

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

OCTOBER 2000

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS

BY TIM KELLER

Last March I wrote an article for this newsletter about common “defeaters” or objections to the Christian faith which make contemporary people think Christianity “just can’t be true.” The positive response to that article was quite surprising, so I have decided that I will go back and treat each one of these defeaters individually for the next few months.

Perhaps the most common defeater for Christianity is that of religious pluralism. Unlike in the past, many people today live and work with people of other religious faiths. The “RP Objection” goes like this: “The other religions of the world have served millions of adherents, producing much wisdom, character and happiness. How can Christians claim to be the best faith or only true faith?”

*“How can
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The Arrogance Objection

The first aspect to this defeater is more of an emotional objection. It just sounds arrogant for Christians to claim that their faith is the best or only true one when there are so many good, well-intentioned people who do not agree with them. The first response to this concern must not be

defensive. We should freely confess how many arrogant people there have been and are in the church. In fact, many people outside our faith will not be able to hear any of the assertions in the rest of this article until they personally have been able to observe some Christians live out proper gospel humility over a period of time. Don’t rush people with rational arguments whose real problem is a genuine grievance.

However, the central premise behind the arrogance charge is one that pluralists, in fairness, have to apply to their own beliefs as well. Once pluralists become aware that others disagree with their belief about spiritual reality, and that so many good people in the world disagree with them (Muslims, Jews, or

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CATCHING THE VISION—HOPE FOR NEW YORK MINISTRY FAIR OCTOBER 1

BY MELISSA HERWALDT AND KATE LEMMER

Many people devoutly hope to someday have a vision of the glorious kingdom of God, witnessing the majesty and beauty of Jesus Christ. Prayer and meditation are the time-honored ways to pursue this vision, but let us suggest another one, available right here in New York City. Attend the Hope For New York Ministry Fair.

The Volunteer Fair will be held Sunday, October 1, at the Hunter College third floor cafeteria in the West Building, following each worship service. (The Fair will not be held at the 7:00 PM West Side

service because of the Open Forum that evening.) Meet the directors and volunteers from many of the affiliate ministries, from child-mentoring programs to organizations that help the elderly, the homeless, teen mothers and people living with AIDS. Come hear first hand about the affiliate ministries, and find the organization that needs exactly the kind of volunteer skills you can provide!

One good way to catch the vision of the Kingdom of God is to volunteer in its service. Hope for New York is a non-profit organization that can help you understand your particular gifts and your place in that Kingdom vision. We acknowledge first-hand the power of the Gospel to change hearts and lives, and the power of the volunteer/servant as a Gospel-

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- PREMARITAL SEMINAR - OCT 7
- “SPIRIT BEHIND SPIRITUALS” CONCERT
- WHITEWATER RAFTING

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any practicing adherent of any of the major world religions), then why is it not arrogant of them to continue to hold their beliefs?

“...how can someone make the assertion that every religion is equally true?”

If it is necessarily arrogant to think that you have the true belief about some issue, doesn't a firm belief in religious pluralism have the very same problem? For example—how can someone make the assertion that every religion is equally true? Such a claim assumes one of two things. Either this is a claim to know more about God than all of the major religions put together (i.e.

that you can see all of the proverbial “elephant” of which each blind man [read: religions] only holds a part). Or else the pluralist simply is taking it on faith that no religion could be the “most true” one. Either way, the position makes no less of claim of perfect knowledge about God than Christianity, and perhaps it is asserting that it has more.

The Personal History Objection

Another aspect of this defeater is a personal one. As John Hick, a very prominent religious pluralist proponent, puts it: “In 99% of cases the religion which an individual professes...depends on the accidents of birth.” In other words—how can Christians claim to be right when they wouldn't even be Christians if they had a different personal history? How can Christians reject the beliefs that they themselves would probably share if they had been born and raised in a different time and place? As we have just seen, objections like this have a boomerang

effect.

