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Regina Sullivan

*Ouachita Baptist University*

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A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON WORLD RELIGIONS

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE CARL GOODSON HONORS PROGRAM

APRIL 21, 1986

BY  
REGINA SULLIVAN



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The germs of this paper were sown in Japan during the year I lived there as an exchange student. This paper is the fruit of much thought and is perhaps more meaningful to me than anything I have endeavored to write thus far. It is a personal journey through difficult questions.

Many people had a part in the formulation and preparation of this paper. Dr. Jim Berryman directed my paper, and Dr. Randall O'Brien and Dr. Tom Auffenberg made up my advisory committee. For their time and energy I am very grateful.

There are other people I must recognize as this paper is as much theirs as it is mine. To my Japanese friends, Christian, Buddhist, Shinto, deist, and agnostic I owe a great debt. These friendships began to shake my intolerant doctrine and dogma. Dr. Dickson Yagi, who taught my Comparative Religions class at Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, Japan, introduced me to the questions involved in this study. More importantly, he taught tolerance and respect for other faiths with his life. The questions I had framed were not easily addressed. It took the spurring of a persistent gadfly to cause me to face the questions and begin my search for answers. To my friend and gadfly, Mark Hagemeyer, I dedicate this paper.

"Indeed, as one goes on it is the things one doesn't believe and finds one doesn't have to believe, which are as liberating as the things one does."

-John A.T. Robinson  
(Honest to God)

"Believe nothing because a so-called wise man said it.  
Believe nothing because a belief is generally held.  
Believe nothing because it is written in ancient books.  
Believe nothing because it is said to be of divine origin.  
Believe nothing because someone else believes it.  
Believe only what you yourself judge to be true."

-Gautama Buddha

Throughout the history of Christianity, Christians have questioned how they, individually as well as collectively, should view other religious traditions. From the musings of Christian thinkers, one can discern four possible relationships between Christianity and other faiths. Some thinkers see Christianity as having continuity with other traditions. Those who hold this view strongly contend that Christianity is no different from other traditions as a means of existence. Christianity is similar to other faiths but has special status as one's heritage or cultural background describes the weaker continuity position. Others hold that discontinuity exists between Christianity and other faiths. The weaker discontinuity position recognizes that other religions contain some value or truth, but only Christianity possesses the whole truth. The strong discontinuity view proclaims Christianity to be the only valid religion; other traditions have no value or truth. This strong discontinuity view is inconsistent with the other three opinions. It comes through history in the writings of Augustine, Luther and Barth. As a Fundamentalist position it can be found

in the doctrine of the American Neo-Fundamentalists of the late 1970s and 1980s. Is Christianity the only valid religion? That is the question to be addressed in this paper.

For the early church fathers, the validity of Christianity was not challenged by the minor religions of the Roman Empire, but rather by Greek philosophy. In contrast to the struggle with Greek rationalism, the encounter of Christianity with other religions was minor.<sup>1</sup> The Roman Empire had been traditionally inclusive, recognizing the national faiths of Europe. When Christianity spread from a Jewish sect to include Gentiles, the Empire leaders became concerned due to this proselytizing.

Inflammatory Christian writings and agitation of the authority lead to persecution, by Nero (A.D. 64) and subsequent emperors. Persecution persisted due to misunderstanding and faulty communication between the Christians and the government. The change in policy came with Emperor Constantine's conversion in A.D. 313. Whether Constantine's conversion was actual or not proved academic, as Christianity was freed from the

<sup>1</sup>Carl Hallencreutz, New Approaches to Men of Other Faiths (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1970), p. 9.

underground to become the faith of an Empire.

While the edicts of Constantine legalized Christianity, the edict of Theodosius, some seventy years later, endorsed Christianity with the sword.<sup>2</sup> In A.D. 380, Theodosius issued this decree outlawing all other faiths in the Roman Empire:

We desire that all peoples who fall beneath the sway of our imperial clemency should profess the faith which we believe to have been communicated by the Apostle Peter to the Romans and maintained in its traditional form to the present day...And we require that those who follow this rule of faith should embrace the name of Catholic Christians, adjudging all others madmen and ordering them to be designated as heretics...

