

one, and —most alarmingly—reshaped the thinking of some in Christendom to embrace a less-than-Biblical view of Jesus Christ.

The existence of religious pluralism has presented a new challenge to believers in America and has rendered necessary a bold reaffirmation of the *uniqueness of Jesus*. Is our Lord to be regarded merely as a highly proficient guru in a long line of Eastern adepts or is He, as the Scriptures declare Him to be, God in the flesh? Is faith in Jesus Christ the only way of salvation, or is Christianity merely one way among many religious paths that share a common essence and which ultimately lead to the same destination? In what sense is the Biblical teaching concerning the resurrection of Christ and the believer unique and superior to the oriental concept of reincarnation and eventual absorption into the “Universal Soul”? These questions, and others, must be satisfactorily answered if we, as conscientious believers, are to “keep the faith” (II Tim. 4:7) and effectively repel the influence of the pagan religions of the Orient.

### *Almighty God—Not Just Another Guru*

From Islam to Hinduism and from Buddhism to Baha'ism, the religions of the East are united in their contention that Jesus Christ is not uniquely Divine. Dr. Hobart E. Freeman, distinguished author and Bible scholar, has written concerning Baha'ism's attitude toward Jesus: “He was not unique, according to Baha'ism. He was a prophet, but only one of many whom God has sent into the world at certain times to witness to their generation. Christ was the prophet of the Christians, as Moses was the prophet to the Jews. Others were such religious leaders as Mohammed, Zoroaster Buddha, and Confucius.”<sup>1</sup> Such a deluded evaluation of Jesus is characteristic of devotees of the drug

culture, Hinduism, Christian Science, Unity School of Christianity (falsely so called), Mind Science, yogis, etc., and is increasingly conditioning the mindset of Western civilization. No longer a bastion of conservative Christianity, the West is increasingly looking Eastward for spiritual direction and is, in the process, losing its appreciation for the unique and absolute Deity of Jesus Christ.

Despite, however, this alarming trend, the Bible is unflinching in its declaration that Jesus Christ is, in fact, *God* (e.g., Jn. 1:1). To deny this Biblical testimony to the absolute Divinity of Jesus Christ is to strike at the very foundation of Christianity, which is squarely built upon the understanding that God has assumed humanity for the purpose of suffering and dying as the sacrificial Lamb of God (I Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:9,14; Jn. 1:29; I Cor. 5:7). In fact, it is the *Divinity of Jesus* that gives His sacrificial death its saving power; for the blood of a mere man, being sinful (Rom. 3:23), *can not save from sin!* By virtue of the virgin birth (Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:22,23), God side-stepped the universal stain of original sin and assumed a real, though sinless, humanity. It was in virtue of His unique person (simultaneously both Divine and human, i.e., θεανθρωπος), that He could offer Himself as a sinless sacrifice—dying on the Cross in our stead (I Pet. 2:24). This is why the apostle Paul could refer to Christ's shed blood as the **very blood of God**: “...*feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood*” (Acts 20:28). A denial of the Deity of the Lord Jesus is therefore a repudiation of the saving power of His sacrifice, without which men everywhere are doomed to the torments of eternal punishment (Mk. 16:16b; Jn. 3:36). If one refuses to believe that Jesus is the great “I Am” (Exodus 3:14) of the Old Testament then he will certainly die in his sins (Jn. 8:24). It is therefore no small matter when men begin to think of

Jesus as somehow less than Divine, as do the Cults, Liberals, and all Eastern religions. In attempting to rob Jesus of His unique Divinity men tamper with the truth of God's Word, and expose their souls to grave peril.

