three years. The four gospel writers give careful witness to His incarnation, His virgin birth, His sinless life, and His powers of miracles, signs, wonders, and works. They also declare His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead, with many infallible proofs of His resurrection, and His ascension into heaven where He presently reigns at the right hand of God the Father.

Beginning with the Book of Acts, the rest of the New Testament presents that Life that was lived on earth and announces to the world that Jesus is the only Saviour, the only Redeemer of mankind, the only God-Man that the world will ever know. The Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly and emphatically presents Him in absoluteness of truth: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be

saved” (Acts 4:12). Christ Jesus Himself announced in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” This, as well as the rest of the Scriptures, sealed Him to be the only way, the absoluteness of truth before God, and the Fountain of Life. Christianity now declared itself to be the only true religion through which all must come to its gospel to be accepted by God.

### **Christianity— Absoluteness in History**

In the early centuries this absoluteness of Christianity brought severe persecution upon it as a religion. Although Rome permitted a pluralism of religions, no religion could stand in absoluteness against the State. Furthermore, all religions must include the religion of the State, of Caesar worship. Rome demanded once a year that all people of the Roman Empire go to a local temple and give a pinch of incense on the altar while simply declaring, “Caesar is Lord.” Whatever religion an individual desired was permitted as long as Caesar was acknowledged. But Christianity refused to include Caesar; it declared that Christ was Lord alone; it refused to give any glory to any man or to any other religion. No compromise of its absolute dedication to Christ could be permitted. Christians believed in the absoluteness of this Christian religion so completely that they were willing to go to Rome’s arena and

face the lions or to burn at the stake in martyrdom for this Gospel of the God-man, Who is alive forevermore.

As the centuries passed and another Roman religion arose, Roman Catholicism, the Remnant who continued to believe in the absoluteness of the Scripture’s presentation of Christ Jesus were willing to face the Inquisition, the excommunication from the institutional Church, and even martyrdom by the Christian apostasy of Rome. As the former Roman State claimed absoluteness, so did Roman Catholicism within the apostasy of Christianity.

True biblical Christianity defies all religions, *including its own apostate Christianity*; it will not bend nor bow, nor include anything in competition with its Lord and Saviour. Presently Roman Catholicism is pressing for pluralism in order to establish herself an acceptable religion among all other religions. All other religions are calling for their own acceptance in the forceful drive to Interfaithism. Nevertheless, true Christianity, though it lives in a world where other religions exist, refuses to accept, adhere, or even respect any other religion. Its absoluteness must be maintained—but it will be costly.

### **The End-time Pressures for Pluralism**

Let us recall the twofold principle of pluralism presented in the first article: Pluralism believes that all

religions must be able to dwell together in harmony and not permit any of their distinctives to interfere with their peaceful co-existence. It promotes toleration of all religions. *But* at the same time pluralism is adamantly opposed to any religion that declares itself to be absolute, the only true religion. This destroys even the existence of the power of the State.

An enigma at this time in history is the religion of Islam that is most adamant about its absoluteness, even to the point that it is willing to kill everyone who denies its absoluteness. It is conquering by the sword in many countries while in places like the United States it is conquering large numbers through its false, peace-loving façade. The demographics in major countries of Western civilization have now announced that Islam is a growing force of potential takeover. When it reaches a certain point in numbers, such countries will then feel the terrorizing force of Islam's conquest. Islam is determined to rule the world as the absolute of not only religion but also government and law.

From a different perspective, Christianity conquers through biblical love and the proclamation of the gospel. Christianity reveals that God seeks to conquer the heart through Christ rather than by sheer force. This is how Christianity has truly survived the centuries of persecution and the powers of hatred against

it. Today, of all the religions on the planet, Islam despises with a dark and satanic hatred the two religions of Judaism and Christianity that profess with equal word their religious absoluteness. Islam knows there is no threat of life and limb from these two religions; Islam is the open religion of hatred, while Judaism and Christianity are the open, professing religions of love.

