**Course CM Egypt Sept. '08 (3) The Christian message and the religions, 'Good views or good news´**

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´Christianity is not good views, but good news´ (L. Newbigin)

Why do people of other religions (sects and ideologies) not believe the ´Good News´ ?

1.Because they didn´t hear it or were not exposed to it. 2. Because they suppress God´s truth in injustice (Rom. 1:18 vv). 3. Because their thinking is darkened. 4. Because they make creation God.

Actually –without grace- that is the situation of us all! (Rom. 3.23).

What about the other religions, did they found other ways to conquer the powers that master humans, like sin and death? What is their *diagnosis* of man and world and what is their *therapy*?

Let us take the example of the medical world. Different doctors might present different therapies to a sick person. What kind of ´doctors´ are non-Christian religions? (We presuppose here that everybody acknowledges that man is sick and this world is not the best one we can imagine.)

Let us compare Buddha, Moses, Mohammed and Christ with different doctors. You cannot try all of them. Some therapies might be dangerous or even dehumanize or kill you. What do I do when different doctors come to me bed? I listen to the diagnosis and try to discover the truth of it. Only if I trust the diagnosis, I also can trust the presented medicine. Not every diagnosis is true and so not every medicine!

Buddha´s diagnosis: life is suffering, to be born is suffering, to grow up is suffering, to die is suffering. The root of all diseases and suffering is desire (or lust), because you attach to the earthly existence with all its pleasures. His therapy: to let loose this earthly, material life and to go beyond it.. Life in the end is only illusion (maya).

- Ⓟ Reflection. Let us think about this therapy. What is the value, what is the problem? Why rejecting the solution of Buddhism?
    - Relevant questions about the ´therapy´ : 1.Can we trust the diagnosis (what is the root of evil?), 2. Do diagnosis and therapy justice to reality as we experience it?
    - What is Christ´s diagnosis? And what is the therapy of the Gospel?

Comparing the portrayal of men, worldview, and the notion of God in different religions.

| | Buddhism | Islam | Christianity |
|---|---|---|---|
| Men | Godly spark, entangled in matter | Cog in the fixed plan of God | Person created after God´s image |

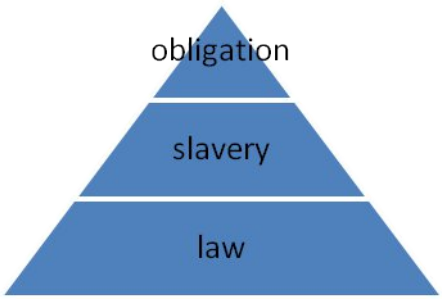
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|---|---|---|---|
| World | Maya (illusion) | Determined universum | Creation with an open ( not fixed) historical process |
| God | The All, The Absolute | Allah, Supreme Judge and Ruler | Lord, Father, moved to compassion |
| Diagnosis | Men, entangled in matter (dust), led by lust | Failure to submit | Sinful will, rebellion against God |
| Therapy | The eightfold pathway to illumination | Five duties | To receive Christ in faith |

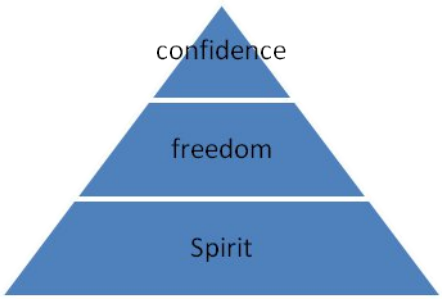
In all non-Christian religions the way to salvation is governed by the question: what can men do to climb to God and to His salvation, Jews try to reach it by the Law (cf. Rom. 2:17v), Muslims by the five religious plights and Buddhists through the eightfold path, New Age adherents by mystical unity between a (pantheistic) god and man, traditional religions by exorcism or magic.

The gospel shows the opposite way: what God has done to reach us. John 3:16. The victory is not ours. The God of the Bible is not the unmoved Mover (Aristotle), instead He is moved, He burns of love and compassion for His world. He is not the severe Judge who waits till we have fulfilled all his conditions, not the great Watchmaker like the philosophers of the Enlightment in 18$^{th}$ century Europe thought. The God of the Bible is no impersonal, all governing Power like they think about Him in the East. He is concerned with holy love. He has dealt with human history in searching Adam and Eva in the garden, in calling of Abraham and his descendants, but particularly by sending His eternal Son to this world and in human history (which is a history of rebellion), in pouring out the Holy Spirit who works the secret of His coming Kingdom in this world till He comes back. In Christ God reaches out to us in order to be saved, to be restored after His image, to receive mercy and grace (cf. the parable of the Lost Son in Luke 15).

The most essential of the gospel (Greek: euangelion) is that it is not ´a good view´ (among other views), but that it is ´good news´ (proclaimed). It is the news brought by a herald about what happened outside us. On a special moment and on a particular place something has happened which is of decisive significance for my life. Life and death depend on it! Actually it means that we can hardly call Christianity ´a religion´.

Religion ß----------à Relationship




(With thanks to the Duth apologetic theologian Wim G. Rietkerk)

- Ⓟ Reflection: 1. What is the truth in world religions? How can we build bridges and remove stones for the ´good news´ of the gospel? (share obstacles and positive experiences). 2. What ´religious elements´ (aspects of religiosity) do we have to overcome in Christian faith and Christian church today?

***The challenge of pluralism.***

Paul Knitter (Britisch Roman Catholic theologian): ´Every religion in a certain way is a window to the Ultimate Truth (which is God)´. Every adherent of a religion proclaims that his religion is unique. What do you mean by ´unique´. Knitter states: ´you can say about an icecream –or a magazine, or a car etc- that it is unique, but it does not mean there is only one icecream, or magazina, or car etc. In the same way you can say Chritian faith is unique´.

- Ⓟ Reflection: How do we observe this (postmodern) attitude toward religions?

Other approaches to the challenge of the plurality of relgions

1. Find fihilosphical ´common ground´: Let us search for consensus in presenting the idea of God as a ´Transcendent Being´ superseding all images of God in the religions. This is the ´solution´ of the philosopher John Hick.

2. Consider other religions and ideologies as full wrong tracks. This position is hold by many Christians, but they might forget that there is some illumination from God in other religions (compare John 1:9).

3. See non-Christian religions as demonic. We must acknowledge spiritual darkness in many religions, sects and ideologies. But we also have to say that the highest ethical and spiritual efforts in religions can be a threat for the gospel.

4. Consider other religions to be a preparation for the knowledge of Christ. This idea is popular in the worldchurch, especially in the Roman Catholic circles. In this concept religions are God´s hidden ways to present His saving grace to people that has not been reached by the gospel so far.

- Ⓟ Reflection:  Can there be ´hidden-Christians´ in other relgions?