Christianity's encounter with a rival religious tradition came in 1095 and was not characterized by communication and love, but rather by war and hatred. During the Crusades against the Islamic nations the Christian war-cry was "Save the Infidels." Yet, the Christian soliders were more interested in warring than proselytizing.<sup>4</sup> The general attitude of the Roman

<sup>2</sup> Martin E. Marty, A Short History of Christianity (New York and Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 98-99.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Hallencreutz, New Approaches, p.9.



Catholic Church correlated with the strong discontinuity position as revealed in this quotation from Pope Boniface VIII in 1302:

We are required by faith to believe and hold that there is one holy, catholic, apostolic Church; we firmly believe it and unreservedly profess it; outside it<sup>5</sup> there is neither salvation nor remission of sins...

The Reformation produced the first distinction between religion and religions. Martin Luther represented the Classical or Reformed tradition when he described Christianity as a grace-related religion and all other traditions as work-related religions. According to Luther other religious traditions are based on works and knowledge. Only through the grace of God in Jesus Christ can one experience true religion.<sup>6</sup>

The radical section of the Reformation consisted of various sectarian groups. The Anabaptists, although characterized by sectarianism and fanaticism, laid the groundwork for religious liberty and toleration with their rejection of traditional doctrine and their

<sup>5</sup>Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitonum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum, 29th ed., No. 468., quoted by John Hick, God Has Many Names (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), pp. 29-30.

<sup>6</sup>Walther von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, trans. Luther-Verlag, Witten (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), pp. 20-21.

spiritual view of religion. The basic tenets of the Anabaptists, believer's baptism and an emphasis on the spiritual nature of religious life, were also held by thinkers who stood outside the mainstream of the Anabaptist tradition.

Termed mystics and Rational Spiritualists, Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenckfeld rejected the Lutheran Reformation due to its denial of religious liberty. These thinkers and their followers, while holding to basic Anabaptist theology, emphasized the absolute freedom of the believer. This freedom from dogma and rituals led to belief in a completely spiritual, invisible church.<sup>7</sup> Schwenckfeld wrote that "...the universal Christian Church extends in all directions; it consists of all saintly and faithful men from the beginning of the world to the end."<sup>8</sup> While not a widely held or popular view, this universalist position was important in the history of toleration within the Christian church as well as without.

In the Modern Era liberal theology began to question Christianity's claim to uniqueness. The

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Kamen, The Rise of Toleration (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), pp.63-65.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

result was the development of the "History of Religion School." Headed by Friedrich Schleiermacher, these theologians attempted to apply the idea of progressive evolution to religion. In their view the world religions were at different stages which would eventually evolve into Christianity. These theologians espoused the strong discontinuity position as they held Christianity as the perfect religion with the other world faiths evolving into it.<sup>9</sup>

The Contemporary Christian approach to the reality of religious pluralism has been manifold. The four basic positions have been stated above. The strong discontinuity view is presented by Karl Barth. This neo-orthodox position has its roots in Luther. Barth contends that Christianity is not a religion, but rather a revelation and therefore cannot be discussed in relation to other traditions which are purely products of human imagination.<sup>10</sup>

The first call for Christianity to reevaluate itself in terms of its encounter with other faiths is

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), pp. 60-68.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Hartwell, The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 8.

attributed to William Hocking.<sup>11</sup> Contemporary theologians such as Willard Dxtoby, Wifred Cantwell Smith and John Hick, counter the claim that Christianity is the only way to God. These thinkers will be discussed later.

From this brief historical sketch the strong discontinuity position emerges as the popular and traditional view held by Christians throughout the centuries. Yet is this view a coherent one in light of the world today and its multiplicity of peoples and faith systems? Supporters of the strong discontinuity position argue affirmatively.

..... Saint Augustine writes of Christianity:

For what is now called the Christian religion existed of old and was never absent from the beginning of the human race until Christ came in the flesh. Then true religion which already existed began to be called Christianity. After the resurrection and ascension of Christ into heaven, the apostles began to preach him and many believed, and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch as it is written.<sup>12</sup>

Augustine based his theology on the presumption that there has been only one true religion in the history

<sup>11</sup>Hallencreutz, New Approaches, p. 40.