Though there are other religions in the world of great numbers, Islam being the largest, has always had an intense, singular hatred for Judaism and Christianity. To some extent Islam has some identification with these two religions. The common ancestry of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is Abraham. But Islam is against Judaism because the latter religion declares to be the offspring of the covenant of Abraham through Isaac rather than through Ishmael, the son rejected. Islam refuses to acknowledge that the covenant was given to Isaac and thus to the Jew. As for Christianity, it came from the womb of the Jew and declared that Jesus was the promised Messiah as well as being the Son of God. Thus Jesus being the Christ is infinitely greater than Mohammed and rejects all the claims of Islam. Any religion that declares itself to be absolute must denounce all other religions. Christianity denounces Islam; Islam denounces Christianity. Christianity's sacred book the Bible denounces Islam, and Islam's sacred book the

Koran denounces Christianity and Judaism. Islam, in the End Time has truly set itself the goal of global conquest, to destroy any form of pluralism of religions, and to become the singular world religion.

### **Christianity's Claim to Absoluteness Diminishing**

In order to survive in these troubled and aggressive days of spiritual and moral darkness, public Christianity has come to believe it must leave its position of absoluteness and ecumenically become one of the many. Modern Christianity has led the way with present-day ecumenicity as well as encouraging Interfaithism. Present-day Christianity has denounced the Bible, its book of revelation, as being a myth and outdated, and opened the door of doctrine to become a melting pot of all the other religions.

Several years ago Billy Graham, viewed as spokesman for Evangelical Christianity, announced to Robert Schuller (of the then-famed Crystal Cathedral) his belief that there are other roads to God and that there will be others from different religions that make up the body of Christ. This sad declaration from probably the most influential man in Christianity in the past century, along with other compromising and world-conformity statements, has brought about the public death of Christianity causing it to be assimilated into the rest of the religions of the world.

The Mega Churches around the world have done away with the “absolutes” of Christianity in order to make it more compatible to the world’s beliefs and philosophies. Christianity is no longer distinct from the rest of religions. In fact, there truly has been an intense subversion within the last 150 years of Christianity to destroy its absoluteness and bring it down to simply another religion. The increased emphasis upon “God’s love” in contemporary Christianity has destroyed its truth of existence and redefined its purpose. Modern Christianity has become nothing more than a religion for the social assistance of humanity.

In spite of these compromising facts, the world still hates Christianity. The number of killings of Christians and burnings of churches are on the rise around the world. The Devil knows what true Christianity is; he knows it is the rival religion to His ultimate absoluteness that will rule in the Tribulation Period under the Antichrist. He will even use an absoluteness of a false religion at this time, such as Islam, and later his own religion (2 Thess. 2:4) to rise up against the absoluteness of Christianity with the hope to destroy it. According to biblical prophecy the world will not tolerate the absoluteness of true Christianity, for it condemns man and all his works; it condemns the world, it condemns world governments, and it condemns

all other religions. This world is rising now and making Christianity a terrorist religion that must be annihilated.

Christ Jesus warned about this increased hatred of the world against the saints; and yet, the very nature of Christianity makes it vulnerable to any reaction. We are sent forth “as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16). We must carefully read from time to time the words of the Lord in Matthew 10:17–42, as well as the words of Christ on Tuesday evening of Passion Week on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24:2–14). Note what Christ declared in these verses:

*Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another (24:9, 10).*

Whenever Christianity compromises its absoluteness with the world and with other religions, it gains a little breathing space of toleration. But even the religious whore of Revelation 17 who rides upon “the beast out of the sea” will finally be burned and consumed. Any form of Christianity, simply because of what it is identified with, must ultimately be destroyed by the Devil. For the very Name comes from the name that is to be above every other name, the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

Public Christianity has basically destroyed itself from within. Only from within where its core absolutes reside could it ever be sustained. Its separation from the world, from the flesh, and from wicked men was the guardian principle of its existence. It has sought to be accepted and become like other religions. It has denied the very heart and soul that God gave to it. The Church today has become a by-word; it now is rising and being mocked by the world for its compromises, its changes, and leaving its very foundational identification. The world knows this; the Devil knows this. Only the Remnant of Christianity have maintained allegiance to the absoluteness of Christianity, and such fidelity of belief and living has cost many lives throughout history, and it will cost many more.

May the Lord help us in this End Time to “Forward the Faith,” to “earnestly contend for the Faith which was once delivered to the saints,” and to live that faith daily, no matter the cost. As ministers of the Gospel of Christ, we must be true to the proclamation of this message and not diminish its word one whit. Any change in the message destroys its power. The maintenance of its absolute message will enable and empower the saints to overcome the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

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