

Forcing Change



Truth Challenge?

Our Changing World and the Great Commission

By Carl Teichrib (www.forcingchange.org)

The congregational leader met me at the door of the South Campus building, Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), located in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

"We're meeting in another room," he said, "we found out this morning that our regular room is being used for something else."



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Carl Teichrib, Editor.

I didn't think much about the venue change until I started setting up for my presentation, a talk highlighting the religious and social shifts in Western culture, and the challenges and opportunities this brings in fulfilling the Great Commission – making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19), going into all the world and preaching the gospel (Mark 16:16), and being a witness to Jesus Christ “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The date was October 14, 2012, and while the congregation I was to speak to wasn't Mennonite nor affiliated with CMU, they had rented the university conference room for Sunday morning services for the past number of years. Therefore, when I was told about the *reason* for the room change, the irony was inescapable. It wasn't because a larger church group requested the space or because CMU was hosting a weekend conference. Rather, the room was needed for Sunday morning yoga classes: Hinduism, for that is what Yoga is, trumped a Christian congregation in a Mennonite college.

The above CMU example represents one part of the worldview shift happening within Christendom and society, and at its core resides the question of *truth*.

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The Message

Truth is central to the Biblical theme. Psalm 119:160 declares that God's revealed message rests on truth; “The entirety of Your word is truth. And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.” Indeed, the Psalmist continuously announces this fact, demonstrating that the “God of my salvation” is the Lord of truth.

Psalm 25:5 – “Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation...”

Psalm 31:5 – “Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.”

Psalm 86:11 – “Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.”

Psalm 96:13 – “For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth.”

“Truth” is repeated in the New Testament through the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, God-manifested in flesh, for in the Book of John we read that the “Word became flesh...full of grace and truth.” Furthermore, Jesus Christ referred to Himself as “the way, the truth, and the life.” Other passages in John, like the Psalms, attest to the centrality of truth as a foundational characteristic of the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

John 1:14,17 – “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

John 14:6-7 – “Jesus said to him [Thomas], ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him’.”

John 8:30 – [Jesus speaking] “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

This truth of God’s salvation through the exclusive and finished work of Christ Jesus, fully Man and fully God, is also expressed in Isaiah and the Book of Revelation. Here we find a series of proclamations that run counter to the spiritual-social flavoring of our day, Interfaith Universalism – that all belief systems and religions are valid and equal expressions of God. However, Isaiah and Revelation point to something else:

Isaiah 44:6,8 – “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am Last; Beside Me there is no God... Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.’”

Isaiah 45:21-22: “...there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; There is none besides me. Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”

Then, in Revelation we find Jesus Christ affirmed as the exclusive and returning Savior, the ***First and the Last***:

Revelation 1:7-8 – “He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’.”

Revelation 22:12-13 – “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”

So if Christ's followers are to be involved in the Great Commission, the proclaimed message must be one of truth - *Jesus Christ as the Beginning and the End*. This can be daunting given that our Western culture is steeped in an attitude of "political correctness," a socially imposed tolerance for the "general good." How then does the Christian engage in the Great Commission when one knows the world, and Christendom itself, is enmeshed in relativism?

The Apostle Paul faced something similar when he visited Athens in Acts 17, a city where paganism and enlightened philosophy were active in the marketplace of ideas. Paul, knowing their worldview and quoting from their own philosophers, leveraged this religious/cultural situation in a way that gave him traction in proclaiming the Gospel. Then, with an interested audience at hand, he told the people about the work and character of the Living God (17:24-25), the make-up of Man and the need of God (17:26-29), repentance and judgment (17:30-31), and the work and resurrection of Jesus Christ (17:31-32).

How did the people respond? Some scoffed and others wanted to hear more. Nevertheless, the truth had been sown into Athens and the Great Commission furthered.

Three Recipient Groups

For decades the Great Commission, expressed as organized Christian missions, has been stereotyped as a foreign endeavor: The sending of missionaries to distant lands. And while the need for Christian workers in non-Western countries still exists, the Western world – traditionally the place of theological grounding – finds itself in dire need of "missionaries."

Briefly consider three Great Commission "recipient groups" in the West.

Recipient Group #1: The Non-Religious

By non-religious, I'm loosely referencing the aggregate of what would be considered atheists, humanists, and secularists – those who adhere to no religious persuasion. It must be understood too, that the numbers listed below are not necessarily complete. In most cases they refer to "convinced atheists," but it should be noted that other classifications would change the totals – such as "not a religious person," which doesn't necessarily label an individual as an atheist, but may only reflect an indifference to the topic.