<sup>12</sup>Augustine, "Of True Religion," in The Library of Christian Classics, XXVI vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), vol. VI: Augustine: Earlier Writings, ed. J.H.S. Burleigh, pp. 218-219.

of humankind, and with the advent of Jesus Christ Christianity gave this religion name and form. Augustine goes on to conclude that in the Christian age, when this unnamed religion has become revealed, there can be no doubt as to which religion leads one to the truth.<sup>13</sup>

While Augustine only hints that God revealed in Jesus Christ separates Christianity from other religions, Martin Luther places a Christological emphasis at the center of his theology. For Luther the cross of Jesus Christ is the central point from which dogma must proceed. Theology, therefore, is theology of revelation. From this point Luther divides theology into two camps. The Christ-centered dogma is characterized by knowledge of the cross. Knowledge of God can come only to one "who himself stands in the cross and in suffering."<sup>14</sup> The opposing position is referred to by Luther as the theology of glory. A theologian of glory sees God everywhere; knowledge of God is not restricted to knowledge of Christ. While these theologians may see ethical works and creation itself as ways to commune with God, Luther rejects these

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>14</sup> von Loewenich, Luther's Theology, p. 20.

views in favor of emphasizing Christ. To admit other ways to God would be to discredit God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ.<sup>15</sup>

As Luther extends and restates the Augustinian view so Karl Barth restates and expands Luther's theology. Barth agrees with Luther that all dogma must be Christologically determined. As with Luther before him, Barth bases every point of his theology on the belief that Jesus Christ is the revealed Son of God.<sup>16</sup> Barth takes this point even further by stating that all religion is unbelief, even Christianity, insofar as it consists of people's strivings toward God.

Christianity is a revelation rather than a religion according to the Barthian view. This fact places it in a category separate from other faith traditions which are considered to be "religions." Barth sees religion as every attempt by persons to seek God. Religion evolves from people upward to God, while true religion is characterized by the downward flow of grace from God through Jesus Christ. Christianity, itself, can only be considered true when separated from people's works and their seeking for God. Barth's view created a great gulf

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-22.

<sup>16</sup> Hartwell, Theology of Barth, p. 96.



between Christianity and other religious traditions even in the language one must use to discuss them. To speak of Christianity and other faiths in Barthian terms is to exalt Christianity above the others since the term "religion," while applicable to the other traditions, cannot be applied to Christianity. Christianity is termed a revelation instead, granting it an aura of legitimacy not afforded to the other traditions.<sup>17</sup>

Augustine, Luther and Barth present a strong case for the belief that Christianity alone constitutes the world's one valid religion. Their theology provides the rationale behind the doctrine of strong discontinuity upheld by many churches. Many Fundamentalists echo Barth in refusing to discuss Christianity in relation to other religions. They hold that God's revelation of Himself through Jesus Christ proves that Christianity is the ultimate truth. Other faith traditions are merely people's strivings to seek God who can only be reached through Jesus Christ.

William Hocking and his commission on missions gave the first recognized call for reconsideration of this view. In his book, The Coming World Civilization,

<sup>17</sup> Karl Barth, "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion," in Christianity and Other Religions, eds. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 49-51.

Hocking argues that the position held by Karl Barth calls for an exclusivist position to be held by all religions. Every faith, if one follows this line of reasoning, should exclude all other faith systems. To counter this view Hocking calls for a synthesis approach. Each faith should assimilate elements from other religions, if it so desires.

Hocking's central attitude can be termed "inclusion by reconception." He carries the synthesis position further to espouse the view that all faiths should widen their base in order to embrace the valid truths found in other faith systems. This would bring deeper truth and self-understanding to every world religion.<sup>18</sup>

Contemporary theologian Willard Oxtoby speaks directly to the exclusivist position in his book, The Meaning of Other Faiths. Oxtoby argues that Christianity cannot logically be termed a pure revelation since in its human form it becomes a religion complete with the characteristics of other world religions.

