



"Don't All Religions Lead to God?"

Amy Orr-Ewing

In 21st century Britain, we live in a context of spiritual longing. Many people are searching for something which will satisfy an inner craving for meaning and significance. The artist Damian Hirst, famous for putting dead animals in perspex boxes, recently said this: *"Why do I feel so important when I'm not? Nothing is important and everything is important. I do not know why I am here but I am glad that I am – I'd rather be here than not. I am going to die and I want to live forever. I can't escape that fact, and I can't let go of that desire."*

But somehow this does not always translate into people finding Christ and starting to follow Him. There is a dizzying array of options when it comes to religion and the culture around us says that they are all equally valid. It seems absolutely bizarre to most people that someone would say 'this one way is the truth and the only truth'.

"The question is actually what is true and real"

In my experience there are usually two motivations in dismissing the idea that Christ is the only way to God and we need to be able to deal with them both. The first objection is that it is arrogant to say that Jesus is the only way. Often at this point the parable of the elephant is used to illustrate how arrogant Christians are. It goes something like this: *"Imagine an elephant with blind scribes touching different parts of this animal. One scribe is holding onto the tail and saying 'this is a rope'; another is holding the front leg of the elephant and saying 'no, this is not a rope - you are wrong, it is a tree trunk'; another person is holding the trunk of the elephant and saying 'you are both wrong. This is neither a rope*

nor a tree trunk – it is a snake!'." The moral of the story is that all of the religions are like those men. They each touch a different part of 'ultimate reality' and therefore Christians are arrogant to say that only they have the truth.

Let us take a step back and think about what is being said here. Think about the two main differences between the person telling us the story and the people inside the story. The first difference is that the people touching the elephant are blind and the narrator can see. The second difference is one of perspective – the people inside the story are close up to the elephant but the narrator is standing back and has the full picture. Do you see the breath taking claim that is being made here? Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Moses and Muhammad are all blind – but I the narrator can see! They all had a small perspective, but I can see the full picture, that all of those ways actually lead to God.

The question now is 'who is arrogant?' It is just as arrogant to say that 'Buddha, Muhammad and Jesus were wrong in their exclusive claims' as it is to say 'Jesus is the only way'. So this usefully moves the debate away from who is arrogant or not, and towards what is actually true and real.

The second motivation or moral force behind this question is exclusion. How can you the Christian exclude all of these religions? Again we need to think carefully about this, because the reality is that whatever position we hold, we exclude some views. Even the person who believes that all ways lead to God – which to be consistent, therefore, must include people such as Idi Amin, Pol Pot, Stalin and Osama bin Laden – by that very position excludes the view that only some ways lead to God or only one way leads to God.

In the same way, the average person in Britain would probably want to exclude extremists like Hitler or Milosovich and therefore would believe that only some ways lead to God – perhaps the five main world religions.

So this position excludes the view that all ways lead to God or that one way leads to God. And the Christian who wants to say 'I follow Jesus and He said that He was the only way to the Father' excludes the view that all ways or some ways lead to God. Every view excludes some – so in fact

the issue is not who is excluding people but what is actually true and real.

Just remember, however, that pluralism is an emotionally held ideal for many, and our aim is not to win arguments but to sensitively deal with people's questions. You can win an argument and lose a person.

Jesus said: *"I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me."* There are a number of possibilities here. Perhaps Jesus was a genuinely good person but He was deluded. In other words, He was sincere but wrong – He believed He was God and misled people about this but in reality He was mentally imbalanced. Or perhaps He knew He wasn't God but still went around telling people He was the only way to God – in which case He was a sinister character. Or ... perhaps He was who He said He was.

Taking it further: read...

True for you but not for Me by Paul Copan
(Bethany House, ISBN 0-7642-2091-8)

Jesus among other Gods by Ravi Zacharias
(Word Publishing, ISBN 0-8499-1437-X)