

Effective Evangelism: JAE403

## ANSWERING THE OBJECTION, “ALL RELIGION IS MANMADE”

by Frank Turek

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How do you proceed when someone asserts that, “all religions are manmade”? Here are some helpful ways of responding to objections in general, and then this particular one.

**Answer the Person, Not Just the Question.** Ravi Zacharias says that when you address objections or answer questions about the Christian faith, never forget that you are answering a person, not just a question. A caring person and thoughtful apologist should probe to see why the person is making this objection or asking this question. This is especially true with a question such as, “If there is a good God, why does He allow evil in the world?” The answer will be different if the questioner is motivated by mere intellectual curiosity than if the person has just watched his daughter die. Launching into a philosophical critique when the person is really seeking pastoral care would be disastrous. Ask clarifying questions before answering the question.

This also is true with the claim that “all religion is manmade.” While it probably does not have the same likelihood of being as emotionally sensitive as the issue of evil, the potential is still there. Perhaps the objection was conceived after being hurt by hypocritical Christians or deceived by manmade cults. Therefore, asking a couple of questions before answering is usually a good idea.

Now, that’s not always possible in a public setting, but it certainly is in private conversations. So in a personal setting, you might start with, “That’s an excellent question. Why do you ask?” Or, “That’s an interesting claim. Why do you bring it up?” How they answer will determine how you respond.

**Ask Two Tactical Questions.** Greg Koukl, in his excellent book *Tactics*, champions this question-based approach. It works and is modeled after Jesus, who often asked questions when challenged. Asking questions helps clarify what the person is asking or claiming, and it has the added benefit of relieving pressure and putting you in the driver’s seat of the conversation.

After you've discovered that there is not some other more emotionally sensitive issue behind the objection, I recommend that you proceed with the two questions Koukl suggests: "What do you mean by that?" and "How did you come to that conclusion?"

The first question helps clarify and expose any assumptions behind the question: What do you mean by all religions are manmade? Then be quiet and really listen to the answer.

If they're not sure what they mean, you might help them a little. You could say, "Do you mean that they have no divine inspiration behind them at all, or do you mean that people are involved in some way, and that means the religions must be flawed or false?"

After you've discovered what they really mean, you should transition to the second question, which asks for evidence: "How did you come to that conclusion?" or "What evidence convinced you of that conclusion?" This is critically important because you should not assume the burden of proof or disproof. *When someone makes a claim, it's not your job to refute the claim — the person making the claim has the job of supporting it.*

Once again, be quiet after asking the question. If they struggle to produce evidence, you're probably dealing with someone who has adopted a slogan into his or her worldview without reflecting on what the slogan means or whether it's really true. In fact, I think that's likely the case with a majority of people. They don't have a well-thought-out, consistent and coherent worldview. They've merely heard slogans that they'd like to be true and have blindly adopted them as their own, never stopping to understand what the slogans mean, their implications, or if they are really true.

**Agree Where You Can.** It makes sense to build some common ground with the person by agreeing with as much as you can. Is there a kernel of truth in what they say? There is.

Probably the most common reason people think "all religions are manmade" is because most of them actually are! While nearly all religions have some truth in them, they are usually manmade systems in which people (theoretically) can work their way to God. Christianity, of course, is the exact opposite. We don't work our way to God; God works His way to us, which is why this objection provides you with an opportunity to transition seamlessly to the gospel.

**Turn the Claim on Itself.** Before you get to the gospel, gently show the sense in which the objection is false. You can do this by turning the objection on itself to expose its inconsistency.

For example, the objector may think that since human beings err, and human beings are undeniably a part of Christianity, then Christianity must err as well. Expose this flaw by beginning with Koukl's disarming phrase, "Have you ever considered...."

"Have you ever considered that while human beings often err, *they don't always err*? If human beings always erred, then the objection 'All religions are manmade' would be an error, too, because the objection comes from a human being. In fact, *all* objections are man-made."

In other words, the objection is self-defeating.