Australia: In the 2012 *Global Index of Religion and Atheism*, it notes that 10% of Australians claim to be "convinced atheists."¹ The Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census Tables on Religious Affiliation, reports 3,643,000 individuals as having "No Religion."

Canada: 9% claim to be "convinced atheists," which is up from 6% as reported in 2005.² According to a Statistics Canada report released in 2008, "22% of people aged 15 and over reported that they had no religion, that is, to the question on religious affiliation, they responded they were either agnostic, atheist, humanist or had no religion. This was double the figure in 1985 when 11% of the adult population indicated they had no religious

affiliation.”³ Conversely, this means approximately 80% “believe in God,” *however this is defined or considered*.

England: In January 2012, the UK House of Commons Library released their Social Indicators research paper, with a section on religious life in Great Britain. Based on the question – “What is your religion even if you are not currently practising?” – the findings showed that between the fourth quarters of 2004 and 2010, Christianity declined by 7.5%, or about 3.41 million people. The numbers for “No Religion,” however, showed a dramatic increase: 48.7%, or about 4.38 million people.⁴

Europe: In a social values survey released by the European Commission in 2005, it was noted that 18% of Europeans “don’t believe in any sort of spirit, God or life force.”⁵ And according to the 2012 *Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism*, the Czech Republic is 30% “convinced atheist,” France 29%, Germany 15%, The Netherlands 14%, and Austria, Iceland and Ireland all register at 10%.⁶

New Zealand: The Massey University contribution to the International Social Survey Programme reported in March 2009 that, “30% either do not believe in God or do not know if there is one.” It also reported that of the approximately 50% of people who believe in God, “about 20% do not believe in a personal God but believe in a higher power of some kind.”⁷

This same survey also revealed that older New Zealanders “tend to be more religious than younger New Zealanders.” And that “those over 55 are more likely than those under 35 to have a religious affiliation, to believe in God and to believe that the Bible is the literal word of God.”⁸



United States: *The 2012 American Values Survey* published by the Public Religion Research Institute noted that “unaffiliated” individuals – people declared unattached to any organized religious body – make up 18.6% of the population. Of this number, 23% are considered “unattached believers,” 36% as atheists/agnostic, and 39% secular (1% was labeled “uncategorized”). The *Survey* discovered that 32% of the population aged 18-29 are unaffiliated, from ages 30-49 the number drops to 19%, from 50-64 it sits at 14%, and those 65+ at 9%.

Commenting on the rise of the non-religious in the US, a recent *Salon* article noted that,

“In the last decade, atheism in America has risen from a tiny demonized fringe to a serious presence in the public and political arenas. The latest polls show that almost 20 percent of Americans now identify as non-religious, and the atheist movement – a loose coalition of skeptical, rationalists and humanist groups – is making inroads everywhere from high school campuses to the halls of Congress.”⁹

Recipient Group #2: The Religious Non-Christian

Throughout the Western world, a multitude of non-Christian religions and “pseudo-Christian cults” are active. Some are growing through a combination of converts and immigration, such as Islam, and others – like Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses – were established in the United States and have spread to other countries. Nevertheless, this Great Commission recipient group is becoming more prevalent. We now “coexist” with a plethora of belief systems at work in our communities, educational institutions, in the marketplace, and often in our own families.

In urban centers throughout the Western world, and increasingly in rural districts too, this multi-cultural and multi-faith reality is evident. Today, the city of Toronto, Ontario, and the area surrounding it, is considered one of the most religiously diverse regions on the globe. According to the City of Toronto website, half of Toronto’s population “was born outside of Canada,” and in the 2006 census, more than 200 ethnic origins were identified in the city. Worship centers for seemingly every religion can be found in the Greater Toronto Area.

But it’s not just Toronto. In fact, Number 5 Road going through Richmond, British Columbia, is called the “Highway to Heaven.” Along and near this route you’ll find houses of worship for Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists (and Tibetan Buddhists), and various Christian congregations. Although Richmond and Toronto are significant examples of the growing multi-faith reality of Canada, religious diversity is now exhibited in all large and many mid-sized Canadian cities. Much has changed in terms of Canada’s religious makeup, which was historically built on Protestant and Catholic lines. The globalization of immigration – the movement of people from around the world and not just from culturally similar societies – has brought every “faith flavor” to our shores.



