

# **ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

## ***Topical Bulletin, January 2021***

We have entered a New Year by the grace of the one true God, the Triune God. Nevertheless, in our nation which was founded upon Christian principals, we continue to see pagan religions recognized and elevated within the halls of our civil government. Thus, it is time for a reality check. Therefore, the question which will be considered in this month's Topical Bulletin is: **How many religions actually are there in the world?**

In Webster's New World College Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, page 1210, we find under its entry for "religion" the following definitions: "1 *a*) belief in a divine or superhuman power or powers to be obeyed and worshiped as the creator(s) and ruler(s) of the universe *b*) expression of such belief in conduct and ritual 2 *a*) any specific system of belief and worship, often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy [the Christian *religion*, the Buddhist *religion*, etc.] *b*) any system of beliefs, practices, ethical values, etc. resembling, suggestive of, or likened to such a system [humanism as a *religion*] 3 the state or way of life of a person in a monastery, convent, etc. 4 any object of conscientious regard and pursuit."

Notice that Webster's definitions attempt to lump Christianity together with other "religions" as demanding specific conduct, practices, and obedience— that is, as being founded upon a SYSTEM OF WORKS to be done to please a higher power or powers! Thus, Webster's definition is inaccurate and inadequate. Francis Pieper in his Christian Dogmatics writes (vol.1, page 8, published 1950): "What, then, is the meaning of the term "religion" as established by common usage? There is no common usage. True, heathen and Christians use the term "religion." But the former naturally associate heathen concepts with this word, and the latter Christian concepts. The fact that both Christians and heathen use the same word does not enable us to arrive at a definition of religion comprehensive enough to include both Christianity and the non-Christian religions under one genus. Men are today eagerly searching for such a definition, but it is a futile undertaking. For the concepts which these two groups attach to the word *religion* are absolutely contradictory. What religion means to the heathen is the exact opposite of what it means to the Christians."

F. Pieper makes some interesting and valid points. Thus, the term "religion" can only be used in an improper sense when applied simultaneously to both Christianity and all other so-called belief systems, for the issue gets down to is this: **How many religions actually are there in the world? Only TWO, the religion of the "Gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24), and the religion of the "works of the Law" (Galatians 2:16) which encompasses ALL non-Christian religions!**

True Christians hold that the Holy Bible is the only reliable and 100% accurate source of information as to what we are to believe, for "the holy scriptures... are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:15-17) Hence, additional Scripture passages from the faithful and reliable Holy Bible King James Version will be quoted as this Bulletin continues to supply proof that there are actually but two religions in the world.

Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, native American belief systems, and all other non-Christian religions teach that a supreme being or deity – a god – must be reconciled by one’s own works, one’s own deeds. On the other hand, genuine Christianity teaches that one is saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man, who has kept God’s Law perfectly for all people and has paid for all the sins of all people by shedding His own holy and infinitely precious blood while nailed to the cross of Calvary. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:16-18) “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:5-10) Note well that impenitence and unbelief leaves one condemned to hell, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” (John 3:36)

*The fact that only Jesus Christ’s work saves and not our own will be more evident as we consider other Scripture passages.*

**“But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.” (1 Corinthians 10:20)**

*Comment: The term “Gentiles” in the foregoing Bible verse refers to all heathen — non-Christian — peoples. Note that ALL non-Christians sacrifice – worship – devils, demons, and do NOT worship God.*

**“For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” (1 Corinthians 8:5-6)**

*Comment: Observe that there is only one true God, God the Father, and there is only one true Lord, Jesus Christ, who together are the Creator with the Holy Ghost, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” (1 John 5:7) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:1-3, 14, 18) Thus, the Triune God is the one true God, three distinct divine Persons {Father, Son (who is the living Word), and Holy Ghost}, yet one divine essence.*

**“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:11-13)**

*Comment: Note that those who are without Christ — those who are non-Christians — are without God! Only those with faith in Jesus Christ have the hope of eternal life and have God while in this world.*

**“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)**

**“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:15-16)**

*Comment: Observe that God reconciled the entire world — all people — to Himself by Jesus Christ who shed His holy and precious blood in payment for all the sins of all people. However, the word of reconciliation — the Gospel — which is the good news that Jesus IS the SAVIOR of ALL people, must be believed by the individual sinner if he or she would personally receive the forgiveness of sins and salvation. Unbelief leaves a person damned to hell, “Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:44)*

**“And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” (Acts 26:14-18)**

*Comment: The conversation which the Lord Jesus had with Saul — whose name was later changed to Paul — reveals to us that Gentiles (which in the foregoing Bible passage means: the heathen, pagans, all non-Christians) are in spiritual darkness and the power of Satan. Only believers in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord are children of light under the influence of the power of God. “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the*

unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” (Ephesians 5:6-11)

**“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:10-14)**

*Comment: If one were to save himself or herself by his or her own works, one would have to keep ALL of God’s Law perfectly in thoughts, words, and deeds! Nevertheless, Holy Writ clearly states: “there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20) Accordingly, no one can be saved by his or her own works! Rather, heart-deep faith in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior and Lord is a necessity if one would be saved. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2)*

**“Sing unto the LORD, all the earth; shew forth from day to day his salvation. Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens.” (1 Chronicles 16:23-26)**

*Comment: As mentioned earlier, there is but one true God, the LORD, the Triune God— God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Three distinct Persons, yet one divine essence. The fact that there is but one true God, the Triune God, is indicative of the truth that there is one true religion, the Christian religion, while all other so-called “religions” are false and based upon self-righteousness. “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” (Romans 3:19-28)*

Let us be ever grateful for the true Christian religion which is the religion of the Gospel of the grace of God given to us in Jesus Christ who is the true and only Savior of the world. “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” (1 John 5:20)

m.e.l.