

JOHN 14.6: ALL RELIGIONS LEAD TO GOD? NO, JESUS IS THE ONLY TRUE AND LIVING WAY! [Chelmsford 21/09/13]

The world into which Hope and Luc have been born is a very different world from the world into which I and many others here were born.

When I was a child, Britain still perceived itself to be a Christian country.

School timetables listed a subject known as Scripture or as Divinity.

I remember that in my first year at secondary school we had to study Mark's Gospel.

The Bible was the basic text book for our Divinity lessons.

But all that has long-changed.

Today we live in a multi-religious society, where Christians rub shoulders not only with Jews, but with Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists.

According to the latest English census in 2011 there were

- 2,660,116 Muslims
- 806,199 Hindus
- 420,196 Sikhs
- 261,282 Jews
- 238,626 Buddhists
- 227,825 people of other religions (so-called pagans, spiritualists, Jains, Rastafarians and the like)

Compared to the wider Christian community these numbers are still relatively small

According to the same census 31,479,876 people described themselves as Christian.

In percentage terms 59.38 % of people described themselves as Christians.

Nonetheless the fact that almost 7% of the UK population say that they belong to a non-Christian religion is not insignificant.

Rightly successive governments have decreed that our children should today learn about other faiths.

The result is that when Hope and Luc go to school they will have to learn about Judaism, about Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism....

This is the context in which our children are today being brought up

The question we now face is this: what are those of us who are Christian parents to say to your children about people who belong to other religions?

No doubt you will encourage your children to respect those from whom they are different, pointing out perhaps that many followers of other religions are truly good people.

But what will you teach them about their actual beliefs?

Can we any longer claim one set of beliefs to be true over against another set of beliefs?

Or is the important thing that we all believe in God?

Most liberally minded people today seem to assume that the embracing of racial tolerance inevitably involves the embracing of religious pluralism.

But significantly Jesus did not share that assumption.

Without any embarrassment on his part, Jesus said: **"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me"** (John 14.6).

For Jesus there were not many paths to God - there was only one.

This morning, I want to unpack this claim.

1. JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY

This is an upsetting statement for those who believe that there are many ways to God. But to believe that all religions lead to God is illogical and a piece of sentimental nonsense. The fact is that the various religions of the world are extremely diverse.

As long ago as 1890 the great pioneer in comparative religion Sir James Frazer stated: "*There is probably no subject in the world about which opinions differ so much as the nature of religion, and to frame a definition of it which would satisfy everyone must obviously be impossible*" (Golden Bough).

To pretend that all these many and diverse paths lead to God just doesn't make sense. It's a bit like saying that any road from Chelmsford will take you to Maldon. It is not true: some roads go to London, others to Southend or to Billericay.

There is the right road and there are wrong roads.

Likewise not all routes lead to God: there is only one route - through Jesus.

All the other routes - all the other religions - fail to lead people to God.

BUT someone might object: "*It's OK for you to adopt this kind of attitude in Chelmsford, where ethnic and religious diversity is relatively limited. But you try and hold this kind of attitude in some of our larger cities, where Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus abound. To deny the validity of other religions is not only impolite; it's also a mark of unwelcome intolerance*".

BUT people who argue along this kind of line forget that from the beginning the Christian faith has been an exclusive faith.

Multi-faith is not a new phenomenon to which the church has to adapt.

The early church grew up in a multi-faith environment.

The apostle Paul, e.g., writing to church at Corinth, spoke of many "gods" and many "lords": "**yet there is for us only one God, the Father, who is the Creator of all things & for whom we live; and there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created and through whom we live**" (1 Cor 8.6).

The first Christians were quite sure that Jesus was the only way to God.

- The apostle Peter said to the highest Jewish council of the land: "**Salvation is to be found through him (Jesus) alone; in all the world there is no one else... who can save us**" (Acts 4.12).
- Similarly the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "**God wants everybody to be saved and to come to know the truth. For there is one God, and there is one [mediator] who brings God and human beings together, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself to redeem everyone**" (1 Tim 2.3-5a)

Why are Christians so sure of themselves?

Why are they able to be so dogmatic?

How could Jesus claim to be the only way?

i) Jesus is the only way because of who he is - incarnation

I find it highly significant that no other religious teacher ever claimed to be the way - neither Gautama the Buddha nor Mohammed the Prophet - they simply claimed to show the way. E.g. when Buddha dying, he was asked by some of his followers how he could best be remembered. Buddha urged his followers not to bother with that question - what mattered, he said, was his teaching, not his person.

By contrast Jesus never said: "*Follow my teaching*", instead he said "**follow me**" (GNB: "**come with me**"). In words of our text: "**I am the way**".

Jesus claimed to be the way because of who he was – he was and is the Son of God.

In this respect the Christian faith is totally different from other religions.

CS Lewis: "*If you had gone to Buddha and asked him 'Are you the son of Brahma?' he would have said, 'My son, you are still in the vale of illusion'. If you had gone to Socrates & asked, 'Are you Zeus?', he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed & asked, 'Are you Allah?' he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off*"

Jesus, however, claimed to be the Son of God.