Canada, however, is not alone. Similar multi-faith trends are evident throughout the Western world, including the United States.

What does this mean in terms of the Great Commission? Simply this: *The world has come to you.* If you have a heart for reaching the Islamic community, you no longer have to go to an Arab land. If you have a love for the Sikh people, you no longer have to travel to India. From an ethnicity point of view, if God has placed a specific desire in you to proclaim the Good News to _____ (name an ethnic/national grouping), odds are high they already live near you.

None of the above, however, precludes missionary work in foreign fields. What it does, however, is remove the barrier of time and distance if your heart is for a particular religious, cultural, or ethnic group. The world has literally been placed in your neighborhood.

Multi-cultural Caveat: Keep in mind that while nationality and ethnicity may give clues regarding a person's religious heritage, they are not synonymous with *religion*. Just because someone is Japanese doesn't mean they are Shinto, no more than being an eighth-generation American means being a Christian. Likewise, just because someone is Arabic doesn't mean they follow Mohammed, no more than being Slavic automatically means being Orthodox. Obviously certain cultural cues can be an indicator, but even here we have to be cautious, for what is ethnically customary *may not* reveal what an individual *actually believes*. In other words, instead of making assumptions about your neighbors and co-workers, *get to know them*.

With that said, let's look at how non-Christian religions are represented in parts of the Western world.

Note on Paganism and Wicca: Accurate numbers are difficult to obtain as Paganism and Wicca are normally practiced in solitude, and adherents are not usually part of an organized community structure like a traditional church, mosque, synagogue, or temple. That said, the social popularity of both indicates that Paganism and Wicca are on the rise. I have included some numbers, where possible, in the listings below.

Australia: According to the Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census Tables on Religious Affiliation, there are, in rounded figures, 148,000 Hindus, 419,000 Buddhists, 88,800 followers of Judaism, 26,000 Sikhs, and more than 12,000 Baha'i. Over 81,000 claim to be Jehovah's Witnesses and 52,000 as Mormons. Wiccan/Witchcraft accounted for 8,200, Spiritualists 9,800, and 15,500 Pagans – however, if other nature based religions and Wiccans were added to the Pagan total, as is often the case in surveys, the Pagan number would be approximately 30,000.

Regarding Islam, the Pew Research Center estimated the 2010 population at 399,000, with a projected 78.9% increase over the next twenty years.¹⁰

Canada: Statistics Canada releases national religious census data once a decade, with the latest report published in 2001. At that time it was observed that Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and followers of Judaism each respectively represented about 1% of the Canadian population. A 2010 *Globe and Mail* story explained that, "by 2017, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists will comprise 10 per cent of Canada's population, up from 6 per cent on the 2001 census."¹¹

In terms of Islam, the Pew Research Center estimates that there were 940,000 Muslims in Canada in 2010, and this number is expected to triple by 2030. However, according to Statistics Canada data, the fastest growing religion *by percentage* was Paganism, which expanded 281% from 1991 to 2001.¹²

England: The Muslim population in Britain, as of 2010, was 2.58 million, a 36.7% gain from 2004. In 2010, the Hindu population was 790,000, up 43% from 2004. The Sikh population was 340,000, and those who follow Buddhism were up 74% from six years previous – representing about 270,000 people.¹³

Europe: The 2011 Pew Research Center global study on Islam reported that the Muslim population of Europe, including the UK, was 26.9 million in 1990. In 2010 it was 44.1 million, and is projected to surpass 58 million people by 2030.¹⁴ Hindu adherents are in the 2 million range, and Buddhists are estimated between 1 to 4 million.¹⁵



New Zealand: Based on 2006 numbers, Hinduism is the second largest religion with approximately 65,000 followers. Buddhism ranks third at 52,000, and about 10,000 Sikhs call New Zealand home.¹⁶ The Islamic population of NZ is small, about 41,000 people, but it is projected to rise steadily with the estimate for 2030 topping 100,000.¹⁷ Christianity is on the slide, and a general disbelief in religion is growing.

United States: Approximately 1.2 million followers of Hinduism reside in the USA.¹⁸ The Muslim population (as of 2010) was 2.6 million and will likely reach 6.2 million in twenty years.¹⁹ According to the American Religious Identification Survey of 2008, Mormons numbered over 3 million, those holding to the Jewish faith were 2.68 million, Buddhism represented almost 1.9 million, and another 1.9 million were listed as Jehovah's Witnesses.²⁰

Many other religious persuasions can be found in the United States; followers of the Baha'i faith, Shinto believers, New Agers, Spiritualists, Scientologists, Pagans and Wiccans, Sikhs – the list is long.

