



STATEMENT DC-555

VIEWPOINT

Should Christians Join in Interfaith Communion?

by Elliot Miller

There is great social pressure today to conform to whatever cultural liberals decide is "politically correct" (PC). PC issues are often tied to discrimination — seemingly all forms of discrimination are considered wrong, from racial bias (which *is* wrong) to moral judgments against homosexuality. This past summer, at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, it became evident to me that *religious* discrimination is an emerging PC issue.

The pressure is mounting for interfaith communion. Many speakers at the Parliament made it clear that interfaith dialogue is only the beginning: since (as they suppose) we all worship the same God by many names, only religious prejudice could keep us from worshiping that God together.

One might suppose that evangelicals would be immune to such pressure. At the Parliament, however, several representatives from evangelical and otherwise conservative Christian traditions participated in interfaith fellowship, both on stage and in the audience.

Lofty ideals, such as world peace, motivated many of the appeals for interfaith communion. But such categorical acceptance of all religions leads to the conclusion that there are no false prophets after all; there is no religious evil that we need to separate ourselves from. No one who takes seriously the teachings of the Bible should agree to this. It is a denial of the biblical God. It is apostasy.

A perfect example of this apostasy is the "Very Reverend" James Parks Morton, Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York (the world's largest cathedral), and founder/president of the Temple of Understanding, an interfaith fellowship group. In a major Parliament presentation on opening one's church to "interfaith celebration," he advocated "opening up your holy of holies" — that is, allowing members of other faiths to partake of the Eucharist (communion) in one's church. Swami Satchidananda, a well-known Indian guru, is one of many pagans to whom Morton has served communion. He also regularly invites leaders of other religions to preach from his pulpit and conduct their own religious ceremonies in his church (e.g., Shinto priests performed sacrifices at his altar). Morton cautions that to get one's church to go along with such interfaith celebration, doctrinal barriers such as the "salvation metaphor" will need to be hurdled.

While Morton is clearly an apostate, the issue of interfaith communion was muddied at the Parliament by the participation of doctrinally orthodox Roman Catholics. The Second Vatican Council's determination that all the world's religions have a measure of God's light and truth allows Catholics to fellowship with followers of other

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religions while still maintaining their own distinctive beliefs.

Now, the conservative Protestant can also accept that there is a certain degree of God's light in the great nonbiblical religions, derived from His general revelation in nature and the human conscience. Therefore, there is a basis for dialogue — but not for spiritual communion. For what the Catholic church since Vatican II has ignored is that when a religion's view of God (or Ultimate Reality) and salvation is fundamentally false, then it must be considered a *false* religion, no matter what truth it may teach on ethics or other matters.

A false god is an idol, and God did not condemn idolatry throughout the Bible for no purpose (beginning with the first two Commandments, Exod. 20:2-6). Furthermore, false gods are clearly associated with the demonic (1 Cor. 10:19-20; cf. Deut. 32:17), as are false gospels (2 Cor. 11:3-4). The apostle Paul emphatically warns that we cannot commune with the true God and demons as well (1 Cor. 10:21).

Some will contend that while biblical condemnations of paganism apply to the crude and morally corrupt idolatry of the nations surrounding Israel in biblical times, they do not concern more philosophically and ethically advanced forms of religion such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. It can first be noted that the objectionable elements in the Canaanite religions can also be found — in varying degrees — in the great nonbiblical religions. For example, occult practices such as those condemned in Deuteronomy 18:9-14 are common in Hinduism. Even the more philosophically sophisticated and ethically advanced Hindus usually worship before idols.

More importantly, there is nothing in the Bible that allows for the exoneration of *any* form of pagan worship: "If [anyone who is dear to you] entice you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, *from one end of the earth to the other end*), you shall not yield to him or listen to him..." (Deut. 13:6-8, emphasis added; cf. Ps. 96:5; 2 Kings 5:15).

Clearly, the religions of India, China, and Persia (among others) are not excluded from the biblical condemnation of idolatry. Not even Islam can be exempted, for although it borrows from biblical sources and itself condemns idolatry, it has fundamentally unbiblical views of God and salvation. Since idolatry is singled out in the Bible as the most abominable of sins (e.g., Job 31:26-28; Rom. 1:18ff.), we must conclude that a Christian cannot in good conscience join in interfaith communion.