### *The Witness of the Word of God*

If we are to rescue the Biblical concept of Christ's unique Divinity from the pluralistic religious influences that are presently molding the mindset of contemporary society, we must recover what the Scriptures plainly teach concerning this important subject. The following table should serve to illustrate the wealth of undeniable Biblical evidence pointing to the absolute deity of Jesus Christ:

| <i>Jesus: Uniquely and Absolutely Divine</i>             |  |
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| <b>Expressly Declared to be God:</b>                     | Jn. 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; Titus 2:13; I Jn. 5:20; Isa. 9:6; I Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:8 |
| <b>Creator and Sustainer of the Universe:</b>            | Jn. 1:3,10; Col. 1:16,17; Heb. 1:2,3,10  |
| <b>The Object of Worship:</b>                            | Heb. 1:6; Matt. 14:33; 28:9; Jn. 20:28   |
| <b>Exercising the Divine Prerogative of Forgiveness:</b> | Mk.2:5-7; Col. 3:13  |

### *Jesus: The Only Way, Or One Way Among Many?*

“...*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (Jn. 14:6).

“*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (I Tim. 2:5).

“*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

Due to the current drive to develop dialogue between major world religions in the interest of world peace, the message of the above-mentioned passages, which have been historically interpreted as asserting explicit faith in Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation, is being increasingly questioned. Here again, the pressure to formulate a “pluralistic theology,” so as not to offend or alienate worshippers of other religions, has been keenly felt by both Catholic and Protestant alike.

It seems as though modern man, with his obsessive aversion to religious intolerance and his frequent dislike of those who claim to know the truth (contra Jn. 8:32; I Tim. 2:4; I Jn. 4:6), is intent on re-interpreting Christianity in an effort to embrace adherents of native religion the world over. In so doing, he downplays the importance of Jesus' uniqueness and seeks for some common denominator around which the world religions can rally. Despite this search for a “common essence” among world religions, Biblical Christianity remains essentially and unchangeably at odds with every religious alternative in that it unequivocally states that its message is God's final saving Word to mankind (Jn. 1:17; Heb. 1:1). Apart from a knowledge of and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9), all men are doomed to an eternity of conscious torment (Mk. 16:15,16—here we see that salvation is conditioned upon faith in the gospel—*not upon dutiful observance of native religion*; cf. also Jn. 3:36; 8:24; Jn. 14:6; Rom. 1:16; II Jn. 9).

In addition, it is well to remember that Christianity did not begin within the social context of a religious vacuum. The apostles of

<sup>1</sup>Hobart E. Freeman, *Every Wind of Doctrine*, (Warsaw, IN: Faith Ministries and Publications, 1974), p. 74.

our Lord Jesus encountered a largely unsympathetic world teeming with varying religious sentiments, as is attested by the Ephesian mob's hysterical cry "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians!*" and by the various objects of worship that dotted the landscape of religions Athens (Acts 19:28; 17:22,23,29). Theirs was—as our is—an *age of religious diversity*. And yet in the very midst of this pluralistic environment these servants of God were bold to declare that God wanted Gentiles to "turn from these vanities unto the living God" (Acts 14:15).

Can one honestly imagine the Apostle Paul, who traversed sea and land to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation in Christ, seeking some common bond between the gospel and the gross idolatrous religion that was the order of his day? Even to ask such a question is to expose the absurdity and sheer nonsense of seeking to develop dialogue with the pagan religions of the world! To those searching for sure salvation our response must ever be, as was Paul's: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved...*" (Acts 16:31).

There is, moreover, another consideration that points to an irreconcilable conflict between Christianity and other "faiths." In citing the very commissioning words of the resurrected Jesus, Paul reveals the motivating purpose of his apostolic mission to the Gentiles as being: "*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me*" (Acts 26:18). Plainly, the apostle, as did his Master, considered the Gentile world to be groping in *a satanically induced darkness* and in dire need of the forgiveness, spiritual inheritance, and sanctification that is only to be found in Jesus! Why else would Paul brave the perils of a heathen world to bring them a message that was so often offensive to their religious sensi-

bilities (II Cor. 11:26; I Cor. 1:23)? If steadfast devotion to their native religions was sufficient for salvation, why even bother to evangelize?