The objector may charge you with “arrogance” for suggesting that Christianity is the one completely true religion. “How could you possibly know that?” he might charge. I’ll explain how below, but you might want to expose the fact that the objector is doing exactly what he is accusing you of doing.

“Have you ever considered that you are assuming to have the same level of knowledge that you say I can’t have? After all, you can’t know something is false unless you know what is true. How do you know it’s true that all religions are false? Have you investigated the truth claims of all religions to know that they are all manmade?”

**Focus on the Evidence for the Resurrection rather than Biblical Inerrancy.** In your defense of Christianity, point out that the Bible does not have to be inerrant in order for Christianity to be true. While you can make a case for inerrancy, you should not set such a high bar in order to get someone saved. If you do, you risk the person dismissing all of Christianity because he thinks he’s found an error in the Bible or because he’s discovered a biblical event that he has a hard time believing.

You might say the following to a person who thinks any error is fatal to Christianity: “If you found an error in a box score on the sports page, would that mean that everything in the sports section was necessarily false?” Of course not. Despite the error, you would assume that the gist of the stories on the sports page were true.

It’s probably our fault that the average person is springloaded to reject the entire Bible if any detail is suspect. We Christians often presuppose inerrancy is necessary, when, in fact, the Resurrection is necessary for salvation (Rom. 10:9). There were thousands of Christians before a line of the New Testament was ever written. That’s because Christianity is based on a historical event called the Resurrection, not on mere philosophies and ancient writings, as is the case with other religions.

In fact, there would be no New Testament if the Resurrection did not occur. Why would Jews invent a Resurrection story? They already believed that they were God’s chosen people. They had no motive to invent the Resurrection story, especially one that would get them kicked out of the synagogue and then beaten, tortured, and killed. No, the Jewish New Testament writers did not create the Resurrection; the Resurrection created the New Testament writers!

**Make the Case for Christianity.** We have good evidence to believe that a theistic God exists and that the Resurrection actually occurred. We also have good evidence to believe that the New Testament documents are historically reliable.<sup>1</sup>

There is a good reason to conclude that Christianity, unlike other religions, is not manmade. Since Christ really is God, as evidenced by the Resurrection and the reliable New Testament documents, then whatever God teaches is true. Jesus taught that the entire Old Testament is the inerrant Word of God, and He promised that His apostles would write the coming New Testament. Therefore, it is on the risen Christ’s authority that we believe Scripture is God-breathed and biblical inerrancy is true. And while it’s true that God used fallible human beings to produce the Bible, the writings they

produced were inspired by God. As Hank Hanegraaff often says, “The Bible is divine rather than merely human in origin.”

But even if God didn’t inspire the writers of the Bible or guarantee an inerrant original text, the essentials of Christianity could still be true. In other words, Christianity follows even if the New Testament writers weren’t inspired but merely recorded the main events correctly.<sup>2</sup>

**Getting to the Gospel.** As I said above, the “all religion is manmade” objection provides you with an easy way to show the uniqueness of the gospel. In manmade religions, you have to do this and do that. In Christianity, Christ has done all the work for you. In other words, God made Christianity, and we’re just participants in the story.

While this objection segues nicely to the gospel, not all objections do. Don’t feel pressured to force every conversation to the foot of the Cross, especially if you sense the person would feel that you are manipulating the conversation rather than being attentive to the question being asked. Sometimes just planting a seed in the minds of other people is enough to propel them on their spiritual journey. Indeed, some plant, some water, but God causes the growth (1 Cor. 3:6). Since our religion isn’t manmade, we can trust God to cause the growth. —*Frank Turek*

**Frank Turek** is an author, speaker, and founder of [www.crossexamined.org](http://www.crossexamined.org). He hosts “I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist” on the NRB Network, Wednesday nights at 9 p.m. and 1 a.m., EST (DirecTV channel 378).

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## NOTES

- 1 .Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).
- 2 While inerrancy is not required for salvation, it wouldn’t hurt to point out that inerrancy is not implausible. In fact, there are many inerrant books out there. Anyone who writes a book with no mistakes has written an inerrant book. Christians believe there is only one *God-inspired* book, but certainly acknowledge