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Christianity: Not part of a menu of nice ideas

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"All paths climb the same mountain." That's a common way of saying that all religions are equal, and it's a matter of personal preference which faith one chooses. A 2008 Pew Forum poll found that more than 70 percent of Americans — including a large majority of church members — believe there are many paths to God.

That view is impossible, though. If we ran all religions in a race, they could never end up in a tie. Christianity in particular cannot come in as equal with other religions. It could be the clear winner or the absolute loser, but it could not possibly finish in between. Speaking more plainly, either it is the truth for all or it cannot be true at all.

Why do I say this? Because of the cross. **Jesus Christ** died for us, suffering what may have been the cruelest form of execution ever devised. He took our place, paying the penalty of death for sin on our behalf, so that we could be reconciled to God and enjoy an eternal personal relationship with him.

Now, let's suppose that there are many religious truths, that they're all basically good ways to "climb the mountain," and that Christianity is one of them — one of many paths to God, enlightenment, fulfillment, Nirvana, or whatever the goal may be. Christianity would be one item on a menu of spiritual options, along with the Buddhist eight-fold path, the Islamic way of surrender, the tribal religionists' ceremonies and sacrifices, the secularist's ethical life. There's also "experiencing the 'Now,'" as Eckart Tolle and Oprah preach, and too many other options to name.

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The universe, on that view, offers us many ways to reach our best destiny. We just have to choose our preference off this spiritual menu. Let's see, will I have the t-bone or the tofu, Christianity or Zen Buddhism?

You could follow any number of paths, all of which we might regard as various nice ideas the universe offers us — and the nicest part is that reality isn't picky: you can choose what you like. Let's just make sure we include Jesus on the list, as another nice option on the spiritual menu. Wasn't that sweet of God the father to offer his own son's torture and death as one of our options?

No, actually, you can't say that at all.

When Jesus faced the cross it was in agony, with sweat dripping as blood. His friends and followers deserted him — as he knew they would do. He was cruelly tortured and mocked. He hung on that infamously cruel cross, dying in excruciating pain while his executioners laughed at him. He was stabbed in the side to make sure he had been fully finished off. His body was wrapped up and entombed in the dark. Was this one of the universe's nice ideas for us?

No, the cross is good and glorious, but it's not a nice option for us to pick just if we like it. As brutal as it was, it couldn't have been a good idea unless it were the only idea — which I and other Christians are convinced it was and is. If the cross were optional, God himself would never have opted for it.

Jesus rose from the grave, which redeemed his death and made its glory even greater. But it did not make it one nice option among many. And it hardly supports the view that Jesus was just one of many equally enlightened spiritual leaders!

Christianity stands alone: if it is true, then it makes no sense to speak of other true ways alongside it.

Tom Gilson is the director of strategic processes for Campus Crusade for Christ. He can be contacted through his weblog at <http://www.thinkingchristian.net>.

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