Obviously, an intelligent faith in Jesus as God and Savior is essential to salvation. Moreover, such faith is produced by hearing the gospel faithfully proclaimed by men sent from God. The inspired words of Paul, himself a champion of the uniqueness of Jesus, should forever settle the question of whether non-Christian religions can be a way of salvation and serve to underscore the urgent need of telling a lost and dying world about Jesus: "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord [Jesus] shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?*" (Rom. 10:13-15a). *No man comes to the Father except through Jesus* (Jn. 14:6). Buddha, Mohammed, Hinduism, or any other religious alternative will simply not suffice—*ye must be saved by calling on the name of the uniquely divine Son of God*.

### *Resurrection, Not Reincarnation*

Reincarnation, the erroneous belief that all men are involved in a series of rebirths into successive lives in which they fulfill the *Law of Karma* until they are (either through spiritual enlightenment or religious self-effort) absorbed into a nebulous "World Soul," is a characteristic feature of Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, and of certain cults (e.g. Theosophy, New Thought, and Unity School of Religion).<sup>2</sup> Such a concept, however, is fraught with unscriptural presuppositions. For one, the law of Karma, upon which the alleged cycle of rebirth is based, is none other than an oriental version of "*works-salvation*" (see in

refutation: Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:5). Secondly, successive rebirth implies *many* earthly opportunities to attain salvation and is therefore in direct opposition to such passages as Luke 16:19-31; II Cor. 6:2; and, most obviously, Heb. 9:27, which reads: "...It is appointed unto men **once to die**, but after this **the judgment**" [emphasis mine]. Also, *the dignity of human individuality* is denied, since man is viewed as but an extension of an all-embracing, impersonal force (a pantheistic concept of God) and could just as easily be reborn as an acorn, earthworm, or caterpillar!

In stark contrast, the Bible asserts the bodily resurrection of Christ (Matt. 28:6; I Cor. 15:1-8) and the eventual resurrection (or change for those who are still alive when Jesus returns) of every born-again believer (I Cor. 15:20-23,52; Phil. 3:21). The bankruptcy of Eastern thought is nowhere more apparent than at this crucial point. In place of the conscious and eternal existence of the soul in a glorified body like unto Christ's, it has substituted a dreary, unconscious absorption into an intangible something. Sadly, its adherents remain without substantial hope and without God in the world; the tombs of its venerated founders are unable to even remotely suggest the expectation embodied in the angel's morning message, "*He is not here; for he is risen, as he said*" (Matt. 27:6).

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## *The Uniqueness Of Jesus*

**A** *new* and unusual age of religious pluralism seems to be bursting upon the American scene. The cultural exchange facilitated by means of mass communication and transportation has brought with it a steady influx of strange religious ideas and practices—particularly from the East. Given impetus by the Hippie Movement (a revolt of American youth against traditional religious and social norms stemming from a disillusionment with the materialism of the age), this Eastern influence has made its presence felt in the rapid growth of interest in yoga, transcendental meditation, psychic experiences, and occultism of all forms. The West's increasing fascination with Eastern thought and practice is reminiscent of Isaiah's description of decadent, eighth-century B.C. Judah: "*Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished [Heb.: מִלְּאֵן מִקְּרָם – 'They are full from the East'] from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers*" (Isa. 2:6, KJV). This explosion of eastern religious ideas upon American soil has won the acceptance of many within the scientific community, sparked a "human potential movement" bent on realizing personal godhood (remember the serpent's age-old lie '*...ye shall be as gods*' [Gen. 3:5]?), foisted a pantheistic world view upon minds that were largely, though imperfectly, conditioned by a Judeo-Christian

<sup>2</sup> Transmigration—rebirth as an animal, plant, or insect—is a broader term. See Freeman, *Every Wind of Doctrine* (Warsaw, IN: Faith Ministries and Publications, 1974), p. 229.