

Seventh Sunday After the Epiphany, February 19, 2006, Liturgical Year B

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**

The Rev. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

***"Truth or Religion?"***

**MANY ROADS TO HEAVEN?**

One of the pervasive views in our society is that there are many roads that lead to heaven. In other words, there may be a God or Higher Power, but there are different ways to reach this God or Higher Power. You will not only find this view here in the US but in other parts of the world as well. In fact, it is becoming more popular as our world becomes more of a global village.

But can this really be the case in light of what we know about life? For example, the laws of biology and how our bodies operate are the same whether you are in China or here in the US. Our doctor better know how the body operates and how to apply basic principles of medicine, or else we'll be in trouble. The laws of physics are the same whether you are in Africa or here in the US. The laws of mathematics are the same whether you are in Buffalo or in London. In fact, in every field there are standards and principles that are consistent the world over.

So then why should it be any different when it comes to the supernatural, when it comes to the things of God? It only stands to reason that if we live in a world governed by certain principles and laws in the natural realm, then there should also be consistent spiritual laws and principles when it comes to the One who created our world.

**"I AM THE TRUTH"**

Jesus said in **Jn. 8:44**: ***"If you continue in My Word, you are truly my disciples and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."*** What we are talking about is truth and reality. There is a common truth and reality when it comes to the things of God. And if there is truth, then there is also falsehood. Jesus said in **Mt. 7:15**: ***"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit."***

As Christians we understand Jesus to be God in the flesh. He is the God-man. That's why Jesus declared in **Jn. 14:6**: ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but by Me."***

And so what you will find when you look at our society and world is an interesting phenomenon: there is truth and then there is religion. Truth tells us what is right and what is wrong. Truth tells us what we need to know about God and ourselves. It is based on supernatural revelation.

Religion, on the other hand, is man-made. It is man's attempt to understand our world and ourselves. It is man's attempt to fill the God shaped vacuum in our hearts. The problem with man's attempts is that they will always fall short. They will be distortions and perversions of the truth because man's heart is sinful. The Lord declares in **Jer. 17:9** that ***"the heart is devious above all else; it is perverse."*** Hence, the religions of man will never be adequate because they are trying to do something only God can do.

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Jesus came to not only reveal the Truth about God and life but to enable us to all have a personal relationship with God. Jesus is about relationship, not religion. We must never forget this distinction. So what is so different about following Christ as Lord and Savior versus following the religions of man?

The best way to see the difference is to compare what Christ and the Bible teaches to what the other religions and cults of the world teach. You will find that there is a great divergence in the teachings of man and the teachings of the Lord.

Before the service you should have received from the ushers, full color pamphlets that compare the world's major cults and religions with the teachings of Christ and the Bible. Let's look at these now and I want us to look at three key aspects of each cult and religion – the founder, the fundamentals, and the fruit.

As Christians we know that Jesus is our founder. But He really didn't begin Christianity. Rather, He came to complete what God had already begun when Adam and Eve were first created. Jesus completes God's work of salvation and Jesus fulfills the promises the Lord gave to Abraham, and later to the people of Israel. Moreover, since Jesus is God and as God is the embodiment of complete truth, there simply is no other way of salvation or way to God. So He didn't begin Christianity, He simply revealed the TRUTH.

### **A SPIRIT OF FALSEHOOD AND ERROR**

So how do the world's cults and religions contradict this Truth? We need to look at their founders, the fundamentals of their beliefs, and their fruit.

Let me first define "cult." A cult is a belief system based usually on the teachings of one individual who believes that he or she has a new teaching and/or revelation that all must follow. Cults tend to have specific peculiar rules that one should not break. Some of the most popular cults are deviations from Christianity. They believe that the Church over the years became corrupt and now they have the correct teaching. Though they often use the same Christian terminology, it is always redefined to say something completely different than what was originally understood. They use additional "sacred" writings besides the Bible and some even mistranslate the Bible.

A religion, on the other hand, is a long established belief system that is not focused merely on one individual or the teachings of one individual. It is based on a variety of teachings from a number of sources and tends to be followed by a greater number and range of peoples. We will find, however, that there is quite a bit of overlapping between religions and cults and there is one thing they all have in common: They are all FALSE.