In Oxtoby's opinion the Christian message has been too long tainted with an emphasis on condemnation and judgement. Oxtoby calls for a re-examination of the

<sup>18</sup> William Ernest Hocking, The Coming World Civilization (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1940), pp. 143-208.



Christian message with an emphasis on love and acceptance. Belief should not be the sole concern of the Christian message or the one purpose in sharing Christ with adherents of other faiths. The main obligation of the Christian, according to Oxtoby, is not to preach damnation, but rather to preach Christ's pervading and accepting love. The Christian church must be willing to forego its assertion that it is the sole heir to the truth and the one way to God, in order to present a Christ of acceptance and love.<sup>19</sup>

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, chairman of the Comparative Religion department at Harvard University, counters the claim that outside of Jesus Christ people do not know God by noting the arrogance of this belief. To say to a devout non-Christian that he or she is damned because he or she not recognize the Western Judeo-Christian concept of God is intolerable for Smith. He argues that this attitude is of itself arrogant, non-Christian and inconsistent with Christ's teachings.

In answer to the widely held opinion that no one can know God except through Christ, Smith gives a lengthy and comprehensive argument. This exclusive view,

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<sup>19</sup> Willard G. Oxtoby, The Meaning of Other Faiths (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), p. 102, 33, 55.

states Smith, stems from the positive idea that in Christ God died to save the world and through Christ people can know God. The problem arises when the negative aspect of this position is delineated. To say that only Christians meet God condemns all adherents to other faiths to Hell.

Smith begins his discussion by noting the epistemological difficulty of this view. How can one "know" that Christianity is the one way to God? Smith concludes that one can only know if Christianity is true within one's own life and cannot therefore judge if a devotee of another faith meets God.

The basic argument given by Christians to uphold the strong discontinuity view is that God has revealed this truth to the person through personal revelation or scripture, according to Smith. Smith disdains this argument and counters its validity with an argument based on empirical evidence. All one must do is look around to see evidence of God's revelation within other faith systems. Empirical evidence proves that Christianity is not the only channel of God's grace. Smith notes that one hundred years ago Christians argued that they knew through divine revelation that the earth was only six thousand years old. Therefore, the evolution theory was false and all evidence to the contrary should be discarded. Now the church admits

that this theology must be re-written in light of empirical evidence. So it follows from evidence that persons in other religious communities meet God. Smith calls for a new theology recognizing this evidence.

According to Smith, all faith systems are valid because God is the type of God who sent Jesus Christ to the world. By revealing Himself to be compassionate and willing to reach out to the world through Jesus Christ, God proved that He loves all humankind. God's character as revealed by Jesus Christ is such that He allows Himself to be known in all religious traditions. There are no boundaries on God's compassion and therefore within Christianity as well as outside of it, God reveals Himself to individuals.<sup>20</sup>

All religious traditions, whether they be Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam or Judaism, consider their system of belief to be the truth and all other systems to be partial truths writes John Hick, the author of God Has Many Names. Therefore, Christianity does not make the only claim to exclusivism. Where the

<sup>20</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Religious Diversity, ed. Willard G. Oxtoby (New York: Crossroads, 1982), pp. 14, 25, 51-56.

believer was born usually determines what faith he holds to be the ultimate truth. From this point Hick argues that Christianity has no right to claim uniqueness due to the fact that geography generally determines religious tradition. All the world cultures developed separately and thus require a separate revelation of God. In effect, all the devout of the world worship one God revealed in various forms. God has many names and many modes of worship which constitute the great world faiths.

Hick continues this argument with the assertion that Jesus Christ was not and did not claim to be God the Son or God incarnate. Instead, the idea of God incarnate is metaphorical rather than literal. Jesus Christ represented the love of God and metaphorically he was God revealed. Yet he was a human being, not a part of the Trinity. By concluding that Christ as God incarnate was a metaphorical idea then it follows that one can meet God through Christ but not exclusively through Christ. Jesus Christ emerges as a way to God, but not the only way to God. Salvation can be extended to others not privy to the Christian experience.<sup>21</sup>

The liberal theologians reject the exclusivist view because they cannot accept it as coherent in a

<sup>21</sup>Hick, Many Names, pp. 37-39, 49, 59, 75.

religiously plural world where many reject Christianity in favor of their personal faith tradition. Yet if provisions within Christianity were made for those who participate in non-Christian faiths, then perhaps Christianity could be termed the ultimate truth.