Suppose I concede to John Hick that, had I been born in Africa to Muslim parents (rather than in Pennsylvania to Christian parents) my beliefs would have been different. But does that prove that the beliefs I have now are wrong? If it does, the same thing goes for John Hick. If he had been born in Africa to Muslim parents he wouldn't have been a religious pluralist. Does that prove that his pluralistic beliefs are wrong? Then it can not disprove Christian beliefs on that basis, either. We begin to see that the objections of religious pluralism to Christian belief, if fairly applied, would deconstruct and disprove their own position as well.

“Does that prove that his pluralistic beliefs are wrong?”

The Narrowness Objection

If a religious pluralist is willing to listen this far, he or she may concede that any particular belief (including the belief that no one can know anything!) is somewhat exclusivistic. But, the pluralist may retort: “The difference is this: I only think you are wrong, but you think I'm lost and going to hell. That is terribly narrow.” Let's test this view on other kinds of beliefs. Imagine that two doctors have carefully studied a

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HFNY BREAKFAST WITH DR. JOHN PERKINS THURSDAY, OCT. 12

Dr. John Perkins is the force behind the Christian Community Development Association, (CCDA) and a well-known writer and speaker. Come hear the experiences of a man who has spearheaded this association, leading a handful organizations working in the trenches among America's poor into a powerful network of 500 member organizations in 100 U.S. cities and 32 states.

The breakfast will take place at the Williams Club, 24 E. 39th Street (between Park and Madison just two blocks from Grand Central) from 7:30-8:30 AM. The cost is \$25.00/person. Call (212) 808-4460, x122, or e-mail klemmer@iname.com, to register.

Dr. Perkins will share the wisdom of many years and experiences, relating how CCDA has stayed on the cutting edge of the most effective ministry ideas, and how every believer can step up to the challenge of responding to the needs of the poor. We'll get to know Dr. Perkins in growing anticipation of the CCDA conference in November.

REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller

Buddy Mungo

Dave Jacobs

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HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM
EAST 69TH BETWEEN PARK AND LEXINGTON
services at 10:30 • 6:00

CHURCH OF ST. PAUL AND ST. ANDREW
86TH AND WEST END AVENUE
services at 7:00

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CATCHING THE VISION — HOPE FOR NEW YORK

carrier. Are you searching for the deepest part of the heart of God? Are you having trouble finding Him? Walk straight into the places where there is poverty and oppression. Share in people's suffering and their dreams. His love will unfold over and over again.

Hope for New York helps you respond to the Gospel's call to show compassion and promote

justice through our own repentance and our willingness to give of our time and of ourselves. We funnel volunteers and financial support into organizations and churches ministering to the mind, body, and soul of people on the margins. From our roots in the spiritual community of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Hope For New York works as a partner with other holistic organizations and churches around the

city, seeking to bring the freedom of Christ to all we encounter.

Each year we work with hundreds of volunteers from a variety of backgrounds in dozens of different programs. Hope For New York provides education and support to help volunteers succeed in serving. Throughout the year Hope For New York offers a program of volunteer education: Orientations, Ministry Fairs, a Class in the School of Christian Community, Conferences, and Lectures.

This Fall Hope for New York is offering an exciting diversity of activities. Please consider participating either as an individual, or with your Home Fellowship Group. These events and others will help communicate that a ministry of repentance, reconciliation and restoration is hidden within these seemingly small tasks of tutoring, singing songs, delivering food, and serving meals. These small tasks require us to display love in the face of racial tensions, to cross societal borders and to run counter to the stream of secular culture. When you volunteer you're not simply "giving back to society," or "giving back to God." With each step you become a servant of the City of God on earth.

FREE CONCERT/ LECTURE: THE SPIRIT BEHIND THE SPIRITUALS

Sunday, October 1, join us for a free concert/lecture followed by a Q & A in the Hunter College Auditorium from 2:00-4:00 PM given by singer Calvin Earl. Lunch will be held at 1:30 PM in C002 for \$5/person. Childcare will be provided up to age five. (The nursery will be on the second floor in the West Building in Rooms 204 and 205.) This is a dramatic experience providing new insight into race relations, and reexamining the potential to be a peacemaker in every environment.