### **THE FOUNDERS**

Jesus said that before He returns, "...*many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.*"

**Notice how many founders of the cults were born within the last 150- 200 years:**

Charles T. Russell (born 1852) founded the *Jehovah's Witnesses* in 1879.

Joseph Smith, Jr. (born 1805) founded *Mormonism* in 1830.

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Mary Baker Eddy (born 1821) founded *Christian Science* in 1875.

Sun Myung Moon (born 1920) founded the *Unification Church* in 1954.

Charles Fillmore (born 1854) and Myrtle Fillmore (born 1845) founded *Unity School of Christianity* in 1889.

L. Ron Hubbard (born 1911) founded *Scientology* in 1954.

Siyyid Ali-Muhammad (born 1819) and Mirza Husayn-Ali (born 1817) founded the *Bahai World Faith* in 1844.

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (born 1896) founded *Hare Krishna* in 1965.

Maharshi Mahesh Yogi (born 1917) founded *Transcendental Meditation* in 1955.

What about the founders of the world's four other main religions? Islam's Muhammed (born 570 AD), Judaism's Abraham (born 2000 BC), Buddhism's Gautama Siddhartha (born 563 BC) and Hinduism's many founders – no one founder (many “gurus” from 1800-1000 BC). THEY, along with all the previous founders of the cults, ARE STILL IN THEIR TOMBS – THEY ARE ALL DEAD!

### **THE FUNDAMENTALS – see also pamphlet**

When it comes to the question of who Jesus is, they all teach that Jesus is NOT God. He is either a perfect man, an angel, good teacher, or great prophet.

When it comes to the Trinity – God existing as Three Persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but ONE GOD – All religions and cults deny this truth.

When it comes to salvation – mankind is saved either through good deeds or works, special knowledge, reincarnation or man does not need to be saved because he already is saved!

You will find from reading the beliefs of these religions and cults that they are full of numerous contradictions and deviations from Christ's teachings and God's Word and are the creations of men deceived by their own sinful human nature and by the devil, himself. There is simply no way that they believe and are saying the same thing.

### **THE FRUIT – see also pamphlet**

Recall once more, Jesus' warning, “*You will know them by the fruit they produce.*”

How can you tell whether something is true or false when it comes to the things of God? By the fruit it produces. And when it comes to the religions and cults of the world you can see the fruit not only by their teaching but also by what is evident in their followers and the influence they have on society.

So let me ask the question – what is the fruit of the Jehovah's Witnesses other than they go door to door and refuse to say the pledge of allegiance and do not observe any holidays? What's the fruit of Mormonism: Refusing alcohol, tobacco, coffee or tea? Baptizing the dead, and secret temple rituals?

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What's the fruit of Christian Science: Matter is an illusion? We do not need doctors? Sickness and death are really only figments of our imagination? What's the fruit of Wicca, Scientology, and New Age thinking? How have these helped our world?

And what about the world religions? How has Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism changed our world for the better? Think about that for a moment. Nothing has had an impact on our world like the teachings of God's Word and the teachings and example of the Lord Jesus Christ (that's whole another sermon in itself).

Clearly, the fruit is lacking in the cults and religions of man, and rightfully so. They aren't the Truth. Only the Truth can set us free. Only the truth can change lives. And only the Truth can make a difference in our world. Jesus is the Truth, and Jesus is the only One who can change us and change our world. So it shouldn't surprise us that there are more Christians in our world than any religious group. Over 2 billion to be exact. Twice as many as the next religious group – Islam. How do you beat a bad idea? With a better and good one. And there is no better idea than the TRUTH.

**DO YOU KNOW THE TRUTH?**

As Christians, we have been blessed by knowing the Truth, of knowing Christ as our Lord and Savior. We may not always understand all the details or why God allows certain things to happen or how we fit in the total scheme of things but we must always remember that the Truth will prevail. And God's will and purpose for our lives and this world will be accomplished.

So what will it be? Truth or religion? Will it be God's Way, which is crystal clear, or will it be man's way, a way of confusion and contradictions? I will choose Truth every time. I will believe the Truth, I will proclaim the Truth, and I will follow the Truth. I will follow and serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN!