

Open-minded approach undermines church foundation

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Some might consider it the most closed-minded statement in the history of the world, when Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." The Presbyterian Church USA's "Religious and Demographic Profile of Presbyterians" is clearly uncomfortable with such an exclusive statement.

Almost 40 percent of the panel, made up of members, elders, pastors and specialized clergy of the nation's largest Presbyterian denomination apparently disagree with Jesus, believing there are other religious paths to heaven for those who are sincere.

A snapshot of this Universalist disposition among PCUSA leaders may appear forbearing and charitable, but is it truly? Is a doctor magnanimous when he tells his cancer patient there are numerous remedies for his disease when there is really only one?

And the question remains, which paths are included and how sincere must one be? Why would they say there are many paths but restrict themselves from saying any path will do? It is this departure from orthodoxy that is compelling many of my Christian friends and pastors in the PCUSA to rethink whether they wish to remain in that denomination. There appears to be a serious misunderstanding of the Christian faith. Jesus never presented Himself as one among many options.

Jesus didn't come to evaluate religions but to rescue fallen humanity. People often ask me if I think people go to hell because they're Jewish, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist. The answer is "no."

Hell is not the consequence of an errant religious view; hell is the consequence of sin. People go to hell because they're sinners; it's an all-inclusive club.

Jesus didn't come to help us figure out how to overcome our sin, He came as the Lamb of God to take away our sin. This teaching is so

central to a Christian, that to deny it is to deny one's faith altogether. Jesus, as the Savior of men's souls, is also a unique aspect of the Christian faith. Christianity is the only religion where men don't save themselves.

Such a denial of the clear, orthodox teaching of the Christian faith is endemic of Western Evangelicalism's anemic condition and subsequently the anemic condition of the culture. The PCUSA serves well as a case study exposing our culture's willingness to believe falsehoods.

A life and worldview that offers itself as true, while at the same time agreeing that a contrary life and worldview is also true, has adopted contradictions - which is a nice word for falsehood. We can amicably disagree while still maintaining intellectual honesty, but to say we agree with a system of thought that is contradictory to our own is simply nonsense.

And because of our willingness to believe nonsense, we elect officials who hold Bibles, take photo ops at Sunday morning church services and then engineer legal systems that run head-on collisions with the words in the very Bibles they tote. It has become the swan song for Western culture, which doesn't want to believe in absolutes.

In light of these things, the closed-minded statement of Jesus, so far from being an embarrassment to Christians who don't want to appear overly restrictive, becomes a necessary statement for any religious leaders who actually believes that what they teach is true. The actual question is not whether a person believes in exclusive truth, but which exclusive truth.

The calculated ambiguity that pervades our current ethical and political landscape can only last for so long. Eventually people must ask just what it is we believe. Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro and similar atheistic religious leaders filled the gap in the 20th century - offering their citizens the absolutes necessary for a culture to survive. Their exclusivity resulted in more deaths and destruction than any previous century in the history of man.

A time will come when Americans must fan away the smoke and mirrors that have come to represent the nonsense by which we are governed. What will the answer be? What, or who, will we be a nation under?

If the religious leaders in one of our nation's largest denominations are willing to adopt falsehoods, how can we expect more from our political leaders?

There are more than 20 nations in the Middle East that define themselves as Muslim nations. I believe they are mistaken in their religious and political convictions. But what are we? Even our churches don't want to be defined as uniquely Christian.