WWW.HFNY.COM, OUR IMPROVED WEBSITE

Come stay awhile, you're always welcome! We are growing and changing every day, and our website reflects our exciting progress. Come early October, visitors will have the opportunity to participate in "Volunteer Matching," a program that asks visitors questions, and then compiles the information to tailor-match a volunteer experience. Our website will also give you the option to donate directly on-line!

NOVEMBER IS OFFICER NOMINATION MONTH

During the entire month of November, Redeemer will be accepting nominations for Elder, Deacon and Deaconess. As Redeemer continues to grow, the need for new officers also grows. However, the chance to nominate only comes around once a year. If you are a member, please start considering whether you or someone you know, who is also a member, could serve in any of these offices.

The Elders serve on the Session and provide spiritual leadership to the congregation through oversight of Redeemer ministries, leaders and members. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9

The primary work of the Diaconate is mercy. They minister as officers of the church to the needs of those in the church family who find themselves in crisis or emergency situations. The crisis may be caused by illness, job loss, long-term or short-term unemployment, or other immediate physical or emotional needs. Acts 6:1-4 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 describe their functions.

How Do I Nominate Someone?

You must be a member to nominate someone. First ask the person that you want to nominate for Elder, Deacon or Deaconess if he or she is a member and willing to be considered and then fax their name with your signature to the church office to the attention of Andrea Clark at 212.808.4465. You may send a list of several names at the same time.

WHITewater RAFTING WITH REINDEER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BY KATHERINE S. JOHNSON

When I presented our Children's Ministry C.O.R.E. team with the prospect of a whitewater rafting retreat this summer, the members — Kimberly Dasse, Janalyn Froese, Scott Williamson & Tiffany Kukec — all responded with the enthusiasm you'd expect from people who work with kids. After all... what could be more fun than whitewater rafting?

So, on Friday, August 25, eager with anticipation, we traded the skyscrapers of New York for the mountains of Pennsylvania to hold our first annual Children's Ministry fall retreat. We had three goals: to play, pray, and plan for Redeemer's Children's Ministry.

Saturday morning, as I made my way to the Whitehaven registration booth to register my rafting team, I glanced at the organization name

appearing on our form — Reindeer Presbyterian Church. Now, who in the world would ever name a church Reindeer Presbyterian?

With a chuckle at my consternation, the attendant handed over our passes to pick up lifejackets and lunches, and minutes later our "three-hour tour" down the Lehigh River began. Our weekend of team building was in full throttle, and the long awaited rafting adventure was about to start. Little did we realize the impact this weekend would have on each of us.

The trip affected us in several ways. We found that as long as we stayed in the raft — safe above the dangers of the rocky riverbed — we could function as a team, each within our own area of responsibility, and make progress toward our goal of finishing the rafting course.

However, if one of us fell out of

the raft into the dangerous current (as two of us did at different times), we became a drag on the other team members who — instead of staying on course to accomplish the goal — had to expend all their energy to rescue us.

We learned not only that we need to work together, but that we need to help share each other's loads, and that it's important to support/encourage one another when we're strong and our other team members are weaker. More importantly, we found out that a team functions best when its members work in areas they are gifted — not just where there is a glaring need.

As far as fun goes... If being splashed by gallons of river water and waking up with sore muscles are any indication of fun... we had a blast! (Really, we did have fun.)

WHERE ARE THE DANCING BEARS?

BY KATHY KELLER

Early last summer acquaintances made a special stop to worship at Redeemer on their way home from a pulpit exchange in Jackson, MS. David had been preaching there for five months, while a PCA pastor took his church in Dundee, Scotland. During his stay in the States rumor had reported many things about Redeemer, and he and his wife were curious to see the beast for themselves.