If Christianity is to claim ultimate truth, then it must answer how those who have never been in contact with the historical Christ will reach God. From the outset Christians must admit that some non-Christians have reached God. If not, then pre-Christ prophets such as Abraham, Moses, David and Elijah are resigned to separation from God in what is commonly termed Hell. To carry this point further, what is the fate of people who lived in the Christian Era who never heard of Christ? Peoples such as the native Americans and the Australian aborigines are two examples. Are these people condemned to Hell simply due to their lack of opportunity to hear of the one way to reach God? What of those who have not seen God revealed in Jesus Christ due to their cultural difference? Will they have a fair chance to learn of Christ? If Christianity can provide for these people, then perhaps Christianity can claim ultimate truth.

Traditionally, the Roman Catholic Church has dealt with this issue in the doctrine "Baptism of Desire." They developed this doctrine to account for the people they encountered in their early missionary journeys.

Modern Catholic theologians, such as Karl Rahner, defend this position which claims that all religious people in non-Christian cultures would believe in Christ if given the chance. Therefore, all devout non-Christians are actually anonymous Christians.<sup>22</sup> Catholics base this position on Acts 17:23 where Paul says to the Athenians that he is presenting to them "the God that they do not know and yet worship."<sup>23</sup> Catholics do, however, affirm that those who hear of Christ and reject Him are not part of the Church.<sup>24</sup>

According to John 1:9 the preincarnate Christ was the true light of all the world. Some theologians interpret this verse to mean that Christ enlightened all people before His birth through reason and conscience. Therefore, the souls which antedate Christ's birth, as well as those who did not come in contact with the historical Christ, can be saved through reason and

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<sup>22</sup>Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in Christianity and Other Religions, eds. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 79.

<sup>23</sup>New American Standard Bible (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, [1977]), p. 111.

<sup>24</sup>Rahner, "Christianity and Non-Christian Religions," p. 79.



conscience. The Cosmological Christ redeems these souls.<sup>25</sup>

An ancient tradition in the church finds its basis in I Peter 4:16. This passage states that the gospel is preached to the dead. Believers in the Eschatological Christ interpret scripture to mean that Christ descends into Hell and preaches the Good News to its inhabitants. This insures that those who die without Christ for whatever reason will receive the chance to believe after death.<sup>26</sup>

That Christianity is the only valid faith, that Christianity is not the only valid faith, that Christianity may be the only valid faith, are all positions that may be argued and strongly defended. Thus the Christian must weigh the evidence and conclude which view represents his or her personal opinion. In light of reading and experience, this writer must conclude that Christianity is not the only way for persons to reach God. Christianity provides one system for meeting God, but not the only valid system.

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Hick, Many Names, p. 35.

The primary reasoning behind the Barthian tradition is that Christianity is different because Christ was God revealed. While Christ's claim to divinity causes Christianity to be distinct, it does not set it above other traditions in its human form. Christian believers are human, and so the Christian religion is a human entity which must be termed a religion to be discussed alongside the other great world faiths.

After two centuries on the mission field worldwide, Christian missionaries are far from converting the world to Christianity. Canon Max Warren, the General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, writes the following: "We have marched around alien Jerichos the requisite number of times. We have sounded the trumpets. And the walls have not collapsed."<sup>27</sup> Why is this so? This situation cannot be blamed on any lack of zeal on the part of Christianity. This lack of responsiveness to Christianity may exist because the other world faiths believe that they are legitimate just as vehemently as Christianity does. The claim to superiority and ultimate truth is one echoed in mosques, temples, churches and shrines worldwide. Simply claiming to have the ultimate truth is no evidence that such a claim is true.

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, Religious Diversity, p. 7.



