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Evangelism in a Pluralistic Society

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How do we proclaim a singular gospel to a do-your-own-thing culture, where there are as many suggested paths to God as there are people?
A

merica—refuge for freedom, melting pot for multitudes. Emma Lazarus described America best in “The New Colossus”: Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!
America is a sanctuary for the oppressed, whoever their oppressor. In colonial times those persecuted for their religious convictions were hounded out of England and Holland. Their will to worship freely made them a threat to the established religion of the Old World, but in America they could worship in accordance with the Bible.
Throughout the last two centuries, people left Europe, Asia, the Far East—whatever tyranny reigned—and came to our shores in pursuit of freedom.

Today America is a collection of minorities, a “patchwork” population. Boston is one of the major Irish cities in the world. New York vies with the Jewish city of Tel Aviv. Chicago has a thriving Polish community, and Los Angeles has a large Mexican population.
Cultural diversity is paralleled by religious variety. Besides the large Roman Catholic community, there are millions of Protestants. No country has as many Baptists as America, and the sons and daughters of Wesley flourish here too. Presbyterians in America outnumber their counterparts in Scotland, the home of John Knox. There is a strong Episcopalian membership here, to say nothing of the Holiness and Pentecostal churches. While 34 percent of all Americans make profession of the New Birth, the rest have a myriad of different beliefs.

Some salute this religious diversity. They pride themselves on relativism. Their motto is: “live and let live!” The relativist sees no right or wrong, just various shades of sincerity. According to Os Guinness, the astute English observer, “The increase in choice and change has led to a decrease in commitment and continuity” (“The Subversive Society,” Pastoral Renewal, vol. 7, number 7, February 1983, p.58).

Professor Charles W. Forman of Yale University adds, “The main body of church people, those who are fully part of the larger culture, are showing signs of increasing relativism in their thinking” (“Religious Pluralism and the Mission of the Church,” International Bulletin of Missionary Research, vol. 7, January 1982, p.5).

Casual, nominal Christians see such pluralism as a pleasant part of American life. Because they are not committed to the Scriptures and their absolute truth, they see no need for spiritual absolutes. The reaction of most church members is yawning indifference.

However, born-again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ view America’s varied society as a homegrown mission field. Like the Lord Jesus, we “look on the fields; for they are white already unto harvest” (John 4:35).

The Bible does not teach that all roads lead to heaven. Man-made paths are dead-end streets. He says: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Our clear message to the mixed multitude is composed of five building blocks.

A Bible to Believe

The first principle of our proclamation must be the absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures. We proclaim a singular gospel message to our pluralistic society. There is no “pick and choose” path to peace with God.

Some tell us that God speaks through wise religious leaders such as the pope or a bishop. Others insist that God has revealed Himself in religious books such as the Unification Church’s Divine Principle. The Arabs in our midst affirm that Mohammad is the prophet who tells the truth about God. Eastern mystics meditate their way to another version of religious truth.

The Bible stands in bold contrast to all these. As the Lord completed His life on earth, He assured His disciples that the gospel was the only source for saving truth (John 20:31). No further revelation is necessary, and none is valid. If we are to evangelize effectively we must have confidence in our message.

Sin to Shun

Religious Americans have dozens of ways to deny sin. The tax evader is not sinning unless he is caught. An adulterer justifies his infidelity by saying his wife is a shrew. Teenagers blow their brains with pills, and sophisticated socialites do the same with cocaine and cocktails. Proper pew-warmers unleash gossip-laden tongues and torpedo the church.

Our pluralistic society offers a multitude of ways to disguise sin instead of calling it by name.

God says that all have sinned, and sin is not just a “social sickness.” According to the Scriptures, sin is falling short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23). Joseph, wise prime minister of Egypt, realized that sin was an affront against God Himself (Gen. 39:9). So whether it is “white-collar” computer larceny or “blue-collar” blasphemy, the Bible lumps it all together as sin. The Scriptures take sin seriously, and so must we. Sin crucified Christ.

Price to Pay

People try different solutions for sin. Some take it to a priest and hope he can find forgiveness for them. Some seek a psychiatrist who will assure...
Confession to Make

In a do-your-own-thing culture, there are as many suggested paths to God as there are people. Some believe that keeping the "golden rule," will open heaven's door. If we do our best, God will do the rest. Multitudes place their trust in a religious person—pastor.

All that can be done to pay for sin has been done by the Lord Jesus Christ.