

***Why be Catholic? Aren't all religions basically the same? Aren't Catholics arrogant in thinking that they are the "one, true Church"?***

I have read quite a few books on comparative religion (it is kind of a specialty at certain colleges throughout this country). And all of them seem to examine the world religions from a similar perspective. Many times, the religion is evaluated from a sociological angle. Who is the founder? How old is it? How many people follow their beliefs? But most obvious is the way in which ethics figures into the comparison. You may have seen posters or articles that list the many religions that have some variation of the "Golden Rule". This is praiseworthy, but too often ethics then becomes the sole criterion for evaluating religions. From this point of view, a person can quickly jump to the conclusion of "all religions are basically the same; they all believe in some form of 'Do Unto Others...'".

That is great. I mean that truly. It is wonderful when we can find common ground among religions. In fact, the Catholic Church teaches us that we must acknowledge truth wherever it is found. Further, the Catholic Church affirms that every religion in this world has some degree of truth and goodness in it.

But that is not the same thing as saying that "all religions are equal". All religions are not equal. Furthermore, not all roads lead to God. In fact, some might lead a person away from God.

Dogma is critical here. In some circles, "dogma" has become a dirty word. It is associated with "authoritarianism" and "religious fanaticism". But "dogma" simply means a system of belief or teaching. Dogma is an attempt to capture and express truth. "Religious dogma" attempts to express the truth about nature of God and the human person. What is the truth about God? This is the primary criterion we should use to evaluate religions.

We might forget that the world's religions teach very different things. There might be some common points (again, those are good to note and begin genuine dialogues), but each religion also maintains some points of doctrine that are mutually exclusive. For example, for a Buddhist, this world, suffering, and one's very self is simply an illusion; they are neither real nor good. For the Jew, the Christian and the Muslim, the world is real and the person is real (and good!). Those are mutually exclusive claims. If one is true, the other is false.

That is a pretty significant disagreement. If Judaism or Islam or Christianity is true, then Buddhism and Hinduism and animist religions are false. And they are false at their very core; in how they even consider the world, the person, and goodness. We might have the "Golden Rule" and other elements in common, but this core dogma is false.

Further, the reason why Jesus doesn't belong in a list of "Founders of World Religions" is that he is the only one there who claimed not simply to "know something about God"; he claimed to actually BE God. And not merely "a god", but the "God through whom all things were made, seen and unseen". This claim

cannot simply stand alongside the claims of other world religions. If Jesus is who he said he is, then Christianity is the only religion worth believing. But also know this, if Jesus is not actually God, then Christianity, no matter how many great things it has given to the world (the concept and action of charity, the virtue of mercy, the notion that all people have intrinsic dignity, among many other things that have come exclusively from Christianity)...then we must not be Christians.

“The only reason to believe anything is because it is true”, says my good friend C.S. Lewis. Not because it makes me feel good or act good. Not because my family believed it. Not because the people around me believe it. Only because it is true. Believing this truth doesn’t make a person arrogant any more than knowing the truth about the multiplication table or that “green means go”.