In a 2009 Pew Forum report on American religious life, it was noted that,

"Roughly one-quarter of adults express belief in tenets of certain Eastern religions; 24% say they believe in reincarnation (that people will be reborn in this world again and again), and a similar number (23%) believe in yoga not just as exercise but as a spiritual practice. Similar numbers profess belief in elements of New Age spirituality, with 26% saying they believe in spiritual energy located in physical things such as mountains, trees or crystals, and 25% professing belief in astrology (that the position of the stars and planets can affect people's lives)."²¹

Of all the countries in the Western World, America is the most Christian in terms of claimed adherents, at the same time the national fabric is composed of a multitude of religions, cults, pseudo-Christian groups, and alternative belief systems. Some of the religions listed above are active in bringing their faith to your door, particularly the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. Whereas other belief systems embed their religion and philosophy in more subtle ways: Hinduism through yoga,²² and Buddhist enlightenment through popular culture.

Here's the rub: We live in an increasingly globalized society, and the Western world is now awash in competing belief systems, faiths, and philosophies.

Two options are available for Christians in the West; ignore the socio-religious changes taking place in your community and family, or take the example of the Apostle Paul and tactfully bring the truth of Jesus Christ into the "marketplace of ideas."

Recipient Group #3: Christendom

It's heartbreaking to say that recipient group #3 is *Christendom*.

Noting the state of European Christendom, Baylor University professor Rodney Stark said; "It's easy to have a negative religious experience going to church in Europe. The one place unbelief is rampant is in the churches."²³

One report noted that, "one out of five Anglican pastors [in Britain] does not believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ. And only 60 percent believe in the virgin birth – that's a lower level of belief than among churchgoers."²⁴

Unfortunately, European Christianity isn't alone in its struggle. So many churches in the Western world are faltering, as Biblical standards are increasingly being replaced by opinions and feelings.

Let's consider American Christianity and the

PAUL AT MARS HILL: *Acts 17:16-32*

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbling want to say?"

Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

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survey findings of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, and to a lesser extent, the work of The Barna Group. In reading the following, keep in mind that other parts of the world – including my own country, Canada – would have similar if not more disturbing results if surveyed at this depth.

In the December 2009 Pew Forum paper, *Many Americans Mix Multiple Faiths: Eastern, New Age Beliefs Widespread*, we read the following,

“Though the U.S. is an overwhelmingly Christian country, significant minorities profess belief in a variety of Eastern or New Age beliefs. For instance, 24% of the public overall and 22% of Christians say they believe in reincarnation - that people will be reborn in this world again and again. And similar numbers (25% of the public overall, 23% of Christians) believe in astrology.”²⁵

When this was explored further, the Pew Forum discovered some interesting data sets.

“Compared with other religious traditions, white evangelical Protestants consistently express lower levels of acceptance of both Eastern beliefs (reincarnation, yoga) and New Age beliefs (spiritual energy in physical things and astrology). For example, roughly one-in-ten white evangelicals believes in reincarnation, compared with 24% among main-line Protestants, 25% among both white Catholics and those unaffiliated with any religion, and 29% among black Protestants. Similarly, 13% of white evangelicals believe in astrology, compared with roughly one-quarter or more among other religious traditions. There are few differences among religious traditions in belief in the “evil eye,” though black Protestants stand out for high levels of belief on this question (32%).”²⁶

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Paul at Mars Hill

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this *matter*.”

Other interesting findings emerged.

“Among Protestants, high levels of religious commitment are associated with lower levels of acceptance of Eastern or New Age beliefs. Among both evangelical and mainline Protestants, those who attend church weekly express much lower levels of belief in reincarnation, yoga, the existence of spiritual energy in physical things and astrology compared with those who attend religious services less often. Among Catholics, by contrast, frequency of church attendance is linked much less closely with these kinds of beliefs, although those who attend less often do express higher levels of belief in astrology compared with weekly attenders.”²⁷

But there’s more troubling news. According to a 2008 Pew Forum research project, many American Christians seem confused on key points.

“The new survey asks those who say many religions can lead to eternal life whether or not they think a series of specific religions (including Judaism, Islam and Hinduism) can lead to eternal life, as well as whether they think atheists or people who have no religious faith can achieve eternal life. The findings confirm that most people who say many religions can lead to eternal life take the view that even non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal salvation. Indeed, among Christians who say that many religions can lead to eternal life (65% of all Christians), the vast majority (80%) cite an example of at least one non-Christian religion that can lead to salvation, and fully six-in-ten (61%) name two or more non-Christian religions. Even among white evangelical Protestants, nearly three-quarters (72%) of those who say many religions can lead to eternal life name at least one non-Christian religion that can lead to salvation.”²⁸

The 2008 Pew data reveals some startling information.

“...most American Christians are *not* thinking only of other Christian denominations when they say many religions can lead to eternal life. To the contrary, among those who say many religions provide a path to eternal life, strong majorities believe that both Christian and non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal life.

Among non-Protestants who say that many religions can lead to eternal life, roughly three-quarters (74%) say that Protestantism can lead to eternal life. A similar proportion (73%) of non-Catholics who say many religions lead to eternal life say that Catholicism leads to salvation.

The numbers are only slightly lower for Judaism, with the overwhelming majority (69%) of non-Jews who say many religions can lead to salvation saying that Judaism can bring eternal life. A slight majority of non-Muslims (52%) also say Islam can lead to eternal life, and a similar number (53%) of non-Hindus say the same of Hinduism. Interestingly, although a majority who say that many religions can lead to eternal life believe that people with no religious

faith also can achieve eternal salvation (56%), far fewer (42%) say this about atheists.

Taken as a whole, these responses reveal that most American Christians, including evangelicals, have more than just other Christian denominations in mind when they say there are many paths to salvation. For example, among white mainline Protestants (85%), black Protestants (81%) and white Catholics (88%), more than eight-in-ten of those who say many religions can lead to eternal life cite at least one non-Christian religion that can do so.

Significant numbers of white evangelical Protestants also believe various non-Christian religions can lead to eternal life, though these figures tend to be lower than those seen among other religious groups; nearly three-quarters (72%) of evangelicals who say many religions can lead to salvation name at least one non-Christian faith that can do so. White evangelicals who say that many faiths can lead to salvation are just as likely as other groups to cite Catholicism as a valid path to salvation. However, evangelicals are less likely than other groups to say that non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal life. About two-thirds of evangelicals (64%) who see multiple paths to salvation say that Judaism, for example, can bring eternal life, lower than the 73% among mainline Protestants and the 77% among white Catholics who say this. And only about one-third of evangelicals who say there are multiple paths to salvation say that Islam (35%) or Hinduism (33%) can lead to eternal life, with fewer still saying that atheists (26%) can achieve eternal life.”²⁹

However, the Pew findings noted that “while the survey confirms that most Americans who are affiliated with a religion continue to adopt a non-exclusivist approach to faith,” there is a percentage who say otherwise; 29% of evangelical Protestants, up from earlier findings, held to an exclusive position regarding “true faith.”³⁰

So what happened to the other 71% of evangelical Protestants who took the survey? Did they misunderstand the question, or simply refrained from answering? In giving the benefit of the doubt, it must be considered that both are possibilities. But it is perplexing.



The Barna Group has uncovered numbers that are different, but still troubling, as the Barna data still demonstrates a significant trend toward interfaithism and universalism.

“When looking at the Christian community, born again Christians were more likely to be interested in sharing their faith with others as well as more likely than average to say they desire active, healthy relationships with people of other faiths...

Nevertheless, despite their own personal faith convictions, many born again Christians embrace certain aspects of universalist thought. One-quarter of born again Christians said that all people are eventually saved or accepted by God (25%) and that it doesn't matter what religious faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons (26%). An even larger percentage of born again Christians (40%) indicated that they believe Christians and Muslims worship the same God.”³¹

All of the above points to the opinion-driven nature of modern Christendom, and the fact that the Biblical message of unchanging truth needs to be re-inserted into the Christian community. The call of Isaiah 45:22 and John 14:6 are not popular to our multi-faith mindset, and the church itself seems to be embarrassed by its exclusive stance – yet, this is the heartbeat of the Biblical message of truth.

“Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” [Isaiah 45:22].

“[Jesus speaking] I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me” [John 14:6].

Who is the Messenger?

Whose responsibility is it to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ to today's three recipient groups?