A weakness inherent in the doctrine of strong discontinuity is that it makes no provision for the majority of humanity, thus condemning them to eternal separation from God. The vast majority of the souls that have been born have lived outside of Christ's influence. To hold that this situation is divinely ordained and condoned is to undermine the character of the Christian God.

To say to a devout adherent of another faith that his or her cultural heritage is illegitimate, and he or she is damned, again is in opposition to the very nature of God, creator of all peoples and nations. Is one damned purely by virtue of his or her culture and the misfortune of his or her geographic location? Such an ethnocentric view seems a vestige of Western imperialism which should be discarded in light of the world today.

Christians throughout the world believe that they are reaching God through their belief in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Moslems, Hindus, Jews and Buddhists, too, believe that they experience the ultimate reality through their prayers and meditations. Yet no criteria exists to judge whether or not the devotee actually knows God or meets God. One can argue, however, that no person would consciously worship a false god. While the revelations, traditions, doctrines and dogma contradict,

the worshippers of all faiths believe that they are directing their worship to true and living gods. Therefore, before condemning the devout Moslem, the Christian should recall the words written in I Samuel 16:7, "The Lord sees not as man sees...The Lord looks at the heart."<sup>28</sup>

The principle argument raised by objectors to this inclusive position centers around the passage found in John 14:6. The setting for this verse is the Last Supper and Jesus is foretelling His departure from His disciples. Distraught at the thought of his Master leaving, Thomas says, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?"<sup>29</sup> The reply: "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."<sup>30</sup> The question offered by the objectors can be framed as follows: Can a Bible-believing individual accept that persons may come to God in ways other than Christ while respecting Christ's words? This writer makes no claim to be a theologian, therefore as a layperson this writer will address this concern in strictly lay terms.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

In the Gospels Christ consistently emphasized the spirit of the law over and against the letter of the law. The continual disputing between Jesus and the Pharisees demonstrated this concern. Twice Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-13; Luke 13:10-17), much to the consternation of the religious leaders.

This emphasis on the spiritual implication was intrinsic when Jesus spoke of Himself. Jesus referred to Himself as the "Door to salvation" (John 10:9) and the "Bread of Life" (John 6:48). It is then possible that in the aforementioned passage, John 14:6, Jesus speaks of Himself once again in a metaphorical and spiritual sense.

In John 14:14 Jesus said, "If you ask Me anything in my name, I will do it."<sup>31</sup> Should this verse be interpreted literally? Note these two examples: "Father, please give me a brand new red Porsche, In Jesus' name, amen." "Father, please give me the desire to help the poor, amen." Which prayer was spoken in Jesus name? Surely not the demand for material gain, although it contains the proper qualification. To ask in Jesus' name goes beyond the literal attaching of His name to a

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

prayer. To ask in Jesus' name is to ask according to His mind, His cause and in His spirit.

Returning to the verse found in John 14:6, it is possible to search for a deeper spiritual interpretation, rather than adapt a legalistic interpretation.

Interjecting the above stated definition of Jesus' name into the passage it reads: I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, unless he comes with My mind, My cause and in My spirit.

This reading and interpretation seems more congruous with the Christ of the Gospels who continually called for a recognition of the spirit of the law rather than strict legalism.

Must one verbally call out the name of Jesus to reach the heart of God? Jesus commented in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."<sup>32</sup> Could this passage imply that those who live according to the will of the Father may reach God without the verbal acknowledgement of Christ? Living in accordance with the will of the Father through the example of Jesus Christ merits more praise than simply speaking the words, "Lord, Lord."

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

If one interprets these verses spiritually then it follows that rational, Bible-believing Christians can accept that devotees of other faiths who are living in accordance with the essence of Christ's teachings, are practicing a valid religion and meeting God. If one accepts this interpretation then the truth in the words of Mahatma Gandhi rings clear:

If I could call myself, say, a Christian or a Moslem, with my own interpretation of the Bible or the Koran, I could not hesitate to call myself either. For then Hindu, Christian, and Moslem would be synonymous terms. I do believe that in the other world there are neither Hindus, nor Christians or Moslems.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Louis Fischer, The Life of Mahatma Gandhi (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1950), p. 333.

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