Later, as they talked it over, Annabelle turned to Tim and said, "I don't get it—where are the dancing bears?" They both went on to express their surprise that Redeemer's service was so, so, so....normal, so orthodox, so unremarkable. Rumor had reported all sorts of aberrations that were the probable cause of Redeemer's growth and success—light-weight sermons filled with feel-good aphorisms, entertainment oriented worship services, splashy musical spectacles, and so on. The reality proved

to be so different from the report that they couldn't get over their bewilderment.

David and Annabelle aren't the first, and I hope not the last, to have a rumored report of Redeemer's practices shattered by the wholly orthodox reality. All Redeemer's services are classically liturgical, in the sense that they move through the stages of approach, invocation, praise, confession, and renewal (Try looking at the top of your worship bulletin sometime to see these stages identified.) There are no gimmicks—no dancing bears—or dumbing down of our worship in order to supposedly appeal to unbelievers who find themselves in our midst. The Willow Creek model (a church which believes you need to segregate seekers and Christians since the seekers would not understand or benefit from the worship of mature believers) is not now and never has been Redeemer's model.

On the contrary, we are committed to a belief in "doxological evangelism," a term coined by Dr. Edmund Clowney, which means that as unbelievers observe believers engaged in genuine worship, they will sense the presence of God and be drawn to him. Naturally, this presupposes a little common sense, along the lines of what Paul counseled the early church in I Corinthians 14: 18, 19, 23-25. Speaking in tongues—either in the literal sense or in the sense of a specialized sub-cultural jargon—must be avoided if unbelievers are going to make sense of what's going on in worship. (And St. Paul evidently expected unbelievers to be regularly present at worship, or why would he have instructed the church on how to prepare for them?)

At Redeemer the visitor will find classic worship, intelligently presented and Reformed theology intelligently preached. But no dancing bears.

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bacteria in a fruit being imported from a foreign country. Dr A concludes it is harmless; Dr B concludes it can be harmful, even fatal. Dr A will see nothing wrong with importing the fruit; Dr B will want to do anything at all to keep it out of the country. Is Dr B's belief about the bacteria "more narrow" than Dr A's simply because he feels that the consequences of disbelief in his position are far more deadly than Dr A feels about disbelief in his? I don't think anyone will say that Dr B is being narrow because he spreads his beliefs more doggedly than Dr A. If he did not do so, it would not be 'open' but unloving! If Dr B is not more narrow, neither is the Christian who comes to the conclusion that Jesus is the way to the Father.

*"If Christians
claim that they have
the 'right' religion,
will this not lead to
intolerance?"*

The Intolerance Objection

A final aspect to this defeater is a practical one. If Christians claim that they have the 'right' religion, will this not lead to intolerance? Again, it is extremely important to admit that there has been terrible intolerance by the church throughout history. But the question is—does the message that Jesus is the only Savior necessarily lead to intolerance? No. As Lesslie Newbigin puts it: "The toleration which a Christian is required to exercise is not something which he must exercise in spite of his or her belief that the gospel is true, but precisely because of this belief... We do not impose our beliefs on others, not because we think they may be right

Open Forum Dates October 1 (WS) and October 22 (ES)

On Sunday evening, October 1, 2000, at 7:00 PM, an Open Forum entitled *New York Family Values* will be held at our new West Side location, St. Paul and St. Andrew Methodist Church, 86th and West End Avenue. After a 30-minute concert of R&B and pop tunes featuring the Redeemer band and a stellar line-up of soloists, Tim Keller will deliver a lecture on dealing with family issues. As always there will be an open-mike Q&A following the lecture.

On October 22, 2000, at 6:00 PM, Tim Keller will repeat the talk at a Sunday Open Forum in the Hunter College Auditorium. However, the artistic portion of the evening will be different, as Redeemer hosts the At Marah dance company from Philadelphia. At Marah will present a 35-minute dance piece entitled *My Song*, depicting the rejection and alienation of a child from her parents.

October 7 - Pre-Marital Seminar from 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Redeemer's quarterly Premarital Seminar, which is for any couple considering engagement or marriage, will be held on Saturday, October 7. The Rev. Jeff White, from New Song Community Church in Harlem (and formerly on Redeemer's staff) will lead the seminar at the church office, 271 Madison Ave, between 39th and 40th Streets on the 15th floor. The cost is \$25 per couple for materials and you must reserve your space by calling the church receptionist, 212-808-4460 x 110. This seminar is required if you want a Redeemer pastor to officiate at your wedding, but it's a great thing to do even if you will be married out of town.

October 8 - No 7:00 PM Service on West Side

Because of a prior commitment, the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew United Methodist will NOT be available to us for this one Sunday evening only. Instead, the 7:00 PM West side service will be combined with the 6:00 PM East side service. On Sunday, October 15, things will be back to normal, with the 7:00 PM service at St. Paul and St. Andrew, West 86th Street and West End Avenue as usual.

New York Missionaries Honored and Supported October 22

The term "New York Missionaries" refers to a group of Redeemer supported missionaries who are members of RPC and work full-time in various ministries right here in New York.

On October 22, the New York Missionaries will be the focus of special prayer in the 10:30 AM service at Hunter College. In an effort to help them inform the Redeemer community about their work in the city there will be a presentation at 1:15 PM on that day in Room C002. During that time each missionary will tell about the work he or she does, will explain prayer needs, and will also present volunteer opportunities.

A light snack will be served for the convenience of those attending. It is very important that you RSVP for this event. Please call 212.808.4460 x 124 or email ezyoke@hotmail.com so that we can adequately plan for your participation.

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[and we may be wrong]...but because the Christian faith itself is centered in the message of the incarnation [and] cross...an inconceivable humiliation...”

“...pluralists often insist that Christians should not try to ‘evangelize’ others and should not speak about their faith in public forums.”

Newbiggin is saying that Christians can only become intolerant to the degree which they misunderstand the heart of the gospel—namely, that Almighty God himself came to serve us and die for us, so we could be saved not because of our right beliefs and behavior, but by grace. That message, rightly grasped, cannot lead to coercion and intolerance.

As a consequence of this belief that Christianity is a basis for intolerance, pluralists often insist that Christians should not try to ‘evangelize’ others and should not speak about their faith in public forums. Stephen Carter says, however, “Efforts to craft a public square from which religious conversation is absent, no matter how thoughtfully worked out, will always in the end say to the religionists that they alone, unlike everybody

else, must enter public dialogue only after leaving behind that part of themselves that they may consider most vital.”

This is a powerful case. When secular people insist that people of strong faith not use their faith in public to argue or to persuade, they are telling them (and only them) that they can’t talk about what is most important to them. There is no way around this. When someone argues in public for values of any kind, he or she bases the argument on judgments that are items of unproveable faith about the nature of the world, right and wrong, and the proper destiny for humankind. Why should people who are “formally” religious be precluded from persuasion and full expression with regard to these issues when no one else is?

“But the gospel has within it deep resources for humility and respect toward those with whom we deeply differ.”

Living Proof

As we have seen, belief in anything whatsoever is unavoidably exclusivistic to some degree, and any assertion about faith or God will assume a knowledge about divine things. But the gospel has within it deep resources for humility and respect toward those with whom we deeply differ. I’m not sure religious pluralism or religion in general have the same resources. It is up to Christians to prove this final assertion with their lives.

For further reading (and to see where I’ve gotten some of these ideas:)

Timothy O’Connor, “*Religious Pluralism*”, in M.Murray, ed. *Reasons for the Hope Within* (Eerdmans, 1999), p. 171.

John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1989) p.2

Alvin Plantinga, “*A Defense of Religious Exclusivism*” in *The Analytic Theist* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 206.

Lesslie Newbiggin, *Faith and Power: Christianity and Islam in ‘Secular’ Britain* (London: SPCK, 1998), p. 149, 153.

Stephen L.Carter, *The Dissent of the Governed* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1998), p. 90