The Great Commission found in Matthew 28, Mark 16, and Acts 1 was given to a specific body of people: *The disciples of Jesus Christ*. It wasn't entrusted to a political system or government office, nor was it given over to a business model, social club, denomination or church-based bureaucracy. *It was entrusted to those individuals who were His disciples.*

The crux of what this means is found in the words of Jesus Himself in John 8:31. Here, Jesus is speaking to the Jews who believed Him, yet it is applicable to *all who believe Him* regardless of historical period: **“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”**

This fits hand-in-glove with His sermon in Matthew 5 – your responsibility to be “salt and light” to those around you.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by

men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” [Matthew 5:13-16]

If we are His disciples, abiding in His word, we are called to participate in the Great Commission – we are to let the light of Jesus Christ “so shine.”

Paul’s example in Athens, *a religiously diverse environment*, is worthy of re-consideration.

In Acts 17 Paul recognized the spiritual situation of the community (vs.16), he engaged with the Jewish and Gentile worshipers, and with those in the marketplace (vs.17). In verses 18-21 he encountered the “thinkers” and trendsetters of the day, and in verses 22-23 he acknowledged and used their spiritual culture to introduce the Gospel. Then he presented the message: The character of the True God, man’s relationship to Him, repentance, judgment, and Jesus Christ. In fact, in verse 28 it’s obvious Paul knew and understood *their* worldview, and quoted their poets as a leverage point in presenting the Gospel. Paul was neither ignorant nor uninformed about the cultural and spiritual situation he found himself in. We can learn much from his example.

Today, Western society is becoming both secularized and multi-faith. At the same time, Christendom is sliding into a new “dark ages” – letting go of the Biblical standard of truth, and losing its saltiness in the process.

The challenge is thus before us: We can hide our heads in the sand and hope nobody notices, or we can let the light so shine.

Let it shine. **FC**

Carl Teichrib is editor of *Forcing Change* (www.forcingchange.org).

Endnotes:

¹ *Global Index of Religion and Atheism*, WIN-Gallop International, 2012, p.4.

² *Ibid.*, p.12.

³ Colin Lindsay, “Canadians attend weekly religious services less than 20 years ago,” *Matter of Fact*, Number 3, The General Social Survey, Statistics Canada, June 2008.

⁴ *Social Indicators*, Research paper 12/05, House of Commons Library, UK, January 19, 2012, p.iv.

⁵ *Social Values, Science and Technology* (Special Eurobarometer, European Commission, June 2005), p.9.

⁶ *Global Index of Religion and Atheism*, p.4.

⁷ *Religion in New Zealand*, Massey University Department of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, International Social Survey Programme, March 2009, p.1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁹ Adam Lee, “Atheism’s growing pains,” *Salon.com*, October 6, 2012.

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- ¹⁰ *The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010-2030* (Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, January 2011), p.78.
- ¹¹ Michael Valpy and Joe Friesen, "Canada marching from religion to secularization," *The Globe and Mail*, online version, December 10, 2010.
- ¹² *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*, p.20.
- ¹³ *Social Indicators*, Research paper 12/05, House of Commons Library, UK, January 19, 2012, p.iv.
- ¹⁴ *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*, p.121.
- ¹⁵ Hindu numbers are tabulated through US State Department data. Regarding Buddhism, see "Buddhism in Europe," European Buddhist Union, [www.e-b-u.org/buddhism/buddhism-europe].
- ¹⁶ See the online "Encyclopedia of New Zealand," sponsored by the Government of New Zealand [www.teara.govt.nz/en/diverse-religions].
- ¹⁷ *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*, p.78.
- ¹⁸ Richard Cimino, "Hindus in the West: American Hinduism expanding while European Hindu events give religion a public voice," *ReligioScope*, April 24, 2011 [http://religion.info/english/articles/article_529.shtml].
- ¹⁹ *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*, p.137.
- ²⁰ *American Religious Identification Survey*, Summary Report, March 2009 (Trinity College), p.5.
- ²¹ *Many Americans Mix Multiple Faiths: Eastern, New Age Beliefs Widespread* (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, December 2009), p.7.
- ²² There is an old saying; "There is no Yoga without Hinduism and no Hinduism without Yoga." For a short book explaining yoga and Hinduism from a Christian point of view, see Dave Hunt's *Yoga and the Body of Christ* (Berean Call, 2006). For Hindu sources, see the volumes of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (*Srimad Bhagavatam: First Canto – Part One*, is one volume that describes, on page 131, Yoga as the act of realizing Sri Krishna). *The Bhagavad Gita*, one of the more approachable texts, provides insight into the spiritual reality of Yoga. See also, *The Hindu Tradition: Readings in Oriental Thought*, edited by Ainslie T. Embree (Random House, 1966), pp.194-197 and others.
- ²³ Dale Hurd, "Eurabia: The Islamic Conquest of European Civilization," *Levitt Letter*, November 2006, p.23.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.23. The report mentioned is titled "Fragmented Faith."
- ²⁵ *Many Americans Mix Multiple Faiths: Eastern, New Age Beliefs Widespread* (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, December 2009), p.2.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.7.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.8.
- ²⁸ *Many Americans Say Other Faiths Can Lead to Eternal Life*, The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, December, 2008 [www.pewforum.org/many-americans-say-other-faiths-can-lead-to-eternal-life.aspx].
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ "What Americans Believe About Universalism and Pluralism," The Barna Group, April 18, 2011.
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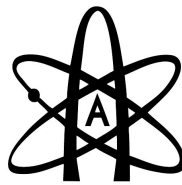
Religious Symbol Identification Guide