Jesus spoke of God being "**his Father**", and of himself being "**the Son**".

Jesus did not claim to be one religious leader among many. He claimed to be God's Son.

Here is the so-called 'scandal' of Christianity.

ii) Jesus is the only way because of what he has done - Cross

Other religions point to humanity's thirst for God - to the fact that there is within us all 'a God-shaped blank'; but Jesus alone is the way to God, because he alone has dealt with the fundamental barrier separating us from God.

That which separates us from God is not our lack of knowledge, but rather our sin.

It is sin which hides God from us.

The Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus has broken down that barrier

In Jesus God has dealt with your sin and mine.

Christians affirm that the death of Jesus was no unfortunate accident when a gifted young religious teacher met an unhappy end: rather, it was the moment when Jesus, the Son of God, offered himself. as a sacrifice to take away the sin of the world.

Do notice that the Christian Gospel is about 'news', and not views.

Christianity is not a collection of religious ideas, it is not about a particular 'world view', but rather centres on an event which has taken place within time & space.

God has intervened in history – he sent his Son to die for our sins., and then raised him on the third ay

No other religion able to deal with the twin problems of sin and death.

This is why we can affirm Jesus to be the one and only way.

2. JESUS IS THE SOLE TRUTH

If Jesus is the only way, does this mean that there is no truth in any non-Christian religion? Not exactly - there is some truth, in the sense that in their differing ways each religion points to the fact that there is a 'power' or 'being' beyond us.

Furthermore, other religions may well have insights into spirituality and ethics from which we can benefit.

But saving truth is to be found in Jesus and in Jesus alone.

The Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Romans shows how creation itself points to the existence of God

- E.g. Rom 1.20: "**Ever since God created the world his invisible qualities, both his eternal power & his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made**".
- E.g. Rom 2.15: Paul argues that we all have some understanding of God's moral demands. He talks of God's law being "**written**" on our hearts: "**Their consciences also show that this is true, since their thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them**"

But the insights and understanding of other religion are inevitably limited.

By reason we can get so far, but no further. For the God with whom we have to deal is incomparably greater than we are - he is beyond us.

Other religions tell of humanity's search for God.

But the good news of the Christian faith is that the search is over - for God has come to us in Jesus. Instead of us searching for God, God has come searching for us.

So here in Jn 14 we find Jesus saying to his disciples: "**Now that you have known me, you will know my Father also**" (14.7).

Jesus went on to say to Philip: "**Whoever has seen me has seen the Father**" (14.9).

It is not that Jesus is a photo-likeness of God - but rather through his teaching and actions Jesus reveals what God is like.

The "**words**" he spoke and the "**things**" he did show God to us.

Yes, the life - and even more the death - of Jesus speak volumes.

In Jesus we see that God is love. Jesus is "**the truth**" - in the sense that in Jesus we see the truth concerning God and his love.

Contrast the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with the picture of God we receive in other religions:

- The God of Hinduism is plural.
- The divine in Buddhism impersonal
- The God of Islam is singular and personal, yet far removed from the gracious Father figure we discover in teaching of Jesus

On the other hand, grace is the key to the life & teaching of Jesus.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus

- is the God who waits for the prodigal son or daughter to come back home;
- is the Father who longs to throw a party for his wandering boy/girl.

Whereas for all the other religions of the world salvation is about being the elder brother,

about works, about earning one's salvation - the Gospel is about grace!

The true way to the Father is through simple trust in Jesus.

In the words of John 3.16: **"God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life"**

3. IN JESUS ALONE IS LIFE

In the context of claiming to be **"the way, the truth and the life"**, Jesus said: **"Do not be worried and upset. Believe in God and believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so"** (Jn 14.1-2).

Jesus is the way in the sense that he is not only the way to the Father, he is also the way to the Father's house.

The Bad News is that we are all born with a halter around our neck: we are all born to die
The Good News is that death need not be the end: the risen Lord Jesus has gone ahead **"to prepare a place"** for those who love him - he has blazed a trail through the valley of shadow of death, along which we too who believe may travel.

"Because I live, you also will live also" (John 14.19).

At regular intervals I used to get letters from *Readers Digest* assuring me that I was about to get some life-changing prize - but that prize never arrived - always somebody else got it.
By contrast the Christian hope is not a wishful hope - certain and sure.

"There are many rooms in my Father's house" (14.2).

God never puts up a 'no vacancy' sign. There is room for all.

But there is room only for those who have been saved by Jesus.

NB Roy Clements: *"You may speculate all you wish about how God is going to judge the heathen who have never heard of Jesus. The Bible never addresses itself to that question... What the Bible does make absolutely crystal-clear is that there will be no dissident voices in heaven. There is going to be nobody in heaven saying what a wonderful chap Mohammed is for getting him there. Nobody will be praising the Buddha. The Bible insists that heaven is united by one single chorus of praise, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain'".*

There are some things we do not know and must remain reverently agnostic.

But one thing for sure: Jesus is the only true and living way to the Father.

This surely is what Hope and Luc need to discover

This is what we all need to discover