

THE DISTINCTIVES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

With the several thousand of religions in the world 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 logically speaking we will have to call it madness, pride or sheer ignorance.

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? 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.

A CASE FOR TRUTH

“To give truth to he who that not love it is to give him more reason for argument”.

He that is on the side of truth listens to me. What is truth, Pilate asked. And with that he walked out”.

In our times (I believe every generation feels that pressure/opposition they face has never been greater in anytime before theirs) when the subtlety of relativism is its main tool for gaining a lot of ground in our thinking and our approach to life in general, it is becoming increasingly difficult to talk about absolutes or in absolute terms concerning many things.

But we first need to know that there is such a category as truth. Yes, truth does exist. And because there is such a thing as truth, there is such a thing as a lie.

It is very important for us to think along these lines because contrary to popular opinion, it is not only the Christian faith that has claims of exclusivity in its teachings. All religions make exclusivist claims (that is there are points or issues that they are not willing to compromise on and believe all other contradictions to their stand is a lie).

But as has been said in many circles, “all roads don’t lead to Rome”. And no matter how long a lie has been in office, it will never become a truth.

But it was Joseph Stalin who said “tell a lie to the people, tell it over and over again, and the people will believe it to be the truth”.

Truth by definition is exclusive. What that means is that when a statement or a point is made with the assertion that it is true, all other statements or points that stand in direct opposition or contradiction to it must be considered as false or lies.

So in effect I cannot say a shirt is black and white at the same time. Or I cannot say well it is black to me but it may be white for someone else. Because black as a colour is exclusive and unique so the game of relativising comes to a halt when we confront absolutes.



The uniqueness of the Christian message hinges on the fact that it is actually true. And so the test of the truth claims of the Christian gospel is not really with the message but with it lies in the honesty in the heart of the inquirer. Indeed he who is on the side of truth listens to him.

“I do not want God to exist because that frees me because it frees me to indulge in my own sensual desires”. A proponent of Evolution

Look at the contradiction we have to live with because of trying to live without absolutes.

“At the time of making it I believed that the most powerful weapon in the world was the bomb. But now I believe that the most powerful weapon in the world is truth and the Christians have it.”...Andre Sakharov

THE NATURE OF 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 considered an insult in some religions to use such terms regarding 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, or is it not?

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

“in the face of Christ Jesus”...I honestly believe that with all that sets us apart as unique individuals, there is nothing more personal than a Face. 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

So the first distinctive of the Christian faith is the God that is posited in Christianity. We have a God love who is not a monad (a Trinitarian God), God is the only being in existence the reason for whose existence is in himself. So the God who is revealed in the gospel does not create out of a need for worship or love because he is all sufficient in himself. He creates out of desire, creativity and purpose. Indeed “we are his workmanship”

THE ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF THE HUMAN CONDITION

Oh wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of sin? Thanks be to God there is way. Christ in you the hope of glory.

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 is 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 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 whose answer was indeed simple but clouded in our judgment.... Am I my brother 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 more clear 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.

THE PROVISION MADE FOR THE MALADY

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.

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.

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...but 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. And this is where we need to just briefly consider the reason why the law was given...”the law was not given to make anyone righteous”...but to reveal transgression. So all the law and the prophets point to the revelation of God in his son and the reason for his coming.

In the gospel we are introduced to a God who takes the initiative in reconciliation, as is seen in the story of the prodigal son.

THE EVIDENCE OF A CHANGED LIFE

We began by making a case for the existence of truth and absolutes in a relativistic world. But allow me to submit to you that one of the strongest defense for the truth of the gospel is the evidence of a changed life.

We are the salt and light of the world and God really is making his appeal and claim of ability to transform through our transformation. This is where all this comes home. We entreated to be ready to give and answer for what we believe and a why we believe. But equally more important is to demonstrate what we believe in the day to day as we live before men.

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and give praise to your father in heaven. We carry this treasure in jars of clay so that the excellency of the power might not be us.



We may not be all we hope we could be, we may not yet be all we know God wants us to be but this one thing is true, we are not who we used to be because of Christ.

And somebody with a \n experience will never be at the mercy of someone with just an argument. Jesus Claimed to be the only way to God. Let us believe hi m to have told us the truth.