With so many religions and philosophies operating within the Western world, we sometimes see symbols that we know have an associated meaning, but don't know which faith or philosophy is being represented. Here is a very short, illustrated listing of such symbols.

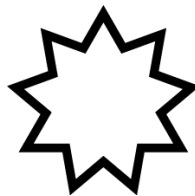
NOTE:

1. Some religions/groups display multiple symbols, therefore some of the listings will display more than one. At the same time, none of the listings will be exhaustive.
2. Some symbols are interchangeable. The Star of David, swastika, Om and Lotus are examples.

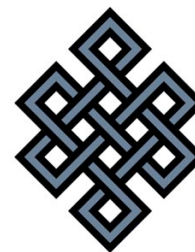
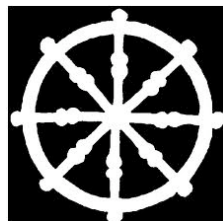
Atheism



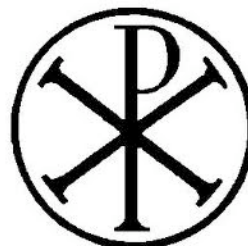
Baha'i'



Buddhism



Christianity



Christian Science



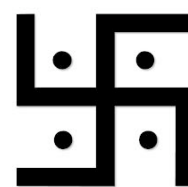
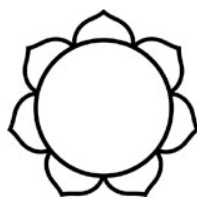
Confucianism



Eckankar



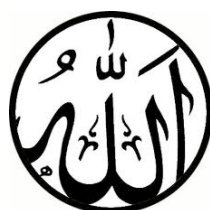
Hinduism



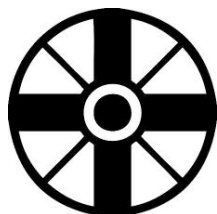
Humanism



Islam

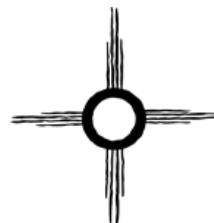
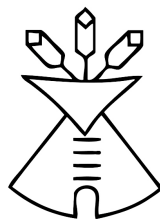
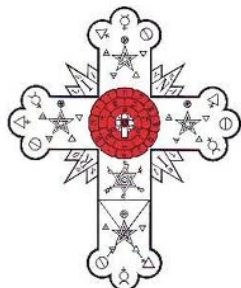


Izunome



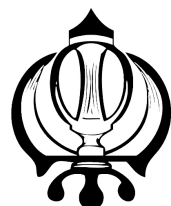
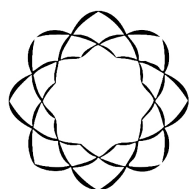
Jainism

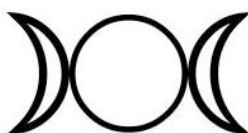


JudaismKonko-KyoMormonismNative SpiritualityPaganismReligious ScienceRosicrucian

Satanism

(Church of Satan)

ScientologySeicho-no-leShintoSikhismSoka GakkaiSufismTaoism

TenrikyoTheosophyUnitarian -
UniversalistWicca -
WitchcraftZoroastrian

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